

CASE STUDY

Ecommerce SEO & Web Development for an Office Supplies Retailer in South Africa

How MarTraff resolved 140+ technical issues, built a geo-targeted semantic core, and grew organic traffic by 67% — on a BigCommerce store with over 20,000 product SKUs.

Industry	Office Supplies
Platform	BigCommerce
Market	South Africa (ZA)
Services	SEO + Full-Stack Development
Duration	6 months

01. Executive Summary

This case study documents the SEO and full-stack web development engagement MarTraff conducted for a South African office supplies ecommerce retailer operating on BigCommerce. The client manages a catalogue of over 20,000 product SKUs across multiple categories including stationery, toner cartridges, shredders, promotional gifts, and IT accessories.

When the engagement began, the site faced significant technical debt: broken internal links, unresolved redirect chains, missing structured data, inconsistent canonical tags, and a backlink profile contaminated with low-quality referring domains. The UX audit identified 30+ friction points in the shopping and checkout flow that were actively suppressing conversions.

"A large ecommerce catalogue is only as visible as its technical foundation. Before any keyword strategy can work, the site has to be crawlable, fast, and structurally sound. That was our starting point."

Key Outcomes at a Glance

+67% Organic Sessions 6-month growth	140+ Tech Issues Resolved Critical & high priority	+210 New Top-20 Positions Google ZA	44 → 71 Mobile PageSpeed Lighthouse score
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<p>21K+</p> <p>Pages Correctly Indexed</p> <p>Up from ~18K</p>	<p>312</p> <p>Toxic Links Disavowed</p> <p>Backlink cleanup</p>	<p>6 mo.</p> <p>Engagement Duration</p> <p>SEO + Dev parallel</p>	<p>5.0★</p> <p>Client Rating</p> <p>Clutch review</p>
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Scope of Work

Technical SEO Audit	Full site crawl and prioritised issue list across 7 audit dimensions
Competitor Analysis	Backlink profiles, keyword gaps, and content strategy of 4 direct SA competitors
Usability Audit	30+ UX findings across homepage, product pages, search, cart, and checkout
Payment Flow Audit	End-to-end review of registration, checkout, and post-purchase email flows
Semantic Core	Geo-targeted keyword research for 6 priority product categories (South Africa)
Backlink Cleanup	Identification and disavowal of 312 toxic/low-quality referring domains
AI Filter Optimisation	Implementation of AI-assisted product filter pages for high-demand queries
Dev Implementation	Full-stack execution of all SEO and UX recommendations in parallel

02. Technical Audit Findings

The technical audit was the first deliverable. It covered all seven dimensions of site health: crawlability, indexation, page speed, mobile usability, site structure, on-page signals, and analytics setup. Findings were categorised by severity and fed directly into the development backlog.

Critical & High-Priority Issues

#	Finding	Priority	Status
01	Multiple redirect chains (3–4 hops) on category and product URLs, diluting link equity and slowing crawl	Critical	Resolved
02	Missing or duplicate canonical tags across ~2,400 filter-generated URLs	Critical	Resolved
03	18 broken internal links on homepage and top navigation (404 responses)	Critical	Resolved
04	XML sitemap referencing 1,200+ non-indexable URLs (redirected, noindex, 404)	High	Resolved
05	Structured data absent on all product and category pages — no Product, BreadcrumbList, or Organization markup	High	Resolved
06	Core Web Vitals failure on mobile: LCP 14.0s, PageSpeed score 44/100	High	Resolved
07	robots.txt blocking crawl of /search/ and /brands/ directories containing indexable content	High	Resolved
08	Hreflang tags present but misconfigured (self-referencing errors on 340+ pages)	High	Resolved
09	Google Search Console not linked; GA4 ecommerce events not firing on purchase confirmation	High	Resolved
10	34 product category pages with fewer than 200 words of visible text	Medium	Resolved

Post-Fix Technical Benchmarks

Mobile PageSpeed (Lighthouse)	44 → 71 (+27 pts)
Desktop PageSpeed (Lighthouse)	68 → 91 (+23 pts)
LCP Mobile	14.0s → 3.1s
Crawl errors (GSC)	1,847 → 94 (-95%)
Indexed pages	~18,200 → 21,400 (+17.6%)

Pages with structured data

0 → 21,400+ (Product + BreadcrumbList schema)

03. Usability & Payment Flow Audit

In parallel with the technical audit, we conducted a full UX review covering the homepage, product listing pages, product detail pages, search functionality, cart, checkout, account registration, and post-purchase email flows. This produced a 30+ point action list with annotated screenshots for each issue.

UX friction costs more than rankings. A site that ranks but does not convert produces zero ROI from SEO. The usability audit is not an optional add-on — it is a core component of every MarTraff ecommerce engagement.

Selected Findings — Homepage & Navigation

- Clickable hover effects on non-linked homepage elements causing user confusion
- Internal anchor links pointing to placeholder URLs (#) creating dead-end navigation
- External links in the value proposition block redirecting to a sandbox/staging domain
- Product comparison feature: icon not intuitive, confirmation notification absent
- Infinite carousel scroll blocked — users cannot revisit products they have passed
- Favicon absent — reducing brand recognition in browser tabs and bookmarks
- Category titles not linked — users cannot navigate to full category from the carousel header
- Search field: no inline validation — empty query submission redirects to a technical error URL
- Social media footer links: Facebook leads to a 404; Instagram URL contains unnecessary www redirect

Selected Findings — Registration & Checkout Flow

- Registration form requires 6+ fields including address and phone before any purchase intent
- After successful registration, users are not auto-logged in — unnecessary step that breaks continuity
- Welcome email references "[The password you specified]" placeholder — shipping raw template variable to customers
- "Sign in to account" CTA in welcome email links to homepage instead of account dashboard
- Cart page does not display estimated delivery date or shipping cost until checkout step 3
- No guest checkout option — purchase requires full account creation, increasing abandonment risk

Implementation Results

UX findings implemented	28 of 30 (93%) within 90 days
Checkout simplification	Registration reduced from 6 fields to 3; guest checkout enabled
Email flow fixes	Template variables corrected; auto-login implemented post-registration

Search UX	Inline validation added; empty query no longer creates indexable error URLs
Navigation	Category titles converted to linked headings with hover states

04. Competitor Analysis — South African Market

We analysed four direct competitors in the South African office supplies ecommerce market across three dimensions: UX and conversion features, backlink profiles and anchor text distribution, and keyword visibility. Competitors reviewed include Penfile, OfficeBox, Park Avenue, and Waltons.

Competitive Feature Gap Analysis

Feature	Client	Penfile	OfficeBox	Park Ave
Product comparison page	X	✓	X	✓
Bulk pricing info visible	X	✓	X	X
Sticky add-to-cart (mobile)	X	X	X	✓
Guest checkout	X	✓	✓	✓
In-menu subcategory expand	X	✓	X	X
Product reviews visible	X	✓	✓	✓
Live chat / instant support	X	X	X	✓

Backlink Intelligence

Referring domains (start)	~180 RDs — low authority, high spam ratio
Toxic links disavowed	312 URLs submitted to Google Disavow Tool
Competitor avg. RDs	340–620 referring domains across four analysed competitors
Link-building strategy	Outreach plan developed for 3 content verticals; execution in Month 3+
Anchor text target	60% branded / 25% partial-match / 15% generic

05. Keyword Research — Geo-Targeted, South Africa

All keyword research was conducted specifically for South Africa (Google ZA). Collection was done in phased stages — starting with the highest-volume, highest-intent categories and expanding systematically. Each cluster was mapped to an existing or new page on the site.

Category	KWs Collected	Avg. Volume (ZA)	Primary Intent	Phase
Compatible Toner Cartridges	340	4,200 / mo	Transactional	1
Brother Label Printers	210	2,800 / mo	Transactional	1
Office Shredders	185	1,900 / mo	Commercial	1
Stationery (core)	410	6,100 / mo	Mixed	1
Dymo Products	160	1,400 / mo	Transactional	1
Promotional Gifts & Clothing	220	1,600 / mo	Commercial (B2B)	1
Printers & Copiers	290	3,400 / mo	Commercial	2
Ink Cartridges	380	5,200 / mo	Transactional	2
Office Furniture	240	2,100 / mo	Commercial	2
IT & Electronics	310	2,900 / mo	Mixed	3

Keyword Implementation Approach

- Transactional clusters → mapped to category and subcategory pages with optimised H1/title/meta and updated product grid copy
- Commercial investigation clusters → informed buyer's guide content blocks on category pages
- High-volume filter combinations → AI-assisted filter page generation to capture long-tail demand without duplicate content
- Brand + product model queries → Product schema implementation to capture rich result positions

The AI-assisted filter optimisation was the highest-impact single initiative. By generating structured, indexable pages for high-demand filter combinations (e.g. "compatible toner cartridges for HP LaserJet"), the site captured long-tail traffic that previously had no dedicated landing page.

06. Organic Performance — 6-Month Summary

The following results reflect cumulative performance from Month 1 through Month 6. Baseline data was captured at project start using Google Search Console and Ahrefs. All traffic figures are organic only.

+67% Organic Sessions Month 1 vs Month 6	+41% Organic Clicks (GSC) Month 1 vs Month 6	+210 New Top-20 Positions Google South Africa
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+85 New Top-10 Positions Google South Africa	+34 New Top-3 Positions Google South Africa	312 Toxic Links Removed Disavow cleanup
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Timeline of Key Milestones

Period	Activity	Observable Output
Month 1	Technical audit + usability audit delivered; critical fixes begin	Crawl errors -60%; GSC connected
Month 1-2	Redirect fixes, canonical tags, schema, PageSpeed improvements live	Mobile PageSpeed 44→71; LCP 14s→3.1s
Month 2	Semantic core Phase 1 complete; on-page implementation begins	Title tags and meta updated across 2,400+ pages
Month 2-3	Backlink audit complete; 312 disavow submissions; competitor analysis	Toxic backlinks neutralised; link strategy live
Month 3	AI filter optimisation deployed; guest checkout implemented	New filter pages indexed; conversion flow simplified
Month 3-6	Phase 2 semantic core; content blocks on category pages	+210 top-20 positions; +67% organic sessions

07. About MarTraff

MarTraff is an SEO agency that works exclusively with ecommerce businesses. We cover the full scope of organic search — technical SEO, on-page optimisation, content strategy, keyword research, link building, usability audits, and full-stack development implementation.

Every engagement at MarTraff is built around one principle: SEO has to produce business outcomes, not just rankings. Traffic that does not convert is noise. We track leads, transactions, and revenue — not only positions.

Website	martraff.com
Clutch profile	clutch.co/profile/martraff
Rating	5.0 / 5.0 — verified client reviews
Location	Ukraine (serving clients globally)
Platforms	Shopify, WooCommerce, BigCommerce, custom-built
Specialisation	Ecommerce SEO — technical, on-page, content, links, dev
Languages	English

If you run an ecommerce store and organic search is underperforming — reach out at martraff.com. We'll review your site and tell you honestly what is holding it back.