

MOVING WEBSITES?

Don't forget your 'seo' – search engine optimisation!

So websites, like all things, will need to be updated from time to time. Sometimes, it's a simple design refresh where you're updating the look.

Other times, it's a brand new website.

When you get that done, it's an exciting time but you should not forget the implications to your SEO or organic search channel.

Let me explain:

Organic search traffic comes when people use Google and click on your website. We call this an EARNED media channel.

This means that over time, your website has earned online authority from other websites linking to yours, your website content, social media profiles, citations and a myriad of other factors.

You earn respect and authority over time and this has a huge impact on how your website ranks in Google search results.

A new website starts from scratch. It has to claw its way up from the bottom rung, probably not even ranking for its brand name for a few months.

Most established websites get anywhere from 15% to 50% of traffic from search engines. Go see for yourself in Google analytics. (Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels > Organic Search). This medium is hugely important.

Imagine all that traffic disappearing overnight, it's not the most comforting thought.

Yet this is the reality many businesses face if they perform a website migration (moving from one website to another) without considering their SEO.

Don't let this be you.

I've put together a simple checklist for you to follow with your web developer to minimise the negative effects of site migration so you can get the most out of your new website sooner.

*Note you will most likely have to endure some sort of fall as search engines try to figure out what your website is about. But a slight drop is a big difference from starting again.

There are three parts to a successful SEO migration

- Part One: Planning
- Part Two: Migration
- Part Three: Review and Analysis

PART ONE: PLANNING | TIME FRAME: 1-2 WEEKS BEFORE LAUNCH

1. Generate a list of all the URLs that make up your website. Your developer might be able to provide this to you. Alternatively, you could use a tool like Screaming Frog. (Love this tool)
2. Import the list into an excel spreadsheet and match these pages to the best page on the new website. Do not think about re-directing all the old pages to the new homepage. Take the time to map old pages to new pages. Sometimes, old or irrelevant pages should be left without being redirected and that's OK.
3. Generate a record of your keyword rankings for all major terms. For a free tool try 'Rank Checker', a plugin for Firefox.
4. Generate a list of websites that link to your current website. We'll be trying to contact these people so try and include contact details. You may also want to include services that you've setup yourself, such as your social media profiles, Google Places/Google My Business, online directories.
5. Have a chat with your developer and ensure that there is a friendly 404 page in the works for visitors that have gotten lost. The 404 page should have the goal of re-orientating lost users and allowing them to continue their browsing with little distraction.

PART TWO: MIGRATION DAY | TIME FRAME: LAUNCH DAY

Today your website developer should kick that re-direction list you made above into action. Once your website developer has confirmed this has been done, follow these steps.

1. Test a few of your most important pages manually by going to your old URLs and seeing what page you get re-directed to.

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If you have any questions, please call 0800 CHAMBER (0800 242 623).

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2. Ensure your other old URLs have the correct response code (301) with a tool like Screaming Frog. (Seriously, this tool is awesome)
3. If you have Google Search Console (GSC) setup on your website, you should register your new website URL in there.
4. If you have Google Search Console (GSC) setup on your website, you should inform Google using the 'change of address' option that your domain has now moved.
5. Through GSC, you can also submit the most important pages of your website to Google immediately, these are pages like your homepage and your main service or category pages, about us page.
6. Using a tool like Screaming Frog, you can create an XML sitemap of your new website. Get your developer to upload it to "www.example.co.nz/sitemap.xml" and you can also submit the sitemap in GSC.
7. Ensure the new 404 page is up and looking good.
8. Remember that list of websites linking to yours? Contact each of the websites if necessary and ask them if they could update your link to your new website address.

PART THREE: REVIEW AND ANALYSIS | TIME FRAME: 4 - 6 WEEKS AFTER LAUNCH

1. Every week or so in Google Analytics, keep an eye on your traffic and conversion levels for any unreasonable drops. Google can take up to 6 weeks to crawl and re-index your website.
2. Check GSC every week to see if there are any crawl errors or important messages.
3. Remember that keyword ranking list for your major search terms? Re-check your keyword rankings every month or so to see if there are any issues.
4. Chase up and verify that those websites you contacted to update their links to your site have done it. Try bribery (joking...no but really).
5. Maintain control of your old website domain and 301 re-directs for about 6 months after the website migration.

SUMMARY

- When you're building a new website, remember to 301 re-direct all your old URLs to the most relevant page on your new website.

So I hope that helps you the next time you're doing a website migration. It's a lot of admin work, but please believe me when I say that a couple days of work could save you years of wasted effort.

Other handy site migration articles:

- www.moz.com/blog/web-site-migration-guide-tips-for-seos
- <http://searchenginewatch.com/sew/news/2067216/the-step-site-migration-process>
- https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6033049?hl=en&ref_topic=6033084&rd=1

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