

## MIGRATION PLAN

In order to limit SEO issues during a site redesign, we recommend having a migration plan which is split into three phases:

- I. Benchmarking – create a checkpoint of where the site is prior to site change (traffic stats, engagement level, technical issues, etc.) for comparison later.
- II. Planning – Ensure all common elements are planned for in case they are changing.
- III. Post Launch – Ensure all 301 redirects and planned migration tasks are reviewed and completed.

### PHASE I - Benchmarking

- Benchmark Report (High Level)
  - Evaluate current organic footprint
  - Review analytics data, backlink profile, current rankings, social media influence
- Inventory of Current Site Issues (High Level)
  - These items will need to be addressed in the new website build

### PHASE II - Planning

- Keyword Strategy
    - Research the top relevant keywords for use in content creation.
  - URL Structure
    - Create an execution document from proper URL structure
    - Review naming conventions and directory/subdomain structure
    - 301 Redirects
  - Tagging Structure Methodology & Implementation Plan (High Level)
  - SEO Authority Migration Plan
  - Technology Touchpoints Checklist for Developers
  - Content Structure & Strategy (High Level)
    - Review current content structure and identify areas of improvement
    - Create best practice content methodology templates for internal content team
  - Hosting Capability & Capacity Review (Speed, SSL, etc...)
-

## PHASE III – Post Launch Activities

- SEO Foundations
  - Webmaster Tools, Analytics Configuration, 301 Redirects, etc.
- Implementation Review & Checklist

## Migration Work List

### 1 Pre-Launch Migration Work List

#### 1. Crawl the site to Export

If possible, perform a full website crawl, scanning, and exporting all pages & data, directories, meta tags, server statuses, page formatting, etc. There are various tools that can be used such as [Screaming Frog](#). This website crawl report will assist in benchmarking the current status of the website and its content as well as plan for future website content and URL mapping.

#### 2. Register Google Search Console

Add and verify your website with the Google Search Console here:

<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home?hl=en>

This tool will help manage your website's health and the website's search engine listings. Keep in mind however, it might take a bit of time to populate the data.

You should submit and verify all versions of the website, including www, non-www, and if applicable, https www, and https non-www. And if specific subdomains are part of the migration, make sure you have them set up as well.

#### 3. Benchmark & Gather Important Metrics

##### i) Run a Baseline Report in your Analytics Platform

##### ii) Organic Search Traffic & Top Traffic Pages

This info can be gathered from any analytics platform as well as from data provided by Google Search Console, located under Search Traffic > Search Analytics.

##### iii) Number of Pages Indexed in Google

The number of pages Google has indexed in their search engine can be found within the Google Search Console, under Google Index > Index Status

---

**iv) Top Linked Pages**

This would be how many internal webpages are linking to other internal webpages. This info can be found in the Google Search Console under Search Traffic > Internal Links.

**v) Top External Links**

This info can be found in the Google Search Console under Search Traffic > Links to Your Site, or via many alternative 3<sup>rd</sup> party resources such as [Majestic](#) or [SEMrush](#).

**4. Map Existing URLs to New URLs**

This is perhaps the most important step of a migration and should be double checked. Find the corresponding URL on the existing website for each new URL that is going to be migrated over. Be sure to account for 301 redirects from http to https is applicable.

**5. Identify Pages to be Eliminated, Created, or Merged**

As part of a strategy new pages may need to be created. There may also be cases where certain pages are so similar they can be combined into one, or pages that are no longer applicable and need to be removed. These URLs should be mapped for 301 redirects as well.

**6. Map Content and Keywords**

Optional at this point, however along with mapping the URLs & identifying new pages, it often makes sense to map out new content, assigning targeted keyword groups to each page.

**7. Set up a new robots.txt file**

Option to setup new robots.txt to block search engines from indexing the development site. Create/Modify robots.txt to block and pages or directories that should be hidden during the process.

**8. Create a custom 404 page**

A 404 error should redirect users to a custom 404 page, not the homepage. It is additionally beneficial if the 404 page can be catered towards the user's initial intent.

## **2 During Migration Work List**

**1. Ensure Google Analytics, Google Search Console (and any Other Tracking Software or code) is in Place & Collecting Data**

Make sure all new URLs and redirected URLs have the existing Google Analytics code in place and metrics are being tracked. Using the existing Google Analytics account is recommended in order keep historical data for measuring later.

**2. Apply the 301 Redirects Based on Mapping Document****3. Test URL Redirects**

Make sure each URL is redirecting to the proper new URL based off the redirect map you created. You can perform a site lookup to ensure the redirects are properly indexed.

---

#### 4. **Update Internal Links**

Update all internal website links pointing to a page that is now being redirected with relevant anchor text. While the newly implemented 301 redirects will also pass these links to their new URL, there's the risk of having a redirect loop or overloading crawler resources.

#### 5. **Update XML Sitemap**

The sitemap lets search engines know about the content on a site in a very simple format. Creating a new XML sitemap helps Google rediscover the site's content in its new location.

#### 6. **Update Canonical Tags**

Update all the rel=canonical tags on your sites so that they point to the new URLs. Make sure to remove canonical tags on the new domain that are pointing back to the old domain, and make them self-referencing canonical tags.

#### 7. **Ensure Clean URLs**

Make sure to remove any non-standard characters, except hyphen, or query strings from static URLs. Ensure the URLs are static and the directories are no more than 3-4 directives deep.

#### 8. **Migrate Existing & New Meta Tags, Markup, and other Content to the New Version**

### 3 **Post-Launch Migration Work List**

#### 1. **Crawl the Website, Audit and Test:**

- All URL/301 redirects are working
- All internal links have been changed to new URL links
- There are no broken images or links
- There are no links or assets linking to the old or dev site
- Title tags, meta descriptions, and H1s are correct (and not missing or duplicated)
- Any noindex/nofollow and robots.txt disallow directives have been removed
- Navigation and images are crawlable and indexable Structured markup (schema.org) is implemented and correct on all applicable elements
- Site speed (desktop and mobile) is high
- The mobile versions are rendering correctly

#### 2. **Submit the New Website & Any Newly Created Pages**

This can be done via the Google Search Console under Crawl > Fetch As Google then click the option Fetch & Render.

---

### 3. **Submit the Old & Newly Updated Sitemap**

It is important to submit both the old and new sitemaps to ensure no links are missed. This can be done via the Google Search Console under Crawl > Sitemaps then click the option Add/Test Sitemap.

### 4. **Submit Updated Robots.txt & Ensure No Resources Meant to be Indexed are Being Blocked**

Ensure resources meant to be crawled by search engines by Robots.txt or Robots meta tag. This can be verified via the Google Search Console under Crawl > robots.txt.

### 5. **Monitor Errors**

Monitor the error reports using Screaming Frog and Google Search Console for even more detail and frequent updates.

Look out for:

- 404, 403, and 500-level errors
- Errors with the sitemap file
- Robots.txt is accessible and not blocking resources
- Crawl rate issues. This can be viewed in the Google Search Console under Crawl > Crawl Errors and Crawl Stats
- HTML problems such as duplicate content (same content used twice on and off the site), title tags and meta descriptions that are too short, too long, duplicate, or missing, multiple H1s, or no H

### 6. **Check & Monitor the Number of Indexed Pages**

This number might drop for a bit after migration, should climb back to normal with the 301 redirects. If the number of indexed pages stays low, there could be an issue with the redirects or crawling your website.

Also, make sure pages that were eliminated aren't still being indexed via a site lookup query search.

To remove these, you must request a temporary URL removal within the Google Search Console, and adjust the robots.txt to disallow indexing in the future. This feature is listed in the Google Search Console > Index Status > Remove URLs.

### 7. **Update External Links**

Using the list, reach out and contact any external blogs, directories, news websites, and other resources that are linking to your website to inform them of the new link location (if the link destination URL has changed) and ask for any links to be updated. This helps ensure that the most amount of authority is passed on to the newly migrated site. If the destination page has been removed, 301 redirect the removed URL to the closest topic existing page.

---

## Technology Checklist for Developers

- **Check website for any server configuration errors**
  - **Keep code clean, make as much JavaScript & CSS external as possible**
  - **Optimize all meta title & meta description tags as well as their social media/Open Graph meta tags**
  - **Ensure all URL structure is optimized**
    - *Short and to the point*
    - *Contains a keyword phrase variation as applicable*
    - *No numbers or special characters, except a hyphen to space words*
    - *Use a hyphen to separate words, not an underscore*
    - *Redirects to either www or non-www version. Only one.*
    - *Server IP redirects to assigned URL*
    - *Use the canonical tag to make sure dynamic URLs aren't creating duplicate content pages*
    - *Old URLs redirected. Use 301 redirects instead of 302 redirects*
    - *Avoid too many subdirectories, 3-4 max.*
    - *If needed, rewrite messy URLs to be cleaner*
  - **Create a XML Sitemap**
  - **Create a HTML Sitemap**
  - **Create a robots.txt File**
    - *Set permissions & specify which directories should not be crawled and indexed*
  - **Avoid Flash and Text Contained in Images**
    - *Search engine spiders can't read Flash content and text within an image.*
    - *Flash can also slow down the website.*
  - **Custom 404 page Created**
  - **All Images Optimized**
    - *Added Alt Attribute in Images*
    - *Added image titles to applicable images*
    - *Applicable image file size compressed to reduce load time*
    - *Image filename named appropriately about the image*
    - *Only use hyphens to separate words in image filename*
-

- **Optimize Website Speed (some may be optional)**
    - *Compress images*
    - *Load CSS before JavaScript*
    - *Enable website caching*
    - *Enable Gzip Compression*
    - *Use a content delivery network (CDN) if possible*
    - *If possible, use CSS sprites for images that are loaded on every page within your website.*
  - **Ensure Click-Depth (Depth of URL) - Max 3 Clicks to navigate to a page**
    - *Top category pages directly link to home page*
  - **Be Mobile-Friendly**
    - *Pass this test: <https://search.google.com/search-console/mobile-friendly>*
    - *Test over different browsers (Safari, Firefox, Chrome, IE (last edition)) and screen resolutions (use actual devices if possible – Desktop, Laptop, Tablet, Mobile – Android & Iphone).*
    - ***Avoid Interstitials popups***
    - ***(Optional) AMP / Accelerated Mobile Pages website version created***
  - **Ensure Optimal Navigation Menus**
    - *Use CSS based menu over an image menu*
    - *Use breadcrumb navigation.*
    - *Use a text based navigation so search engine robots can crawl properly.*
    - *Top category pages directly link to home page*
    - *Main pages should be placed in main navigation bar, less important in the footer menu*
  - **Ensure Optimal Linking Structure**
    - *Don't mix www and non-www while linking.*
    - *Avoid JS for linking within your site.*
    - *Top category pages directly link to home page*
    - *Ensure there are no broken links.*
    - *Link using descriptive anchor text*
  - **Avoid Any Hidden Text**
    - *Avoid using any hidden text or using colours that make any content hard to read as this is not only bad for user experience, but also frowned upon by search engines.*
  - **Ensure all Heading Tags are Used Appropriately**
    - *Only one H1 header per page, acting as the page content title*
    - *H1 contains a variation of the target keyword phrase if applicable*
-

- **Ensure Page Content is Optimized & Formatted Correctly**
    - *One H1 per page, variation of meta title & URL*
    - *H2 used for multiple secondary titles, focus on granular keywords*
    - *H3 used for multiple other inner titles, less focus on keywords*
    - *No more than two links within the page content*
    - *Target keyword phrase within first 100 words and last 100 words of content.*
    - *Ensure content is written naturally, without the overuse of target keyword*
    - *Utilise target keyword synonyms and variations throughout content.*
    - *No misspellings or poor grammar.*
    - *Content pages should have at least 400-500 words, often more if it is a competitive keyword phrase*
  - **Ensure Page Content is Unique, Not Posted on External Sites**
  - **Incorporate Schema Markup Where Applicable**
  - **Inclusion of Social Media Links**
    - *Include links to your social media entities on your website*
    - *Have social media share buttons on posts or sharable content*
-