



SITE MIGRATION CHECKLIST

2018 EDITION



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STRATEGY AND SCOPE

Phase 01



IDENTIFY GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

Site migrations are a great opportunity to explore ways of increasing organic visibility and traffic to your site, for example by improving taxonomy or addressing duplicate content issues. Be sure to factor these into your scope of work. Also consider any potential risks that could harm your site's visibility so you can plan to mitigate them.

Phase 02



Phase 03



Phase 04



Phase 05



Phase 06



SET REALISTIC OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

Share clear and realistic objectives and goals with key stakeholders to help set and manage expectations. Agreeing on this in the set-up phase will also help keep the project within scope and budget.

PREPARE THE PROJECT PLAN

Include planned activities, owners and dependencies for each phase.



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PRE-LAUNCH PREPARATION

Phase 01

Phase 02

Phase 03

Phase 04

Phase 05

Phase 06

REVIEW PROTOTYPES AND WIREFRAMES

Identify and resolve SEO/UX issues as early as possible.

PREPARE THE SEO SPECIFICATION

Include all SEO requirements to be ticked off from a development perspective, documenting new as well as existing features that work well and you want to keep.

IDENTIFY PRIORITY PAGES

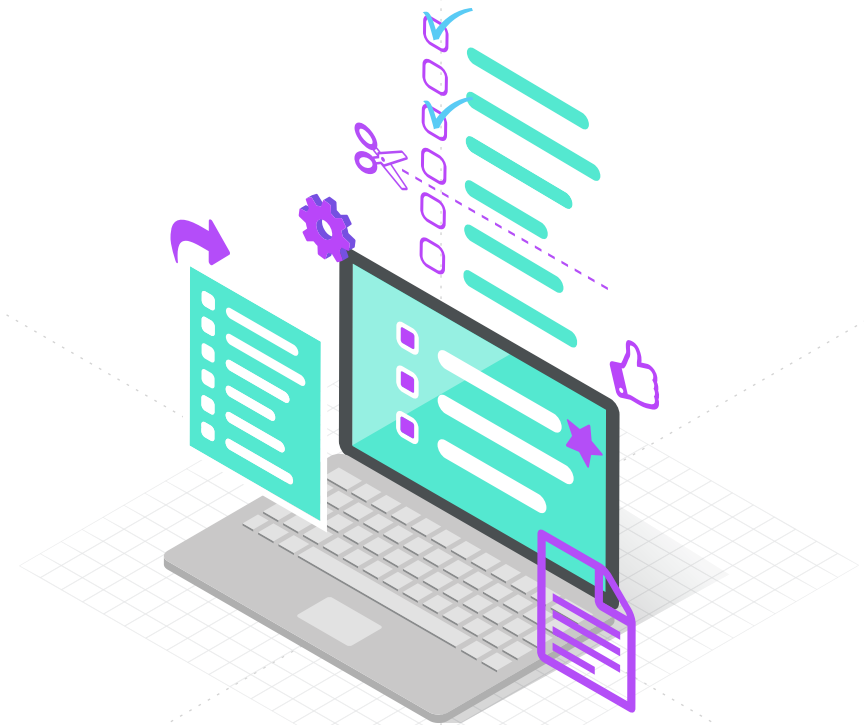
These are your most valuable assets that can't afford to lose visibility; think top traffic-drivers, pages that convert well and backlink magnets.

BENCHMARK

Note your legacy site's page loading times and top keyword rankings across desktop and mobile, so you can compare performance post-migration. Keep a copy of your crawl data safe (including your search console data) for future reference.

REVIEW YOUR STAGING ENVIRONMENT SET-UP

Make sure the site isn't accessible to search engines, but can be crawled on demand for testing.



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PRE-LAUNCH TESTING

Phase 01

Phase 02

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Phase 06

REVIEW PAGE TEMPLATES

Review each page template and make sure all essential SEO features are in place and optimised. We're talking page titles, meta descriptions, headings and image alt text as well as technical attributes such as robots directives, canonical tags, hreflang tags, AMP tags etc.

REVIEW CONTENT

Put your creative hat on...

- > **Quantitative assessment.** Make sure all traffic-driving legacy pages have been retained.
- > **Qualitative assessment.** Look out for pages with duplicate, similar or thin content.
- > **Meta data and copy review.** Check for pages with missing or unoptimised page titles, meta descriptions, headings and copy.
- > **Media review.** Finally, check all images have SEO-friendly file names and alt text is optimised and that any legacy traffic-driving images or videos are available on the new site.

REVIEW INTERNAL LINKS

Next, review your new site's internal linking structure including main and secondary navigation, body content links, header/footer links, breadcrumbs, pagination links, and cross-site links on international sites.

Internal linking is the backbone of a site's link equity flow. Consider your vertical linking – from the homepage to deeper pages – as well as horizontally linking to neighboring relevant pages.

Make sure the new site doesn't have a deeper site architecture than your previous version, as this could reduce your site's organic search visibility.

Put simply, if a user needs to click too many times get to a page, their user experience won't be great. Similarly, search engines don't like pages that are hard to find and will demote them in search results. Ideally, each page should be accessible within 3-4 clicks from anywhere on the site. The most important pages should be accessible via 1-2 clicks max.



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PRE-LAUNCH TESTING

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REVIEW TECHNICAL SEO

Time to get (a bit more) technical...

- > **Identify crawl-time issues.** Crawl the new site in the staging environment on the hunt for broken links, incorrect canonical tags, pages with a non-200 server response, internal redirects, soft 404s, unintentional noindex pages or nofollow links.
- > **Undertake cloaking checks.** Crawl the new site using both the Googlebot regular and Googlebot smartphone user agents to make sure there are no search engine accessibility or cloaking issues.
- > **Review JavaScript crawling.** Test all page templates to check there are no JavaScript crawling issues resulting in missing copy or internal links.
- > **Check mobile set-up.** Identify and fix any mobile tagging or canonical issues between the desktop and mobile site(s) so Google knows where to find your responsive, AMP or PWA sites.
- > **Review structured data.** Check each template's structured data implementation for errors using Google's [structured data testing tool](#).
- > **Review pagination.** Make sure paginated pages can be crawled and take additional precautions if using infinite scrolling, which can have a negative impact on indexation.
- > **Set-up custom 404 page.** Ensure your new site has a custom 404 page that serves a 404 server response. The page should include your site's header and footer, links to the most popular sections of your site and analytics tracking code so you can easily identify the most visited 404 pages and take action.
- > **Review XML sitemaps.** Check the new site's XML sitemaps and make sure they include all indexable URLs. Also make sure that non-indexable URLs such as 404s, redirects or canonicalised pages are excluded to help monitoring the site's indexation levels more accurately.
- > **Review HTML sitemap.** Ensure your HTML sitemap links to all essential pages, including pages that sit deeper in the site and aren't linked to from the global navigation.
- > **Review hreflang.** If your site is targeting multiple countries and/or languages, make sure the hreflang annotations have been implemented correctly.
- > **Conduct site speed checks.** Check each page template (Google's [PageSpeed Insights](#) and [Lighthouse](#) are great tools to use) and see how the results compare with the legacy site's respective pages.

CHECK REDIRECTS

Test redirect mapping in the staging environment to make sure all one-to-one redirects work as expected. If you can, test the more generic redirect rules too. (If you can't wait, skip straight ahead to the full list of redirect checks in phase 4).

REVIEW ANALYTICS SET-UP

This is the time to check your analytics tracking is properly set-up, including any advanced analytics features you need (such as event tracking, E-commerce tracking etc.).



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LAUNCH DAY SPOT CHECKS AND ACTIONS

Phase 01

Phase 02

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Phase 06

The big day has arrived! You're soon to be a hero...

SPOT-CHECK SEARCH ENGINE CRAWLING

Put your mind at ease by checking...

- > Robots.txt file for any major crawling issues.
- > Server responses across desktop and mobile for key pages.
- > Canonical tags for errors.
- > For unintentional noindex or nofollow directives.
- > That search engines and users are treated in the same way (i.e. there are no cloaking issues).

And finally, don't forget to check the above on both desktop and mobile.

CARRY OUT SEARCH CONSOLE ACTIONS

No major issues? Phew. Now it's time to jump into the search console to find out what Google thinks about your new site and help crawl and index it faster.

- > Use the Blocked Resources report to check for critical issues.
- > Use Fetch as Google on every single page type (i.e. homepage, a category page, a product page) across desktop and mobile.
- > Set the targeted country using the International Targeting report (if applicable).
- > Test each sitemap for errors and submit it.
- > Upload a separate sitemap (or just a list of URLs in a text file) with the old site's indexable pages to help search engines discover the redirects that are in place.
- > Configure the URL parameters to deal with duplicate content issues.
- > Upload the disavow file, if applicable.
- > Lastly, use the change of address tool if moving host or domain.

UNDERTAKE REDIRECTION CHECKS

Make sure that:

- > Old URLs redirect correctly to the new site.
- > Redirects are implemented as 301 (permanent redirects).
- > Legacy redirects haven't been lost.
- > There aren't any long redirect chains.
- > There aren't too many internal redirects.
- > Redirect rules work as expected, including...
 - > www vs non-www URL requests.
 - > http vs https URL requests.
 - > lower case vs upper case URL requests.
 - > requests for any legacy mobile sites.

CARRY OUT META DATA AND COPY CHECKS

Make sure the following have been successfully migrated:

- > Page titles
- > Meta descriptions
- > Headings
- > Copy
- > Internal links
- > Alt text on images



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POST-LAUNCH ACTIONS

Phase 01

Phase 02

Phase 03

Phase 04

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Phase 06

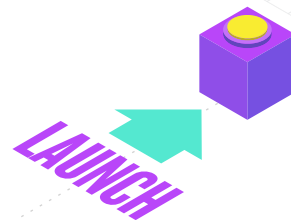
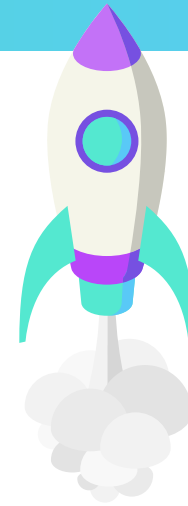
Congratulations, you've launched!

Use Search Console's data and insights for further post-migration improvements:

- > Regularly check the Index Status report to closely monitor indexation.
- > Monitor the sitemap's indexation levels.
- > Keep an eye on the Crawl Stats report in case the number of pages Google crawls per day drops.
- > Download and review the Crawl Errors report daily, particularly the 'Not Found' URLs. Consider redirecting the more valuable ones.
- > Review the HTML Improvements report to find missing or duplicate title tags.
- > Look out for mobile usability and structured data errors.

It's also worth checking your site's server log files, to find out which pages get less frequently crawled, spot frequently visited pages that are now of value and take further action, if required.

Now, book yourself a well-earned holiday. The really hard work is done.



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PERFORMANCE REVIEW

Phase 01

Phase 02

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Ready to see those trend lines spike upwards? Of course you are...

KEYWORD RANK TRACKING

Check how many keywords are being tracked daily; aim for at least 500 high-volume keywords that were driving traffic to the legacy site, including:

- > **Brand and non-brand terms.**
- > **Head and mid-tail terms.**
- > **Seasonal and non-seasonal terms.**
- > **Across desktop and mobile.**
- > **Across different markets (if migrating international sites).**

Make sure keyword tracking is enabled before the new site goes live, otherwise you won't be able to make pre and post migration ranking comparisons!

PERFORMANCE REPORT

By now you're probably dying to find out how your new site is performing, but try to be patient – it can take 1-2 months before you'll have reliable data to report on. Google needs some time to fully crawl your new site and update the search results.

Some of the areas to pay more attention to for trends or anomalies include:

- > **Desktop visibility**
- > **Mobile visibility**
- > **Organic sessions**
- > **Bounce rate**
- > **Conversion rate**
- > **Revenue**

Last but not least, compare pre- and post-performance on:

- > **Total number of indexed pages.**
- > **Submitted vs Indexed pages submitted via the XML sitemaps.**
- > **Pages receiving at least one organic visit.**
- > **Number of 'not found' pages.**
- > **Site speed scores and metrics.**



That's it – you've (hopefully) successfully migrated your site. So sit back, admire your handiwork and wait for the praise to roll in...



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