

Anyone who's undertaken a website move, redesign or merger knows it can be a time-consuming process – and the bigger the website is, the more complicated it gets.

The marketing department will naturally focus on the customer facing elements of a website – design, layout, content and imagery, but it's important to ensure search engine optimisation and the website's general online performance is not neglected.

Any major change to a website can impact SEO if not done properly and getting it wrong could lead to a fall in revenue as organic traffic and associated conversions decrease.

One of the biggest advantages of a site redesign is that it provides a great opportunity to assess what your site could be doing better in terms of SEO and build it into your plans – much easier than trying to retrofit things at a later date.

Create a search engine friendly site structure

Search engines like easy to understand and well-structured sites. Webpages should be collected and categorised into logical folders and breadcrumbs should be used to make your site easy to navigate.

You should also look at updating your URLs to ensure they contain your target keywords for each page. Again, this is much easier to do as part of a site-wide change rather than once the site is live.

Know the effects a different URL has on SEO

Whenever you change a page's URL you aren't moving the page, you're creating a new one and any links pointing at the old page will be broken. The way to get around this is to ensure that each page from your old site is pointing at its new permanent location. This is done by [setting up permanent redirects](#) (301s) so when the old page is visited, the visitor is automatically sent to the correct new location. There are other types of redirects, but a 301 redirect will pass up to 90 per cent of any page rank accrued through to the new destination – temporary redirects do not pass page rank (or very little).

Don't say goodbye to your best content

Just because it was published months or years ago, it doesn't mean there isn't value to be gained from the content on your old site. Pages accrue links over time and useful blog content in particular can be good at this.

So before you delete that old blog, run it through a tool like Open Site Explorer and take a look at its link profile. Select your best content and either ensure that it remains where it is (i.e. the same URL) on your redesigned site or, in the case of a move or merger, migrate the content onto your new site and set up a 301 redirect from its old location to the new one.

Don't forget Google Analytics

If your site is going to be on a new URL then make sure the [Google Analytics](#) tracking code is carried over too. This will enable you to access your old historical data and ensure there's no gap in your tracking or reporting.

Get to know your CMS

If your new site comes with a new CMS, make sure your web development team give you a full overview and tutorial on how it works. If the marketing department is responsible for updating content, ask for process documents on how to do this to ensure mistakes aren't made.

Some CMSs auto-generate multiple versions of the same page on different URLs when new content is created. Duplicate content is a big issue for SEO so speak to your web development team about this and work together to find the best solution, be it redirecting these pages, marking them as duplicate content, telling search engines to ignore them or removing them altogether. This can also be achieved in your .robots.txt file.

Does Google know about your new site?

Changes made on your website won't show up in search engines immediately, your website has to be crawled (often many times) for them to take effect.

One way you can speed up the process is ensuring that your sitemap is up to date. This is a page that essentially tells search engines what your site contains. There are tools online that let you generate your own sitemaps in a matter of minutes. Once your web team has added the sitemap to your website, you should then submit it to Google via your [Google Webmaster Tools](#) account. Don't forget to include [Bing Webmaster Tools](#) also.

Ongoing checks and optimisation

Finally, you should set yourself regular tasks to check on your site's ongoing performance.

- Identify broken links with tools like [Screaming Frog](#) and fix them by setting up redirects.
- Use Google Webmaster Tools to monitor HTML errors and duplicate content.
- Monitor how your site ranks for selected keywords with keyword monitoring software.
- And don't forget to monitor and report increases in organic traffic using Google Analytics to show the fruits of your SEO efforts.