

MOVE YOUR WEBSITE WITH CONFIDENCE:

The SEO Checklist for a Seamless Transition

I. INTRODUCTION

Just as people sometimes decide to move to greener pastures, so too do websites move—a process called **website migration**.

Besides transferring to a web address (in technical terms, a new domain name), other reasons for migrating a website include switching to a new platform or framework, transferring to a different server, revamping the site's architecture, and switching the website to HTTPS (from HTTP).

Whatever your reason may be for migrating your website, it's important to note that even websites that already have a strong domain and impressive search engine rankings need a well-planned migration. And just in case you needed a reminder (or are still unaware of it), effective SEO is critical for getting a high volume of quality website traffic and conversions, which ultimately means more revenues for your business.

This eBook will guide you through the entire process of ensuring a smooth transition that preserves your site's search ranking dominance.

Ready to learn how you can maintain your high rankings while transferring from one website to another?

Let's get moving!



II. PLANNING FOR A SMOOTH SEO MIGRATION

A successful website migration that minimizes disruption to your search engine rankings requires careful planning and preparation. This section will guide you through the essential steps involved in pre-migration SEO activities and in setting goals and strategies that will help ensure the smoothest transition possible.

Pre-Migration SEO Audit

Before embarking on the actual migration, it's important to conduct a thorough SEO audit of your existing website. This audit will provide a baseline understanding of your site's current SEO health, as well as identify areas that need improvement.

Your audit should include these three major steps:

1 Identify your current ranking keywords.

If you want to preserve your top position in search engine results pages (SERPs), you first need to know what keywords you're ranking for. You can use tools like [Google Search Console](#) to uncover the keywords your website currently ranks for in SERPs.

Make sure to keep a list of those keywords. Knowing what they are allows you to track their performance after the migration. It also will help you prioritize optimization efforts on your new site.

If you need more detailed information regarding your keyword rankings, you may utilize additional tools like [Semrush](#) and [Ahrefs](#).



2 Evaluate your site's structure, content quality, and technical SEO health.

This time, you need to dissect the foundational elements that search engines consider when ranking websites. Keep in mind that a well-organized website with a clear information hierarchy makes it easier for search engines to crawl and understand your content.

Assess how your pages are organized. Is there a logical flow that guides users to the information they're looking for? Are your main categories and subcategories clearly defined and easy to navigate?

Search engines prioritize high-quality content that's informative, engaging, and relevant to user search queries. Be objective as you evaluate the freshness, accuracy, and comprehensiveness of your website's content. Are you targeting relevant keywords?

Technical SEO refers to those behind-the-scenes aspects of your website that influence search engine crawling and indexing. Look for common technical SEO issues that can negatively affect your rankings. These include broken page links that lead to dead ends, slow loading times that frustrate users, duplicate content that confuses search engines, and a lack of mobile-friendliness that excludes a large portion of web users.

Google's own [PageSpeed Insights](#) (PSI) and [Screaming Frog](#) are two useful tools you can use to audit your technical SEO. Google's PSI analyzes your website's loading speed on desktop and mobile devices and then provides recommendations for improvement. Meanwhile, Screaming Frog will crawl your website and point out technical issues like broken links, missing meta descriptions, and improper redirects. By addressing technical SEO issues, you ensure a search engine-friendly website foundation and smooth user experience.

3 Analyze backlinks profile

The final part of your pre-migration SEO audit should focus on your backlinks. Keep in mind that those refer to the links from other websites pointing to yours, and they act as a vote of confidence in your content's value.

Search engines consider backlinks a strong indicator of your website's authority and trustworthiness. Hence, the higher the quality and quantity of backlinks you possess, the more likely your website is to rank higher in SERPs.

[Ahrefs](#) and [Moz](#) are a couple of tools you can use to analyze your backlink profile. They allow you to delve deeper than just the number of backlinks.

Three pieces of information about linking websites that can be of high value to your SEO include their:

- **Domain Authority (DA)**

The linking site's DA can predict your website's ranking potential. Backlinks from high-authority websites carry more weight and contribute significantly to your own SEO power. For example, having a link to your website on an article published on [cnn.com](#) (DA: 95) can significantly boost your search engine rank—far more than a post published on a relatively unknown personal blog.

- **Thematic relevance**

Backlinks are most relevant when they come from websites topically related to yours. For example, if you have a website about gardening, backlinks from reputable gardening blogs and publications are more valuable than links from a luxury travel website.

- **Anchor text**

Last but not least, the text used to link to your website (called anchor text) provides context about the linked page. Getting a variety of relevant anchor texts that link to your site is better, SEO-wise, than getting the same anchors. The latter can seem unnatural to search engines, and they may even harm your site ranking.

Once you've examined the quality and makeup of your backlink profile, you can start planning strategies to maintain those valuable links after migrating your site. Some tactics you may use include reaching out to website owners and informing them of your new website URL, and even requesting them to update the anchor text they use.

Setting Migration Goals and Strategy

After performing our recommended Pre-Migration SEO Audit, you'll have a clear picture of your current SEO standing. Now, it's time to define your goals and strategize for the migration process.

First, determine if you'll change your domain name. Changing it can dramatically impact your SEO. If at all possible, it's best to retain your existing domain name as it carries accumulated search engine authority. However, if a domain name change is absolutely unavoidable, it's crucial to have a well-executed redirect strategy (we will cover this in a bit).

Second, establish your success metrics. Define a clear criteria for measuring the success of your SEO migration. We recommend tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) like keyword rankings, organic traffic, conversion rates, and bounce rates before, during, and after migration. This helps you identify areas for improvement and track progress towards your goals.

And finally, choose your migration approach (if you haven't), based on your website's size and complexity. There are two common options: Full Website Migration and Partial Migration. Full Website Migration involves migrating your entire website—including all content, URLs, and data—to the new platform. On the other hand, Partial Website Migration may be sufficient for websites with specific sections needing migration, leaving other sections on their old site.



III. TECHNICAL SEO CONSIDERATIONS FOR WEBSITE MIGRATION

As we've previously mentioned, technical SEO is one of the crucial elements of successful website migration. The major technical aspects you should look after are your site's crawlability and indexing, URL mapping and redirects, mobile-friendliness, and page speed optimization.

Website Crawlability and Indexing

Search engines rely on crawlers to navigate and understand your website's content. Here are some tips to optimize your new website for efficient crawling and indexing:

- **Maintain a clean and optimized website structure.**

This involves organizing your content logically. Use clear categories and subcategories, and apply a flat hierarchy whenever possible to avoid burying essential pages deep within your website.

In addition, make sure that your internal linking is well-structured to guide both human users and crawlers to the pages they need.

A good rule of thumb is to try to make it so that no page on the site is more than three clicks away from the home page.

- **Properly configure your robots.txt file to avoid any crawl errors.**

The robots.txt file instructs search engine crawlers which pages to crawl and index. When doing your site migration, make sure to review and update your robots.txt file to avoid blocking essential pages on your new site.

The [Google Search Console](#) can help you check your robots.txt file for any errors.

- **Ensure proper sitemap submission to search engines.**

A sitemap is an XML file that provides search engines with a complete list of your website's pages and their hierarchy. When migrating to a new site, you need to create and submit an updated sitemap for your new website to Google Search Console and other relevant search engines.

It doesn't end there. We recommend that you regularly update your sitemap as you add new content to ensure search engines discover and index your most recent pages.

URL Mapping and Redirects

When migrating to a new website, your web address (also known as URL, which stands for Uniform Resource Locator) may change. Here's some advice on how you can handle this transition effectively.

- **Plan a comprehensive URL mapping strategy (in the form of 301 redirects).**

A URL mapping strategy outlines how old URLs on your previous website will be directed to corresponding pages on your new site. Make good use of 301 redirects, which signal to search engines that a page has permanently moved.

301 redirects help retain SEO value linked to your old URLs and ensure that users land on the correct, new pages.

This is a crucial step that is often overlooked. If you don't set up 301 redirects, Google will register any old URLs as non-working and de-list them. If this happens, you could lose all of your hard-earned rankings almost overnight!

Make sure your 301 redirect strategy is comprehensive and well thought out.

- **Implement server-side redirects for all relevant URLs.**

Based on our experience, it's best to not rely on browser-side redirects, as those can negatively impact your SEO.

Rather, implement server-side 301 redirects at the server level for all URLs that have changed during migration.

- **Thoroughly test the functionality of your redirects.**

Given the SEO benefits of redirects, it's important to make sure that they're working as expected.

You may choose to crawl your website yourself, or use any of the available tools available on the web to confirm if all your redirects are working properly, sending users and search engine crawlers to your intended destination pages. Some of the tools you may use include scrawlingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider, redirect-checker.org, kinsta.com/tools/redirect-checker, domsignal.com/url-redirection-checker, and httpstatus.io.



Mobile-Friendliness and Page Speed Optimization

In today's mobile-first world, search engines prioritize websites that offer a seamless user experience on all devices. And since, as of the fourth quarter of 2023, roughly 96.3% of global users connected to the internet using their [mobile phones](#) (versus 62.2% who used laptops or desktops), it's imperative that your website is mobile-friendly!

You need to ensure that your new website is mobile-friendly and offers a fast-loading experience. Ideally, it's best to create your new website to be responsive, adapting seamlessly to different screen sizes (desktop, mobile, tablet), based on what your site visitor is using.

Google's PageSpeed Insights can help you uncover and address any performance issues that slow down your site's loading speed. Keep in mind that a fast-loading website not only improves user experience but also benefits your SEO rankings! Find out your load speed using tools like Google Analytics and Pingdom.



III. CONTENT MIGRATION AND OPTIMIZATION

In addition to technical SEO, content—specifically, high-quality content—is the backbone of any successful SEO strategy. Let's take a look at some strategies for migrating your valuable content to your new website while keeping it optimized for search engine visibility.

Content Transfer and Consolidation

Believe it or not, not all of your site's existing content deserves a place on your new website, especially if you have limited resources. Here are two of our recommendations on doing strategic content migration:

- **Transfer high-performing content to your new site.**

First of all, you need to find out your top-performing content. Analytics tools like Google Search Console can help you with this.

The pages that are driving valuable organic traffic are worth transferring to your new website with minimal changes. After migrating those pages, review the content to ensure that they are still relevant and up-to-date.

- **Find opportunities for content consolidation or refresh.**

Just as moving to a new home serves as a great time for taking stock of your current possessions, so does a site migration provide a wonderful opportunity to declutter your existing content.

You might discover that you have multiple pages on your old site covering similar topics. Consider consolidating their content into a single, comprehensive resource on your new site. Doing this improves user experience and avoids confusing search engines with duplicate content.

In addition, try to spend some time reviewing your older content and finding outdated information. (Here's an expert tip: search your text for years like "2020", "2019", and so on). Then, update your content with new insights and data to retain or even improve your content's value.

On-Page SEO

On-page SEO involves optimizing your individual pages to rank higher for relevant search terms. Here are some things you can do to optimize your transferred content:

- **Update title tags, meta descriptions, and header tags with relevant keywords.**

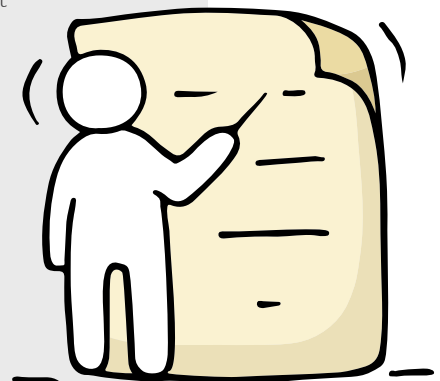
All of those give search engines context about your content's subject matter. Make sure you refresh these elements with relevant keywords while maintaining a natural reading experience for users.

- **Write alt image attributes.**

These are used by search engines to understand the contents of your images. If you neglect alt attributes, you may miss the chance to get a better placement in search results because alt attributes help you rank in image search results. On top of that, not using alt attributes also negatively affects the experience of visually-impaired users, as well as those who have disabled images in their browsers.

- **Maintain internal linking structure.**

Internal links connect relevant pages on your website, helping search engines understand your content hierarchy and navigate your website effectively. During migration, we recommend recreating the essential internal linking structure from your old website on your new site.



Schema Markup Transfer

Schema markup refers to code that provides search engines with additional information about your content, potentially leading to richer search results.

If you were using schema markup on your old website, make sure it's properly transferred to the corresponding pages on your new site. This can improve the way your website appears in search results, potentially leading to higher click-through rates.



V. POST-MIGRATION MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

By applying the tips we shared above, you'll be well on your way to a successful website migration that helps maintain—and may even boost—your search engine rankings.

We strongly recommend that you run a full technical audit and PageSpeed Insights once your new website is ready for launch.

But here's the thing: The success of this process should not end with the launch of your new website. Here are some tips to help you maintain your site's SEO success and ensure continued growth:

Monitor Changes in Your Search Engine Ranking

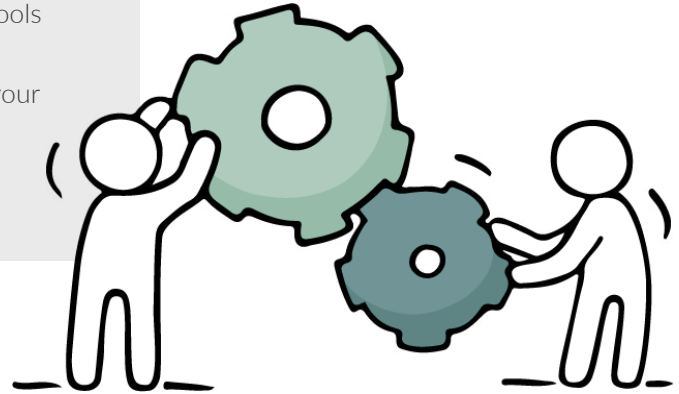
Search engine rankings can fluctuate after a website migration. This is quite common and generally not a cause for concern. As long as you pay close attention to your site's content, technical SEO, and structure, you can expect to bounce back and jump higher in SERPs.

We recommend that you regularly use Google Search Console and analytics tools to track your website traffic and keyword rankings. Examine changes in your keyword rankings, organic traffic, and other relevant metrics. Identify any significant drops and investigate their potential causes, which will guide you in planning your next course of action.



Find and Fix Broken Links and Redirects

You know by now that broken links and malfunctioning redirects negatively impact user experience and search engine rank. To stay on top of these, you need to use website monitoring tools to detect broken links and fix crawl errors. Promptly fix broken links by redirecting them to the appropriate pages on your new website. You also may remove them if they are no longer relevant.



Backlink Outreach and Link Building Strategies

To maintain your current backlinks, check that your 301 redirects properly transfer the link equity from your old website to the corresponding pages on the new one.

To build backlinks for your new website, we recommend developing a link-building strategy to acquire high-quality backlinks from relevant websites in your specific niche. Some effective tactics you can use include content marketing (creating link-worthy content, preferably long-form content), guest blogging on sites with a high Domain Authority, and online community engagement.

VI. SUMMARY

To recap, successfully migrating your website while maintaining your SEO ranking involves comprehensive planning, meticulous execution, and ongoing monitoring.

Here's a quick summary of the key takeaways you should remember:

- **Pre-migration SEO Audit:** Conduct a thorough audit to understand your current website's SEO health, identify areas for improvement, and establish a baseline for measuring your migration's success.
- **Planning and Strategy:** Define your migration goals, determine if a domain name change is necessary, and choose the appropriate migration approach based on your website's size and complexity.
- **Technical SEO Considerations:** Ensure your new website is crawlable and indexable by search engines, implement proper URL mapping with 301 redirects, and prioritize mobile-friendliness and fast loading speed.
- **Content Migration and Optimization:** Migrate your high-performing content, consolidate similar pages, refresh outdated information, and optimize transferred content with relevant keywords and internal linking structure.
- **Post-Migration Monitoring and Maintenance:** Regularly monitor your search engine ranking fluctuations, identify and fix broken links and redirects, maintain your existing backlinks, and develop a strategy to acquire new high-quality backlinks for your new website.



Embrace the Move and Thrive in Search Results!

Migrating your website can be a daunting task, but with careful planning and the SEO strategies outlined in this guide, you can navigate the process with confidence.

By prioritizing high-quality content, user-friendly experience, and strong technical SEO practices, you can maintain your existing search engine ranking and also pave the way for even greater visibility and organic traffic.

Congratulations on taking the first step towards a successful website migration—and best wishes on your new website!

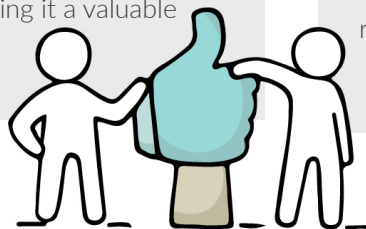
If you need any help with website migration, SEO, or other aspects of digital marketing, get in touch with Zero Company. We have more than 20 years of experience as a leading digital marketing agency in California and have helped more than 2,500 companies across various industries achieve their online marketing objectives. [Book a free consultation today!](#)

VII. APPENDIX

Useful SEO Tools and Resources

Here are some valuable tools and resources to help you with your website's SEO efforts, both during migration and beyond:

- **Google Search Console:** <https://search.google.com/search-console/about> (Free): A comprehensive platform from Google that offers website owners insights into their website's search traffic and performance in Google Search. It allows you to submit sitemaps, monitor crawl errors, and track keyword rankings.
- **Google PageSpeed Insights:** <https://pagespeed.web.dev/> (Free): A tool by Google that analyzes your website's loading speed on desktop and mobile devices and provides recommendations for improvement.
- **Ahrefs:** <https://ahrefs.com/> (Paid): A powerful SEO toolset that offers features for keyword research, backlink analysis, competitor research, and rank tracking.
- **Semrush:** <https://www.semrush.com/> (Paid): An all-in-one SEO toolkit that provides solutions for keyword research, on-page SEO optimization, competitor analysis, rank tracking, and social media marketing.
- **Screaming Frog SEO Spider:** <https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/> (Free & Paid versions): A desktop application that crawls your website and identifies technical SEO issues like broken links, missing meta descriptions, and improper redirects.
- **Moz Beginner's Guide to SEO:** <https://moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo> (Free): A comprehensive guide from Moz that covers the fundamentals of SEO, making it a valuable resource for beginners.



Glossary of Essential SEO Terms

- **Backlink:** A link from another website that points to your website. Backlinks are considered a sign of trust and authority by search engines and can positively influence your website's ranking.
- **Crawl Error:** An issue that prevents a search engine's crawler from accessing or indexing a page on your website. Common crawl errors include broken links, server errors, and robots.txt blocking.
- **Domain Authority (DA):** A score developed by Moz that predicts a website's ranking potential. Websites with higher DA are more likely to rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs).
- **Keyword:** A word or phrase that users type into search engines to find information. SEO involves optimizing your website's content to rank higher for relevant keywords.
- **Mobile-Friendly:** A website that is designed to display and function optimally on mobile devices like smartphones and tablets.
- **Organic Traffic:** Visitors who arrive at your website through search engine results pages (SERPs) as opposed to paid advertising or other channels.
- **Redirect:** A way to instruct search engines and users that a web page has moved to a new location. A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect, while a 302 redirect is temporary.