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Domain Migration SEO Checklist: Safeguard your Rankings



Summary

SEO migration is the process of migrating the search engine ranking positions, website authority, and indexing signals to reflect a major change in your website or website URL structure. SEO migration ensures that the loss of organic traffic is minimal when conducting a website migration.

This is a general SEO guide for migrating one domain to another (e.g. domain1.com to domain2.com).

The guide below states the minimum steps that need to be performed while migrating a domain.

The following recommendations are included in the guide:

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Map up The Old URLs to the New URLs

Overview

The goal of such an approach is to make sure that all SEO signals and history that each page on the old domain has attained will be transferred to the new domain.

Recommended Action

Each old URL should have the final destination on the new domain. For example:

- domain1.com -> domain2.com
- domain1.com/services -> domain2.com/services
- domain1.com/about-us -> domain2.com/about-us

This means, all the redirects should be set up on a page-by-page basis.

If a page existing on domain1.com will no longer be available on the new domain, it should still be redirected to the best matching option. For example:

- domain1.com/services/qwerty -> domain2.com/services

Set up 301 Redirects from the Old URLs to the New URLs

Overview

Redirects help to connect the page on the old domain to the page on the new domain.

Recommended Action

Set up a 301 redirect from each page on the old domain pointing to the final destination on the new domain defined in the step above.

Important: each of the following website versions on the old domain should redirect to the new domain:

- https/http
- www/non-www

All 301 Redirects Should Point to The Canonical URLs

Overview

A canonical version of the page is the only version that should be available to users and Google. For example:

- <https://www.domain2.com> vs domain2.com
- <https://www.domain2.com/services> vs <https://domain2.com/services>

Recommended Action

You first need to identify the canonical version of the pages on the domain2.com. There's generally no difference between the following variations:

- [www](https://www.domain2.com) vs [non-www](https://domain2.com)
- URLs with a '/' at the end and without it

I'd recommend sticking to the pattern the initial domain has so that you won't need to make any additional changes except for the domain name. For example:

- <https://www.domain1.com/services/> -> <https://www.domain2.com/services/> (not: <https://domain2.com/services/> or <https://www.domain2.com/services>)

Set up Internal Links on the New Domain to Reflect the Changes

Overview

Internal links are the links inside the website. After migrating to the new domain, they need to point to the new domain as well.

Recommended Action

Make sure that all the internal links point to the new domain.

Additional Things to Do for a Domain Migration

Overview

These steps are very important for preserving the website statistics and communicating the domain change to Google.

Recommended Action

Pre Launch

- Set up blocking on the new (domain2.com) UAT and Dev environment from crawling and indexing
- Check links to your current website, making note of the most powerful links from other websites
- Make a note of the Search Engine rankings for the targeted keywords
- Set the TTL to 300 seconds of the new domain at least 3 days before the move

At the time of Launch

- Verify site in Google Search Console. Include both the current and new domain you're moving to under a single account with "owner" access
- Check if the website on the new domain has the right meta robots directives (index, follow) and that its crawling is allowed in robots.txt.
- Make sure that a Google Analytics code is installed on the new domain

Post Launch

- Flush the DNS cache for the root domains and the subdomains
- Upload old and new XML sitemap
- Crawl new website, checking for internal errors, any references to the old domain name. Fix all errors found.
- Submit URLs of the new website to Google. For example, submit the site's home page using Google's URL Inspector Tool
- Use the Change of Address tool in Google Search Console to let Google know about changing the domain
- Contact link owners of the most powerful links to the old site. Tell them about the new domain name

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- Work on getting new links to the new domain name
- Watch the current site for any search engine ranking changes
- Monitor and fix the crawl errors in the Google Search Console

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