THE ULTIMATE
SEO MIGRATION GUIDE

How to avoid a drop in ranking
when launching a new website

b:web

"YOU KNOW THAT IT'S TIME TO REBUILD YOUR WEBSITE, THERE IS ALWAYS THAT NAGGING CONCERN THAT THE NEW WEBSITE WILL LOSE THE SEARCH RANKINGS THAT YOU HAVE WORKED HARD TO GAIN."

ZOE ASHBY

HELLO THERE!

Thank you for downloading the b:web "Ultimate SEO Migration Guide". b:web have been designing and launching websites for our clients since 2004. In the early days many of our clients were launching their website for the very first time and the process was very simple. These days have long gone...

Now, clients are considering the redevelopment of a website that is several years old and/or it's probably approaching its 2nd or 3rd generation. A big worry can be the SEO and what might happen if you change it, such as losing traffic.

These are some of the commonly asked questions we hear from people who are planning a website redesign:

- **Will I lose keyword ranking?**
- **Are the keywords I have any good?**
- **How can I be sure the new website will be better?**
- **What if something goes wrong?**

With 100s of successful website launches under our belt, at b:web we have crafted our own unique process. We hope that you find this guide invaluable. Our aim is to keep your website safe and secure, to save you time, and to the avoid the stress of something going wrong.

Zoe Ashby

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WARNING! The nature of this document is a little bit technical and we're going to get a bit geeky. However, if you would like to ask any questions, please do not hesitate to email me direct at zoe@bwebsites.co.uk

OVERVIEW

When creating a new website, there is always an element of risk to your search engine organic rankings. Moving content around, removing text, deleting pages, adding pages and making changes to title tags can impact your rankings.

With some preparation, it is possible to prioritise the important traffic driving keywords and retain their rankings. A new website can also be a chance to tidy, de-clutter and only include content that is important to SEO and the user journey.

There are a number of steps to planning and implementing your SEO migration strategy:

1. Keyword Research

2. Keyword Analysis

3. Sitemap

4. Content Attribution

5. Content Movement

6. Content Creation

7. Metrics & Analysis

Like any other marketing activity, success isn't guaranteed. By completing these steps and analysing the results, you can ensure that the damage is minimised and that you are in a position to increase organic search traffic going forwards.

Before you start you will need:

• Access to your Google analytics console

• Access to your Google webmaster console

• Current sitemap

• Proposed sitemap for the new website (this can be a draft if necessary)

① KEYWORD RESEARCH

You have probably already heard quite a lot about keyword research and about how it can be used to identify the keywords that you should target to bring in the right kind of traffic to your website. The keyword research required for a migration project is a little bit different.

Instead of trying to source keywords that are useful for your ongoing marketing we are looking to find out the specific keyword success of your website. We are looking for the keywords that are actually already driving traffic. We can then ensure that the new website either retains these keywords or improves on them.

Sometimes you might find out that your focus keywords are irrelevant, in which case this is also a useful exercise.

LOGIN TO GOOGLE SEARCH CONSOLE

Using Google Search Console you can find out which keywords are bringing the most traffic to your website. To do this, you'll need to go to your property in Search Console, then go to Search Traffic → Search Analytics.
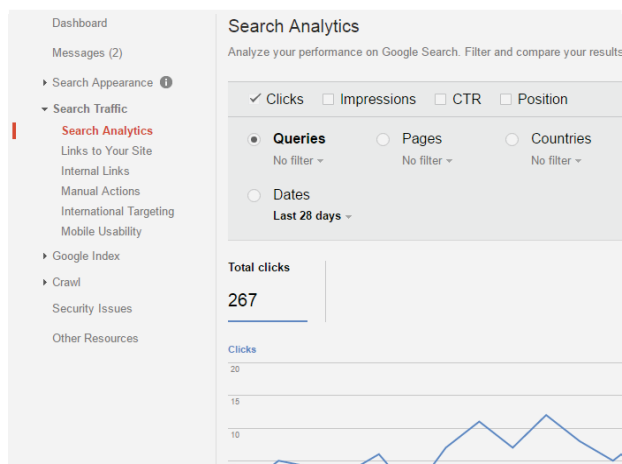
If you scroll down the page, you will see a download button. Download the information into a spreadsheet so you can copy your keywords.

Ask yourself the following questions about each keyword and make a note of your observations on the spreadsheet in a new column.

1. **Is this a branded keyword?**
    I.e. Search terms that are basically your business's or website's name. Usually if this is the case, you really don't need to worry as, with very little effort, a new website on the same domain is still likely to retain this ranking.

2. **Does the keyword look irrelevant?**
    Sometimes you might find yourself ranking for a keyword that has nothing to do with your business. Perhaps it has been pulled from old content, redundant services or a blog post. Either way, irrelevant keywords should be marked.

3. **Which are the top traffic drivers?**
    It should now be very obvious to you which keywords are driving the traffic. I like to red, amber and green these so that high traffic keywords are highlighted in Green and lower traffic keywords in Red. I would not dismiss the keywords highlighted in Red because they still might be important if they are significant and if this is the case you should look at on-page SEO improvements on the new website.

If you have a lot of keywords highlighted then you have a lot of work to do!
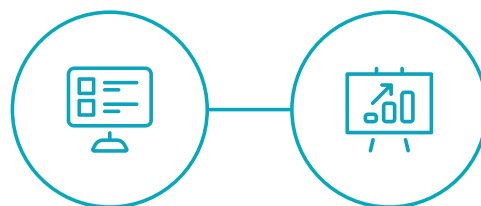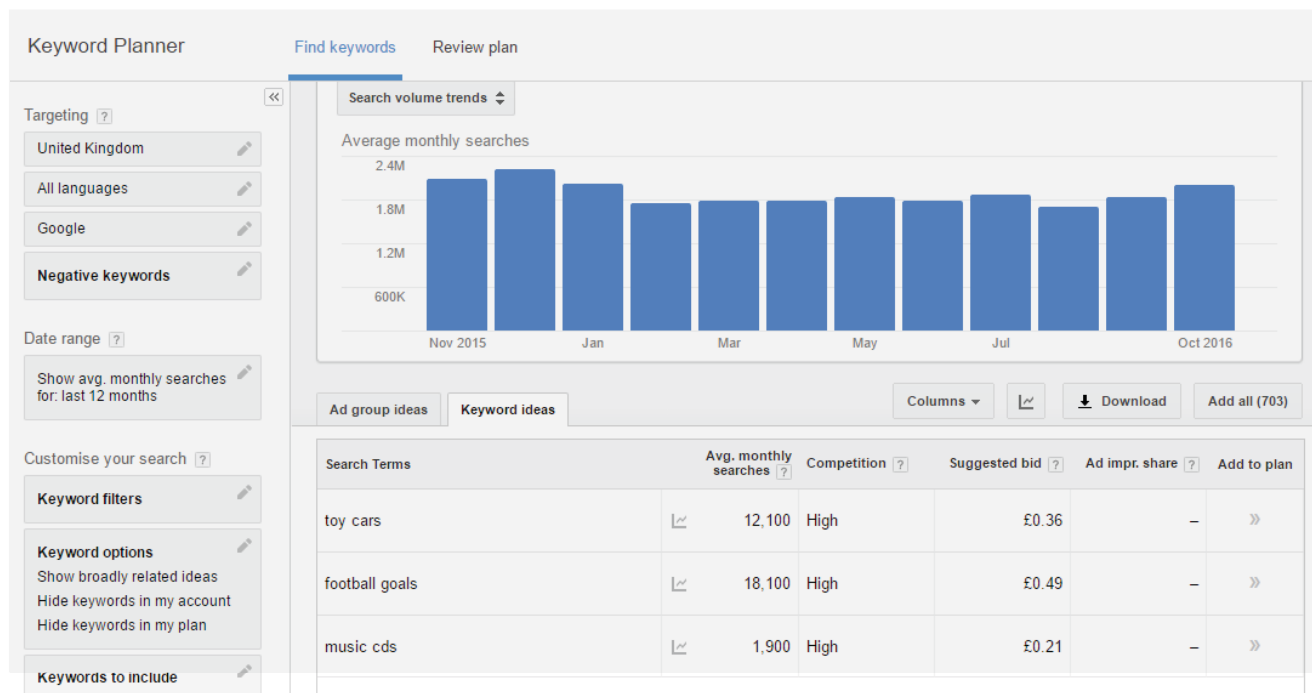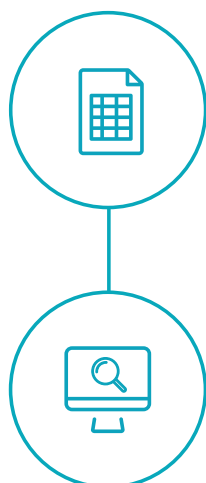
You now have an insight as to which keywords are currently working for your website and have started to form a strategy. You will also know which keywords will require some TLC during the SEO migration project.

Before you can start to work out exact actions there are still some gaps on your spreadsheet that need to be filled.

1. Where is the web page ranking on the search results for each keyword?

It's fair to say that if the keyword is bringing in traffic that you are probably on the top 3 pages but this is not always the case.

You also have to consider both the personalisation and localisation of search results. We like to use tools like www.positionly.com which provide an average ranking position per day for a list of keywords.

2. Which pages are bringing in the relevant traffic for each keyword?

Positionly.com also provides information about which page from your website is the highest ranking for a particular keyword.

Make a note of these on your spreadsheet to help you to finalise your SEO migration strategy.

3. How many people are searching for this keyword?

You will already know how much traffic is coming via each keyword from your work above, but its also really useful to know the true potential of each keyword.

③ SITEMAP

Now that your keyword research and analysis has been completed, you can draw up a considered strategy for the sitemap of your new website.

1. Identify pages that need to be included in the sitemap.

SEO isn't the only driving factor behind the inclusion of a page in your sitemap. However, the insights that you now have allow you to identify those pages that you *need* in order to retain keyword rankings. All of those pages with keywords highlighted in red, amber or green have a case for being included in the new sitemap and should be included on their own merits.

2. Identify pages that are not bringing in traffic from SEO

You can verify this through Google Analytics in Behaviour → Site content → Landing Pages, and then add the secondary dimension of Default Channel Grouping. To make it easier to read, you may wish to then click 'Advanced Search', and include Default Channel Grouping containing Organic Search. Here you will see all of the landing pages that generate search traffic, which should ideally match closely to your previous findings.

3. Update your proposed sitemap

When updating your proposed sitemap you do need to balance your new SEO insights with your planned customer user journey.

Remember that this SEO migration exercise is designed to find content that should be included in your new website to prevent loss of rankings.

Therefore it needs to be used in conjunction with the usual content strategy. You don't necessarily need to exclude all pages that aren't driving traffic, but you will be able to see which are the most important pages for your SEO migration. However, those that are driving the most traffic should really be included on the new website.
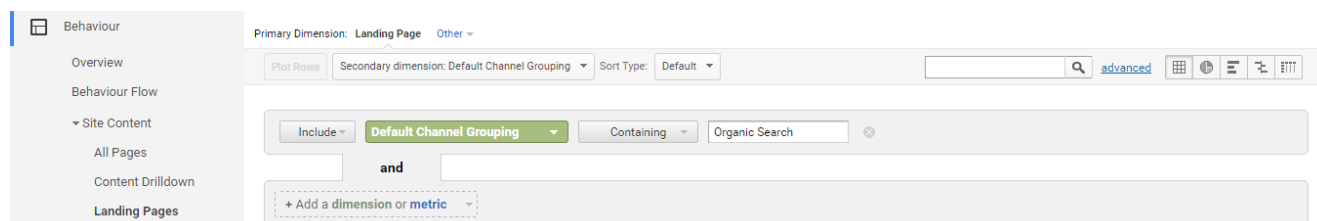
KEY POINTS FOR YOUR NEW SITEMAP:

- Include those pages that are currently important to your SEO.
- Do not duplicate pages with other parts of your site (although if you do, you can use canonical links for this).

We generally draft out a sitemap in a spreadsheet, with these columns:

- **Page**
- **Main Keyword (this is the one that is relevant and drives the most traffic)**
- **Main Keyword Searches per month (Found in Keyword Planner)**
- **Main Keyword Competition (found in Positionly.com)**
- **Secondary Keyword**
- **Secondary Keyword Searches per month**
- **Secondary Keyword Competition**
- **SEO title**
- **H1**
- **URL**

You may want to include tertiary keyword and any others. These are the ones that are less searched for. Be sure to include all of the most searched for keywords (from your Search Console investigation) in your sitemap.

④ CONTENT ATTRIBUTION

In order to properly 'migrate' SEO from one website to another it is important to understand why the page is ranking so highly. This is a complex area as there are so many ranking factors. But the main variable that you have control over during a migration is the on-page SEO.

For the keywords that are important to your website, visit the top ranking pages and make a note of the reasons why the page is performing well.

For example, if you have a page called "footballs.html" and it is generating traffic for "Training Footballs", make a note of whether the search term is in the page content, title tag or headers. Any content or tags that are likely to help the page rank for the target keyword should be noted.

CHECKLIST

Is the keyword or part of the keyword included:

- **In the full URL?**
- **In the title tag**
- **On the website menu or any other static link on the website?**
- **As an inbound link from across the website**
- **In any of the h1, h2, h3 headings etc.**
- **In the body text**
- **Image tags?**

Usually it will be fairly clear to see why a page is ranking for a particular keyword.

⑤ CONTENT MOVEMENT, REDIRECTS & NEW CONTENT CREATION

Once you have completed your sitemap, be sure to note down any pages that are on your current website but won't be in the new version, as well as any pages that will have a new URL.

For the pages that you are happy to copy word for word, you don't need to be too concerned about the content. If you are looking to streamline your site, it can be easier to keep the important content, as found in the content attribution step. If this isn't

possible, you will need to make sure you keep the same keyword density and placement.

If you are creating new content, you'll need to make sure that you don't duplicate other content across the site. When dealing with the migration of your SEO, the main focus is to avoid damaging current search rankings.

REDIRECTS

At this point you will have a list of pages that didn't make it into the sitemap and a list of pages that will be need a URL change. Prepare your 301 redirects to be added on launch.

The pages that will be lost in the site move will need to be redirected to suitable replacements (even if not perfect matches) and the pages that will have new URLs will need to be redirected to those new versions.
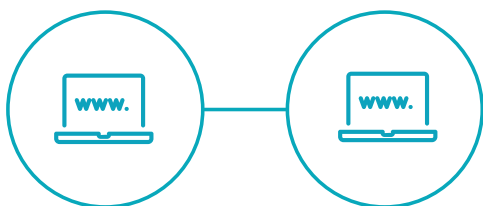
⑥ METRICS & ANALYSIS

Whilst you may have planned your SEO migration meticulously, there are no guarantees. Your competition might make changes to their website or an algorithm might change. It's really important to closely monitor your new website post launch.

These are the key metrics for your SEO migration:

- **Overall organic search traffic**

- **Organic search traffic to the pages that previously ranked well**

- **Keyword rankings (keywords that previously generated traffic to your site)**

These metrics can be monitored in Google Analytics (traffic) and with tools like Positionly.com (keyword ranking).

We would usually recommend analysing this data daily from the point of launch for the first six weeks.

You might find that your new website is indexed fairly quickly and you might find that rankings go up/down at an alarming rate following the launch. This is quite usual which is why it's important to track regularly until the site settles and to avoid being too reactive.

HAVE YOUR METRICS DROPPED?

- Check if there is a fundamental issue
- Robots.txt file is set to no-index
- Individual pages are blocking search engine spiders
- Redirects not working
- Errors in the website sitemap
- Check Google Webmaster for any reports

- Look at the pages that previously ranked well and keywords that previously generated traffic to see if you can pinpoint any problems.
- Have there been external changes, a Google algorithm change or a competitor launching a new website?

THANK YOU

Thank you for downloading and reading our SEO Migration Guide. We hope that the information helps you to avoid any unforeseen and unplanned hiccups in the migration of your website.

b:web have been providing digital solutions including web design, development and digital marketing since 2004. Our talented and passionate team have launched websites for brands across the UK and internationally.

If you would like to find out more about us please visit **www.bwebsites.co.uk**

You can also find us on Twitter and Instagram @ **bwebagency**

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