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The handy guide to data and your website migration

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At Vuzo we love data, and we want to help our clients make the best use of theirs, so that their decision making is always informed by the facts and figures. And when it comes to migrating or building a new website, this is vital.

Whether you're upgrading your website to keep it search engine and data compliant, investing in a new app or migrating to a new CMS, it's always a significant business investment which is why it's imperative you've got as much data behind your decisions as possible.

This handy guide is designed to help you answer some of the most common questions, and offer you a crash course in website migration and the importance of data! We look at:

1. What is a website migration?
2. How do I prepare for a site migration?
3. Will I lose SEO traffic in a website migration?
4. What data is important for SEO in a site migration?

What is a website migration?

In its most basic form, a website migration is when you're making a significant change to the nuts and bolts of your website. The most common site migrations are:

- Domain level changes – This could mean new URLs, international rollouts or multiple domain amalgamations.
- Back end changes – Typically this will be a CMS shift or upgrade and will be more focused on the code behind the scenes.
- Front end changes – Introducing wide scale content or UX changes can improve the user experience, conversion rate and SEO performance.
- Structural changes – Making changes to the user journey or site structure could involve updating the navigation and internal links.

There are a lot of different parties with equally vested interests when it comes to a site migration.

And, the form in which your website changes occur, can change depending on the stakeholders and their priorities. There are understandably a lot of different parties with equally vested interests when it comes to a migration.

Unfortunately, not everyone is going to agree, and each discipline will be convinced their area should take priority.

A Developer is going to focus on a site migration from a technical perspective. This might mean a change of CMS, design or functionality or server location.

An SEO will be more concerned with ensuring as little organic visibility is lost as possible, making sure any technical compliances are followed through on and ensuring the end result is completely search engine friendly and as future-proof as possible.

A Designer or User Experience specialist will be more concerned with making sure the presentation of the website is going to offer the best customer experience and the conversion path is as optimised as possible.

And of course, to the business owner, the CFO, and the people sitting at the top, a website migration is about ROI. The cost of migrating a website must be smaller than the potential loss of not migrating.

If anything goes wrong, it could take months (or even years) for the site to recover.



How do I prepare for a site migration?

To make sure each conflicting argument is considered impartially and stand the best chance of a seamless and profitable migration, a channel neutral and technically competent project manager is a necessity. Your Web Analyst might insist on various tracking scripts which your SEO might be concerned will impact page load time or Experience scores. Whilst there are legitimate arguments to both sides, the project manager will need to understand enough about each channel to make the final call.

Before you start, before you even sign off on a budget, you need to consult any channel within the business this project could possibly impact. This might sound like a 'too many cooks' meeting, but it's best to start with all the information and whittle down from there.

- Developer – obviously whoever is in charge of your current website needs to be involved even if their job is ongoing maintenance and you're bringing in a third party for the build
- Designer – anyone who has spent time making sure your website looks the way it does should have an involvement
- UX – the most important thing once the dust has settled is your customers can still convert
- SEO – start with the technical SEO but if your SEO is split into sub disciplines make sure you're also involving any content experts and creative SEOs. These will be the people who can tell you exactly what Google looks for in a perfect website and it's where your biggest potential post migration lies
- Paid – whether this is PPC or all paid marketing channels, these people spend a lot of your money ensuring customers find your website, so they'll need involvement in its migration
- CRM – just like your organic and paid channels, your CRM team will have a lot invested in making sure your customers are happy
- Web Analyst – as important as it is your new website proves its ROI, it's going to be very hard to quantify if you haven't got tracking in place throughout

Once you've got an idea of how much involvement each channel needs, you can start collating data and you'll have a good idea just how much time and resource this project is going to need.

It's very important you plan and organise as much as possible at this stage because once you start, mistakes and hesitation will increase the project cost and if anything goes wrong, it could take months (or even years) for the site to recover.



It's a common assumption that any website migration will result in a temporary loss of organic traffic.

Will I lose traffic in a website migration?

It's a common assumption that any website migration will result in a temporary loss of organic traffic at the very least. Whilst this is certainly very common, it's not an inevitability.

There are usually two reasons you'll see a loss in SEO after a migration:

1. Your website was doing something it probably shouldn't have been doing before the migration. You might have had a lot of duplicate content, too many floating doorway pages or some questionable backlinks from the olden days. Most competent SEO will use a migration to clean up anything lurking in the bowels of the code that could have the potential to do some damage.

   If Google had decided to let these things slide for now, you might see a loss in traffic or visibility until Google gets to grips with the new site.

   If this does happen, your SEO should have explained the potential risk vs benefit of future proofing your website in your planning sessions, and whilst traffic might be down temporarily, it's better than waiting for a Google wrist slap which could cost even more traffic in the long term.

2. The other reason you might see a drop in SEO traffic after a migration is that your site isn't as search engine compliant as it was before – obviously this is a broad statement but so long as you had a thorough grasp of all the data pre and post migration, the hole should be easy to spot. Between detailed site crawls (set to extract Schema, Core Web Vitals and all the standard on page elements) and SEO reports broken down by tags, you should see pretty quickly where the traffic went and why.

What data is important for SEO in a site migration?

Your SEO should have detailed copies of as much data as they can get their hands on. This doesn't have to be presented in every planning meeting, but the crux of it should be understood by all relevant stakeholders.



Most SEOs know how ineffective too much focus on individual keywords is.

Whether you're using a dedicated crawler like Deepcrawl or Screaming Frog or an all round SEO tool subscription service like Ahrefs, it's very important you've extracted every possible detail from your current website. If it's part of your website, it should be recorded. Typically, this will include:

Crawls

- All URLs – including canonicals, redirects (and their status code), errors, blocked. Don't forget to take XML and HTML sitemaps to compare and contrast as well as exports from Google Search Console and your analytics. You never know what Google might be indexing or sending traffic to, that fell down the back of the sofa.
- On page elements – again, everything you can physically record. Meta data, headings, Hreflang, word count, in and out links with anchor text, images and alt tags. Don't forget your Schema and Core Web Vitals which you might have to specify depending on what you're using to crawl.
- Your IA (information Architecture or site structure) to give a visualisation of how your website knits together. As this is part of Google's Algorithm, it's important you've got this information.

SEO reports

There's always someone in the business that loves Googling their favourite keywords to make sure it's ranking but most SEOs know how ineffective too much focus on individual keywords is.

Whether you're just exporting the top 1,000 from GSC or you've got your preferred subscription tool, get as large a list as possible of all keywords generating organic visibility for your website. Apply the following tags per keyword:

- Rank, clicks, impressions, CTR
- Brand or non brand
- Glamour or longtail (or tier 1, 2, 3 etc)
- Top level category
- Sub category
- Ranking URL (and a change column to check the stability of it)
- Ranking URL AOV & CV

The more information and data you have going into your migration, the more chance you have of being successful.

Depending on how many keywords you're working with, this could take a while even with some careful filtering in your preferred spreadsheet. But once it's done, it's easier to just update with any new keywords each week or month per report.

Now you've got a more holistic view of your SEO and you can make more informed decisions about where focus should be, measure impact from previous work and most importantly, keep an eye on migration performance.

Instead of panicking that 40% of keywords have lost rank or even 40% of Category A as lost organic traffic, you can see a larger picture.

- Was the loss better or worse for brand?
- Did the longtails suffer too?
- Of all the URLs that routinely ranked for those lost keywords, what's changed?
- Has a change in IA impacted these URLs?

With conversion metrics pulled in, you know where to focus first. The CEO might like that glamour keyword ranking at position one but if your data shows another set of long tail keywords from a different sub category generates more money, you can put forward an ROI supported case for focus.



To be forewarned is forearmed – the more information and data you have going into your migration, the more chance you have of being successful. If something doesn't go quite to plan, it's going to be all that recorded data that helps you recover.

Hopefully this has been a useful handbook, and we are always available to discuss things further. Get in touch with us now to see where Vuzo could help you and your team!

To find out how we can give you the technical capabilities of a FTSE 100 company, drop us an email at hello@vuzo.co.uk



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