

Replatforming without losing search traffic.

A website migration SEO checklist, for the weeks before a replatform rather than the week after it. Work top to bottom: the first two sections have to be done while the old site is still up.

Almost everything here is cheaper during the build than after launch. If you are already live on the new platform, start at "Launch day" and work back.

BEFORE ANYONE TOUCHES ANYTHING

- ☐ **Twelve months of Search Console data exported: queries, pages, clicks, impressions**
The only way to tell later whether a drop is a real problem or ordinary seasonality. Search Console will not hold it for you forever.
- ☐ **A full crawl of the old site saved: every URL, status code, title, H1, word count and canonical**
You cannot map what you have not listed, and a crawl always finds pages nobody remembered.
- ☐ **Every URL with organic traffic pulled into its own list**
These get mapped first and checked twice. They are the pages doing the work.
- ☐ **Every URL with backlinks pulled into its own list**
A link pointing at a dead page is authority arriving at a closed door.

THE REDIRECT MAP

- ☐ **Four columns: old URL, new URL, code, checked**
It is a spreadsheet, and it does more to protect your traffic than anything else on the project.
- ☐ **Every old URL has a row, including the ones you intend to kill**
A row nobody got round to is indistinguishable later from a decision that was made.
- ☐ **Pages that should go are marked 404, or 410 where you are certain**
"Unmapped" is a legitimate answer as long as somebody decided it on purpose.
- ☐ **301, never 302, and never pointing at another redirect**
A 302 says temporary, so the old URL may keep being treated as the real one. Each extra hop costs a little.
- ☐ **Pages merged into one have been agreed with whoever knows why both existed**
Whether two old pages were really the same page is a content decision with a search consequence. It needs the people who remember.
- ☐ **Old addresses redirect to their closest match, never all to the homepage**
A blanket redirect to the homepage is usually treated as a soft 404, and the visitor lands somewhere that does not answer them.

ON STAGING, BEFORE LAUNCH

- ☐ **The whole redirect map run against staging, with the final destination recorded**
Rules get overridden by server config, the CDN or a trailing-slash setting. Seeing each one work is the only proof.
- ☐ **Old and new word counts compared on your twenty best pages**
A new template with less room for words can quietly remove the thing a page ranked for. Nothing flags it, because nothing is broken.
- ☐ **One URL per template run through the Rich Results Test**
Schema usually lives in the old theme or a plugin, so it is easy to leave behind when the templates change.
- ☐ **The XML sitemap lists the new URLs, and no staging hostname**
A sitemap pointing at staging tells search engines about a site they cannot reach.

LAUNCH DAY

- ☐ **robots.txt opened on the live domain, in a browser**
A staging robots.txt that disallows everything is the quietest way to remove a whole site from search.
- ☐ **Three live pages checked in view source for a leftover noindex**
One template can carry it. Check again the next morning, because launch week brings more deploys.
- ☐ **The redirect map run again, this time against production**
Checked means somebody loaded the old URL and watched where it went, not that the rule was written.
- ☐ **Analytics and Search Console still recording, on the new templates**
A tag that lived in the old theme goes with it, and the gap in the data is the fortnight you most need.

THE FIRST FORTNIGHT

- ☐ **Server logs read for what search engines are actually crawling**
The fastest way to spot a redirect loop or a crawl trap, and it shows what is really happening rather than what should be.
- ☐ **Search Console coverage watched for a spike in "not found" or "excluded by noindex"**
Small problems in the first fourteen days are the cheapest ones you will ever fix.
- ☐ **Core Web Vitals checked on the new templates**
A new hero design can slow a page down without anyone noticing, and the field data takes 28 days to tell you.
- ☐ **What counts as recovered is written down, and so is when you would act**
Back to the pre-migration trend line, adjusted for seasonality. A drop in week one is expected; still there in week six is worth investigating.
- ☐ **The map, the rule count and the date it was last checked go into the handover**
The next person to touch the URL structure needs to know what is already pointing where.

Take it, change it, use it on your own migrations. No need to credit me. adamroe.co.uk/blog/replatforming-without-losing-traffic