

Page structure and URLs, before any design.

Run this before anyone opens a design tool. One row per page, one search per page, and the addresses settled while they are still text in a spreadsheet.

On a rebuild, the crawl comes first. The new structure is built knowing which old pages are load-bearing, and the redirect map grows out of it.

BEFORE YOU DRAW A SINGLE BOX

- ☐ **What the site is for, in one sentence, agreed with whoever is paying**
Most page arguments later are really this argument. Settle it once, at the top of the spreadsheet.
- ☐ **The searches the business needs to be found for, written down**
The page list comes out of the query list, not the other way round.
- ☐ **If a site already exists, it has been crawled first**
Every URL with its traffic, its links in and its links from other sites, so you know which pages are load-bearing.

ONE ROW FOR EVERY PAGE

- ☐ **URL: final, lowercase, hyphenated**
Everything downstream depends on it, and changing it later needs a redirect.
- ☐ **What it is for, in one sentence**
If the sentence needs an "and" to be true, you are looking at two pages.
- ☐ **Target query: the one search it should answer**
One page per search, forever. Two pages chasing one search hold each other back.
- ☐ **Parent: where it sits, and therefore how deep it is**
Depth is a signal your own site is sending about how important the page is.
- ☐ **Links in: which pages will point at it, with what anchor text**
The easiest field to leave out, and the one that decides whether a page arrives supported or on its own.
- ☐ **Schema type: Service, Article, Person, FAQPage**
Decided here so the template can carry it, rather than added months later, template by template.

THE TEST FOR EVERY PAGE

- ☐ **"What would somebody type to find this?" asked of every row**
It produces the H1, the title tag and the internal linking plan as a by-product.
- ☐ **Nothing to type: it is a section of another page, not a page**
Built anyway, it launches thin, picks up no links, and still has to be looked after by somebody.

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- ☐ **The same query in two rows: decided now, not in the build**
Combining is usually right, but it is a content decision, so make it with the people who know why both exist.

URLS, SETTLED ONCE

- ☐ **No dates in evergreen addresses**
/blog/2026/10/... starts to look dated within a year, and people are less likely to click it.
- ☐ **No taxonomy in the path**
/services/technical/seo-audit breaks the moment somebody recategorises the page. Let the category live in the data.
- ☐ **The addresses read on their own, with the page titles hidden**
If you cannot tell what the page is from the address, it is worth another go while it is still text in a cell.
- ☐ **The pattern for adding a page later is written down**
Somebody will add one in month nine. The pattern is what they will follow, or not.

HIERARCHY AND INTERNAL LINKS

- ☐ **Money pages have a navigation link and links from body copy**
A page linked from six relevant paragraphs is well supported at any depth.
- ☐ **Supporting pages are linked from the money pages they support**
That is what makes them supporting rather than stranded.
- ☐ **Nothing that matters is reachable only from a footer list**
It either belongs somewhere else, or it is really part of another page.

IF IT REPLACES AN EXISTING SITE

- ☐ **Every row names the old addresses it replaces**
The redirect map then grows out of the sitemap, instead of being assembled in a hurry in launch week.
- ☐ **Every old URL with traffic, or a link from another site, appears against a row**
Anything appearing nowhere is being deleted. That is a decision, so make it out loud.
- ☐ **Pages being merged are agreed with the people who know the content**
Somebody has to remember why both exist before the two can safely become one.

BEFORE THE DESIGN STARTS

- ☐ **Signed off by whoever owns the content, not only the project**
They are the ones who will write it, and who know what is already there.
- ☐ **The decisions and the reasons behind them are written down**
It becomes the decisions log in the handover, so the next person can see what was decided and why.

Take it, change it, use it on your own projects. No need to credit me. adamroe.co.uk/blog/sitemap-before-design