

# Oops, I Redesigned My Website! An SEO Checklist

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**A website redesign is a time for celebration! But if you just redesigned your website without thinking about the effect on its search engine presence, you may be in for a rude awakening. Follow a few simple guidelines to be sure that your fabulous new site isn't going incognito.**

One question that we are asked over and over again is this: "I just redesigned my website. How can I make sure that I don't lose my search engine rankings?"

If you just launched a redesigned website, we've made this checklist for you. Follow it, and your grand debut won't become a search engine flop.

## You Don't Know What You've Got Until It's Gone

How did visitors get to your old site? Knowing this will help you know where to focus your efforts when reclaiming lost traffic. For a meaningful baseline, dig up this information about your old site:

- ✓ **Conversions.** Do you have any data on sales, leads, or other performance of your old website? Make a note of it so that you can compare it against the new site.
- ✓ **Search Engine Rankings.** Did you track your old site's search engine ranks? Is your new website targeting the same keywords? If so, you'll want to keep a record of your old site's ranks as a baseline. You can learn the best way to track search engine ranks in chapter 6 of our book, [SEO: An Hour Day](#), and you can record your rankings on our downloadable [SEO rank tracking worksheet](#).
- ✓ **Broad-brush Traffic Stats.** What were the most visited pages on your old website? And, what were the most common entry pages (the pages that your audience comes to first)? These pages will be your highest priorities for "cleanup time" tasks (we'll explain below).
- ✓ **Inbound Links.** It's important to know how many other sites are linking to your old website – especially if you're changing URLs. While the previous tasks in this list require some recordkeeping before the new site is live, this is one you can do just as well after launch. To check links that are still pointing to your old site, go to [search.msn.com](http://search.msn.com) and use this syntax: **link:http://www.YourURL.com**. (Google is not the search engine to use for this, because it has a reputation of drastically underreporting your inbound links.)

## It's Cleanup Time

With key background info in hand, you'll be in a good position to do some important tidying up!

- ✓ **Website Redirects.** In an ideal world, every URL from your old website would redirect to an appropriate page on your new website. But we know that this can be hard to achieve in reality. So try this on for size: using a server 301 setting (your IT people will know what this is) redirect the following pages, in order of priority:
  1. Your Website Home Page (be sure you get all the variations – index.asp, index.php, or whatever you have)
  2. Any Pages with Special Status (i.e., Customer Support) That Make Them Important to your Business
  3. Your Top Entry Pages
  4. Your Top Most Popular Pages
  5. Pages on the Path to Conversion (the pages that visitors often visited on their journey from entering the site to converting)
  6. Any Other Pages on the Website.

And be sure, when setting up the redirect that each page from your old site goes to a well-chosen landing page on your new site – not just the home page! P.S.: Looking to go techie? Here's a link to an [excellent guide to redirects in all sorts of languages](#) (PHP, .htaccess, Ruby on Rails and so on).

- ✓ **Inbound Links.** There may be dozens or hundreds of links all over the web linking to non-existent URLs on your website. Each of these should receive a polite request for an update – but don't hold your breath. In our experience, less than half of these requests result in an update.
- ✓ **Directory Listings.** Really just a special case of "inbound links," directory listings deserve a little special attention. Take the time to submit whatever form you need to make sure that they are linking to the correct URLs.
- ✓ **Internal Links.** No website is immune to broken links – even your own. After a redesign be sure to run a link validator on your website to be sure that those internal links have all been updated properly. These are available [online](#) or using website development software (in Adobe Dreamweaver, for example, select Site > Check Links Sitewide).
- ✓ **File Not Found Page.** As a result of all the potential broken links listed above, your audience will probably see the "File Not Found" Page more often than usual after a site redesign. Be sure it's well written and explains the situation. ("To better serve our customers, we have redesigned our website" is good; "404 Error! The URL you have typed is incorrect!" is not.) Better yet, include links to those most-popular pages you figured out earlier. And keep an eye on your website stats, so you can see if there are a large number of "File Not Found" errors showing up for a particular URL.
- ✓ **Google Sitemap.** Today's search engines are smart enough to follow a 301 redirect through to a new page and index it properly – with no loss in search engine presence. How long will this take? We've seen it take 3 months before an old site is entirely flushed. Can you speed up the process? Maybe. Setting up a Google Sitemap is a simple, free way to improve your website's indexing on Google. Learn more about the process at [Google's Webmaster Page](#).

We know what you're thinking: You worked so hard on your shiny new website, and just when you want to kick back and relax a little, we've created a substantial new pile of work for you. Is it worth it? Absolutely! If your website redesign was typical, you've inadvertently turned away some desirable visitors – people who actively tried to come to your site! You could hand all this traffic

over to your competitors, or you could identify your best sources of traffic, and take important steps to keep them coming!

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As SEO consultants, Jennifer Grappone and Gradiva Couzin bring targeted visitors to websites and help businesses on the Web achieve their goals. You can learn more about SEO, and how to optimize your own site, at [www.yourseoplan.com](http://www.yourseoplan.com).