

CHECKLIST: MIGRATING A WEBSITE WITHOUT LOSING SEO

From inventory to the first three months, with Google's rules

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Work through this list before, during and after the launch of a new site. Every Google rule was checked on 27 September 2026; the other points are our advice.

1. PLAN THE MIGRATION

- ☐ Decided what changes: if the URLs stay the same, you check content, titles, DNS and firewall ^[1]; if they change, every URL gets a redirect ^[2].
- ☐ Only with a new domain: a Change of Address in Search Console as well ^[3].
- ☐ A small or medium-sized site moved in one go, in a quiet period ^[2].
- ☐ One thing at a time: for example the domain first, and only then a new layout ^[2]. If content and URL structure change together, expect some loss of traffic ^[3].

2. MAKE THE INVENTORY

- ☐ All URLs crawled, including PDFs, images and forgotten pages.
- ☐ From Search Console: pages with clicks and impressions over the full 16 months ^[4], and pages with external links.
- ☐ From Google Analytics 4: the landing pages that bring in enquiries.
- ☐ A decision made per URL:

What happens to each old URL		
DECISION	WHEN	WHAT YOU DO
Keep	The page attracts traffic or enquiries	Same topic, preferably the same URL; otherwise a 301
Improve	Good topic, weak or outdated content	New version, 301 from the old URL
Merge	Several pages on the same topic	One stronger page, 301 from each old URL
Remove	No traffic, no links, no replacement	404 or 410; a 301 only if there is a genuinely related page

3. MAKE THE REDIRECT MAP

- ☐ One line per URL with the old and new URL, set up as a permanent redirect on the server ^[2].
- ☐ 301 or 308, not 302 or 307: a temporary redirect is only a weak signal ^[5] and no signal for the canonical URL. JavaScript redirects only as a last resort ^[6].
- ☐ Not everything to the homepage, because that can count as a soft 404, and no chains: preferably no more than three steps ^[2].
- ☐ Internal links point to the new URLs, and every new page has a canonical to itself ^[2].
- ☐ The redirects stay in place for at least a year, and for visitors preferably forever ^[2].

4. MULTILINGUAL SITES

- ☐ Every page redirects to a successor in the same language, not to another language or the homepage.
- ☐ hreflang updated to the new URLs ^[2] and reciprocal between all language versions, otherwise Google ignores the tags. `x-default` only for a language selection page ^[7].
- ☐ If a language moves from the root to `/fr/`: a language choice at the top, hreflang to `/fr/` and redirects for all underlying pages.

5. TEST ON A PROTECTED STAGING ENVIRONMENT

- ☐ Protected with `noindex` ^[1] or a password; a robots.txt alone does not keep pages out of Google ^[8]. Every `noindex` is on a list to remove at launch ^[2].
- ☐ Crawled: every old URL returns a single 301 to the right page; titles, H1, canonicals, structured data and internal links are correct; on a phone the site is faster than the old one.
- ☐ New hosting: the firewall or DoS protection does not block Googlebot ^[1], and the server can handle the temporarily more intensive crawling after a move ^[2].
- ☐ OAI-SearchBot allowed ^[9]. Behind Cloudflare: the managed robots.txt ^[10] and the defaults for new domains ^[11] checked.

6. LAUNCH DAY

- ☐ Redirects live, and a sample of old URLs tested.
- ☐ Every `noindex` and every test rule in robots.txt removed ^[2].
- ☐ New sitemap submitted in Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools. A sitemap with the old URLs may be added; redirect notices in it are normal ^[2].

- ☐ New domain: Change of Address after the redirects, as owner of both properties ^[3], for every variant of the old domain, including `www` ^[2]. The old domain stays paid for at least a year ^[3].
- ☐ Google tag, cookie banner and forms tested, including on thank-you pages with a new URL.
- ☐ Links updated in your Business Profile, social profiles, email signatures and ads.

7. THE FIRST THREE MONTHS

This is normal: a few weeks before most pages have moved ^[2], old URLs that stay visible for a while ^[6], and less crawling after a hosting change ^[1].

- ☐ Weekly in Search Console: old URLs with clicks or links that return a 404, and new pages that are still not indexed after a few weeks.
- ☐ Weekly: traffic per landing page next to your inventory, and enquiries in GA4. A sudden drop on launch day is usually a tracking problem.
- ☐ Your fixed list of questions repeated monthly in ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity.
- ☐ A drop that persists after a few weeks? Checked for a missing redirect, lost content, a forgotten `noindex` or a firewall.

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