

MarginseyeDigital

Website & Platform Migration SEO & Traffic Loss Prevention Guide

*For End Users & Website Owners
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1. Why This Guide Matters

The Hard Truth: A poorly executed website migration can destroy years of SEO progress in a matter of days. Studies show that **60-80% of website migrations experience significant traffic loss** — and many never fully recover.

This guide exists to make sure that doesn't happen to you. Whether you're moving to a new domain, redesigning your site, switching platforms (e.g., WordPress → Shopify), or restructuring your URLs — following the steps in this document will help you protect your search rankings, preserve your traffic, and maintain your revenue.

What This Guide Covers

- Domain migrations (e.g., oldsite.com → newsite.com)
- Platform/CMS changes (e.g., WordPress, Wix, Shopify, custom builds)
- URL structure changes (e.g., /blog/post-name → /articles/post-name)
- HTTPS/SSL migrations (HTTP → HTTPS)
- Site redesigns with content changes
- Mergers and acquisitions (combining multiple sites)

Who Should Read This

- Website owners and business stakeholders
- Marketing managers responsible for digital performance
- Content teams managing site updates
- Anyone paying an agency (like MarginseyeDigital) to handle a migration

2. Pre-Migration: The Foundation Phase

 **CRITICAL:** Skipping the pre-migration phase is the #1 cause of traffic loss. Do not rush this.

Step 1: Establish Your Baseline

Before touching anything, you need a complete picture of your current site's performance. This is your insurance policy — if something goes wrong, you need to know exactly what you lost.

- Data to Collect:
 - Organic traffic (last 12 months via Google Analytics 4)
 - Top 50-100 landing pages by traffic
 - Keyword rankings (use SEMrush, Ahrefs, or Google Search Console)
 - Backlink profile (Ahrefs, Moz, or Majestic)
 - Site speed metrics (Core Web Vitals via PageSpeed Insights)
 - Indexed pages (Google Search Console → Coverage report)
 - Current XML sitemap and robots.txt file

 **Pro Tip:** Export all this data into a spreadsheet and store it in a shared folder. Label it clearly: 'PRE-MIGRATION BASELINE – [DATE]'.

Step 2: Crawl Your Entire Site

Use a crawling tool (Screaming Frog, Sitebulb, or DeepCrawl) to create a complete inventory of every URL on your site. This crawl will become your migration map.

What to Capture	Why It Matters
All live URLs (200 status)	These are your money pages — protect them at all costs
All redirecting URLs (301/302)	Understand existing redirect chains
All broken URLs (404/500)	Fix these before migration; don't carry problems forward
Meta titles & descriptions	Preserve or improve click-through rates
H1 tags & content headers	Maintain topical relevance signals
Internal linking structure	Preserve PageRank/authority flow
Image URLs & alt text	Don't lose image search traffic
Canonical tags	Prevent duplicate content issues

Step 3: Map Every Old URL to a New URL

This is the single most important document in your entire migration. It's called a

URL Mapping Spreadsheet

and it tells search engines (and users) where every old page now lives.

Your spreadsheet must include these columns:

- Old URL
- New URL
- Redirect Type (should be 301 for permanent moves)
- Page Title (old vs. new)
- Content Match (Exact / Similar / New)
- Priority (High / Medium / Low)
- Status (Pending / Done / Tested)

 **DO NOT DELETE PAGES WITHOUT A PLAN.** If a page has traffic, backlinks, or rankings, it must have a new home. If you truly must remove it, use a 410 (gone) status — but only after confirming it has no value.

Step 4: Audit & Preserve Your Backlinks

Backlinks are votes of confidence from other websites. Losing them means losing authority. Before migration:

10. Export your full backlink profile from Ahrefs, SEMrush, or Moz
11. Identify your top 100 linking domains (these are gold)
12. For any backlinks pointing to URLs that will change, reach out to the linking site and ask them to update the link to the new URL
13. If outreach isn't possible, ensure a 301 redirect is in place from the old URL to the new one
14. Update any backlinks you control (social profiles, directory listings, partner sites)

Step 5: Prepare Your New Site (Staging Environment)

Never, ever migrate directly to your live site without testing. Use a staging environment (a private copy of your new site) to test everything first.

Check	Pass Criteria
All 301 redirects work	Every old URL redirects to the correct new URL with no chains
Noindex tags removed	Staging noindex tags are NOT carried to the live site
Robots.txt allows crawling	Disallow rules don't block important pages
XML sitemap is valid	Submit to Google Search Console without errors
Internal links updated	No links still point to old URLs
Canonical tags correct	All canonicals point to the new domain/URL structure
Schema markup intact	Rich snippets still render properly

Core Web Vitals green	LCP < 2.5s, INP < 200ms, CLS < 0.1
Mobile usability clean	No mobile-friendly errors in Search Console

3. During Migration: The Execution Phase

 **TIMING IS EVERYTHING:** Execute migrations during low-traffic periods (typically weekends or overnight). Have your full team on standby.

Step 1: Launch the New Site

15. Push the new site live (replace the old site or point the domain to the new server)
16. Immediately implement ALL 301 redirects from your URL mapping spreadsheet
17. Upload the new XML sitemap to your server (e.g., /sitemap.xml)
18. Verify the robots.txt file allows search engines to crawl the new site
19. Remove any password protection or staging blocks

Step 2: Verify Redirects Immediately

Use a bulk redirect checker (Screaming Frog, httpstatus.io, or your own script) to test:

- Every old URL returns a 301 (not 302, not 404)
- Every 301 points to the correct new URL
- No redirect chains (old → redirect → redirect → new)
- No redirect loops (A → B → A)
- All new URLs return a 200 (OK) status

 **A SINGLE BROKEN REDIRECT ON A HIGH-TRAFFIC PAGE CAN COST YOU THOUSANDS.** Test every single one.

Step 3: Update Google Search Console

20. Submit your new XML sitemap via Google Search Console → Sitemaps
21. Use the URL Inspection tool to test key pages and request indexing
22. If changing domains, use the Change of Address tool (Settings → Change of Address)
23. Monitor the Coverage report for crawl errors
24. Check the Pages report for indexing issues

Step 4: Update Bing Webmaster Tools

Bing powers Yahoo and DuckDuckGo search results. Don't ignore it:

25. Submit your new sitemap in Bing Webmaster Tools
26. Use the Site Move tool if changing domains
27. Check for crawl errors in the Reports section

Step 5: Update External References

The faster search engines and users find your new URLs, the faster you recover. Update:

- Google Business Profile (website link)
- Social media profiles (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, TikTok)
- Email signatures and marketing templates

- Paid advertising landing pages (Google Ads, Meta Ads, etc.)
- Email marketing automations and drip campaigns
- Partner / affiliate links
- Directory listings (Yelp, industry directories, local citations)
- Press releases and media kits

4. Post-Migration: The Recovery & Monitoring Phase

Migration isn't done when the new site goes live. The real work is the weeks that follow.

Week 1: Daily Monitoring

Check these metrics every single day for the first 7 days:

Metric	Tool	What to Watch For
Organic traffic	Google Analytics 4	Sudden drops > 20% = red alert
Indexed pages	Google Search Console	New pages appearing; old pages disappearing
Keyword rankings	SEMrush / Ahrefs	Rank drops for top 20 keywords
Crawl errors	Google Search Console	404s, server errors, redirect issues
Core Web Vitals	PageSpeed Insights	Performance regressions
Backlink status	Ahrefs	Lost backlinks pointing to old URLs

Week 2-4: Weekly Monitoring

Continue checking the same metrics weekly. Look for:

- Traffic recovery patterns (expect a 10-30% dip initially; recovery should start by week 2-3)
- New keywords ranking for migrated pages
- Any pages stuck in 'Discovered – currently not indexed'
- Backlink reclamation progress

Month 2-3: Monthly Audits

By month 2, you should see clear recovery signals. If not, escalate immediately.

- Full site crawl to catch broken internal links
- Content gap analysis (are competitors now outranking you for your old keywords?)
- Backlink gap analysis (have you lost authority compared to pre-migration?)
- Conversion rate analysis (is the new site converting as well as the old one?)
- User behavior analysis (bounce rate, time on page, scroll depth via GA4 / Hotjar)

When to Panic (Red Flags)

Red Flag	Action Required
Traffic down > 50% after 1 week	Emergency audit — check redirects, indexing, robots.txt
Zero new pages indexed after 2 weeks	Check noindex tags, robots.txt, sitemap errors
Rankings dropped for ALL top 10 keywords	Content mismatch — new pages may not satisfy search intent

Backlinks lost > 20%	Aggressive outreach campaign to reclaim or replace links
Core Web Vitals failed	Prioritize performance fixes — Google uses this as a ranking factor
Conversion rate dropped > 30%	UX audit — new design may be hurting user experience

5. Common Mistakes to Avoid

Mistake	Why It Destroys SEO	How to Prevent It
Using 302 redirects instead of 301s	302 = temporary; Google keeps indexing the old URL and doesn't pass link equity	Always use 301 for permanent moves
Launching without a staging test	Broken redirects, missing pages, and crawl errors go live undetected	Test everything in staging first
Forgetting to update internal links	Internal links pointing to old URLs create unnecessary redirect chains	Bulk-update all internal links to point directly to new URLs
Carrying staging noindex tags to live	Your entire site becomes invisible to Google	Audit every page for noindex before launch
Changing content significantly during migration	Google re-evaluates relevance; drastic changes can drop rankings	Keep content as close to original as possible initially; optimize later
Ignoring mobile usability	Google uses mobile-first indexing; a broken mobile experience kills rankings	Test every page on mobile before launch
Deleting pages without redirects	Every deleted page with traffic or backlinks becomes a 404 error	Either redirect to a relevant page or use a proper 410 status with a plan
Not monitoring after launch	Problems surface days or weeks later; early detection prevents permanent damage	Set up daily alerts in GA4 and Search Console
Changing URLs for no reason	Every URL change is a risk; only change what must change	Keep URLs identical unless the new structure is strategically necessary
Forgetting about image SEO	Image search drives significant traffic; broken image URLs = lost visibility	Update image URLs, alt text, and structured data

6. Quick-Reference Checklist

Print this page. Tape it to your monitor. Don't skip a single item.

☐ Pre-Migration (2-4 Weeks Before)

- Exported baseline data (traffic, rankings, backlinks, speed)
- Completed full site crawl and inventory
- Created URL mapping spreadsheet (old → new)
- Audited and preserved backlink profile
- Built and tested new site in staging environment
- Verified all redirects work in staging
- Confirmed noindex tags are removed from live pages
- Validated XML sitemap and robots.txt
- Set up Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools access
- Briefed all stakeholders on timeline and rollback plan

☐ Migration Day (Launch)

- New site pushed live during low-traffic window
- All 301 redirects implemented and tested
- New XML sitemap uploaded and submitted to Google & Bing
- Robots.txt verified as crawl-friendly
- Staging blocks / passwords removed
- Change of Address tool used (if domain change)
- External references updated (social, ads, directories, email)
- Team on standby for immediate issue response

☐ Post-Migration (Weeks 1-4)

- Daily traffic monitoring (GA4)
- Daily crawl error checks (Search Console)
- Weekly ranking checks (SEMrush / Ahrefs)
- Weekly backlink monitoring
- Core Web Vitals re-tested
- Mobile usability verified
- Internal link audit completed
- Content quality review (no broken images, missing text)
- Conversion tracking verified (forms, purchases, calls)
- Stakeholder report sent weekly

☐ Month 2-3 (Recovery Validation)

- Monthly full site crawl
- Content gap analysis completed
- Backlink gap analysis completed
- Conversion rate benchmarked against pre-migration

- User behavior analysis (bounce rate, session duration)
- SEO optimization phase begins (now safe to improve content)
- Lessons learned documented for future migrations

7. Emergency Troubleshooting

If something goes wrong, use this flowchart-style guide to diagnose and fix fast.

Scenario A: Traffic Dropped 50%+ Immediately

1. Check redirects: Are 301s working? Use httpstatus.io to test 20+ URLs.
2. Check indexing: Are new pages in Google? Search 'site:yoursite.com'.
3. Check robots.txt: Is it blocking everything? Look for 'Disallow: /'.
4. Check noindex tags: View page source for '<meta name="robots" content="noindex"'.
`<meta name="robots" content="noindex"`
5. Check Search Console: Any manual actions or security issues?
6. If all else fails: Consider a temporary rollback to the old site while you fix issues.

Scenario B: Rankings Dropped But Traffic is Stable

1. Check keyword cannibalization: Are multiple new pages competing for the same keyword?
2. Check content quality: Did the new design remove important text or headings?
3. Check internal links: Are authority pages now orphaned (no internal links pointing to them)?
4. Check page speed: Did the new theme slow things down? Run PageSpeed Insights.
5. Check mobile experience: Test key pages on real mobile devices.

Scenario C: Backlinks Disappeared

1. Check if old URLs are returning 404s instead of 301s.
2. Check if redirect chains are too long (3+ hops).
3. Reach out to top linking domains and request link updates.
4. Create a link reclamation campaign targeting lost high-value links.

Scenario D: New Site Not Indexing

1. Submit the sitemap again in Search Console.
2. Use URL Inspection tool → Request Indexing on 10-20 key pages.
3. Check for crawl budget issues: Is the site too slow? Too many low-value pages?
4. Check for duplicate content: Are canonical tags pointing to the wrong URLs?
5. Check server logs: Is Googlebot even crawling the new site?

8. Glossary of Terms

301 Redirect	A permanent redirect that tells search engines and browsers a page has moved forever. Passes ~90-95% of link equity.
302 Redirect	A temporary redirect. Does NOT pass link equity. Avoid for permanent migrations.
404 Error	Page not found. Bad for user experience and SEO if it happens to important pages.
410 Gone	A stronger signal than 404 — tells search engines a page is permanently deleted and will not return.
Backlink	A link from another website to yours. A major ranking factor.
Canonical Tag	An HTML element that tells search engines which version of a page is the 'official' one. Prevents duplicate content issues.
Core Web Vitals	Google's page experience metrics: Largest Contentful Paint (LCP), Interaction to Next Paint (INP), and Cumulative Layout Shift (CLS).
Crawl Budget	The number of pages Googlebot will crawl on your site in a given time period. Waste it on junk, and important pages get missed.
Google Search Console (GSC)	Google's free tool for monitoring how your site performs in search. Essential for migrations.
Index / Indexing	The process of Google adding your pages to its search database. If a page isn't indexed, it can't rank.
Link Equity / Link Juice	The ranking power passed from one page to another via links.
Noindex	A meta tag that tells search engines NOT to index a page. Useful for staging, deadly if left on live sites.
Robots.txt	A file that tells search engine crawlers which pages they can and cannot access.
Sitemap (XML)	A file that lists all the important pages on your site, helping search engines find and index them.
Staging Environment	A private copy of your website used for testing before going live.

9. Contact & Support

This guide was created by MarginseyeDigital to help our clients and partners protect their digital investments during website and platform migrations.

Need Help?

If you're feeling overwhelmed, that's normal. Migrations are complex, high-stakes projects. MarginseyeDigital specializes in risk-managed migrations that protect your traffic, rankings, and revenue.

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 [Your Phone Number]

We offer:

- Pre-migration audits and baseline reporting
- Full URL mapping and redirect strategy
- Staging environment testing and validation
- Launch-day execution and real-time monitoring
- Post-migration recovery tracking and optimization
- Emergency rescue for failed migrations

Protect what you've built. Migrate with confidence.

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