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Redesigning a website without losing your Google traffic

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO

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Redesigning a website without losing your Google traffic

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A new site on top of an old one loses visitors when **the pages Google knows disappear, change address without notice, or lose the text that made them show up**. The look matters least. The rule is simple: before changing, *know which pages bring visitors*; when changing, *keep their address and the substance of their content*, or point the old address at the new one. No method guarantees a position, but these steps remove the avoidable mistakes.

Before touching anything

1. **Take inventory.** List every address on the current site (the sitemap, or a crawl, will do) and add, for each, the visits it brings: the Search Console performance report has that per page (**Google Search Console, step by step**).

2. **Mark what brings visitors.** The few pages that give most of the visits are the ones to protect. The ones nobody ever sees can go.

3. **Keep a copy of the old site**, files and database (**your own backup**).

While building the new one

1. **Build it off-line**, at a test address (**a test site before touching what is live**), with the do-not-index option on so Google does not see the building work.

2. **Keep the addresses that bring visitors.** If a page was `/services/`, keep it so. See what a good address looks like in **what a good page URL looks like**.

3. **For the ones that change, draw a map** from old address to new, page by page, and prepare the 301 redirects (**301 redirects**).

4 **Carry over the text that worked.** If a page shows up for certain searches, do not cut it to two lines. Keep the title, the main text and the headings (**writing a page title and description that get clicked**).

5 **Carry over the images with their alt text, and the structured data,** if you had them.

On launch day

Check	Why
Switch off the "do not index" option.	The commonest mistake: the new site goes out with the building-phase block, and Google stops showing it.
The `robots.txt` blocks nothing that should be open.	See **robots.txt and sitemap.xml**.
The 301 redirects are live.	Test a dozen old addresses, including those that bring most visits.
There is a new sitemap, submitted in Search Console.	It gives Google the new list of addresses.
The titles and descriptions came across.	Pages without a title make them all look the same.
The canonical address and https are right.	See **the canonical tag**.

Over the following weeks, follow Search Console: crawl errors and pages that stopped showing reveal what was left behind (**crawl errors, one by one**). Expect some swings while Google visits everything again.

Do not point every old address at the home page.
Someone looking for a specific page does not find it, and Google treats the old page as gone. Each old page points at its equivalent.

If you change domain too,
there are extra steps (the change-of-address tool, keeping the old domain): **moving WordPress to a new domain**.

Pick a quiet hour to publish
and keep the old site for a week: if something goes wrong, you can go back.

NEED A HAND?

About to redo the site and want to review the address plan with us? Write to us.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- 301 redirects when you change a page or a domain →
- Why your site does not show on Google: a checklist →
- robots.txt and sitemap.xml: what they do and how to check them →
- Crawl errors in Search Console: 404, soft 404 and server errors, one by one →

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