



## *10 Things You Must Know Before Redesigning Your Website*

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## *ABOUT 1ST ON THE LIST*

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Thanks for downloading our eBook:

### **10 Things You Must Know Before Redesigning Your Website**

We decided to write this eBook to address several of the key insights we have provided to our clients in hopes that others will realize the importance of integrating SEO from the very beginning stages of website design projects.

Our dedication to helping clients make informed decisions about their online presence and website is our highest priority and has helped us achieve outstanding results for our clients over the last 15 years.

Whether we are providing Website Redesign and SEO Consulting or actively involved in your campaign we aim to provide:

- ✓ **Forward Thinking:** We stay ahead of the trends, using best practices and preparing for the future.
- ✓ **Collaborative Teamwork:** We work together to develop, shape and achieve your online goals.

*Request a Consultation*

*SEO Video Overview*



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## INTRODUCTION

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### So you've decided to redesign your website ...

Making the decision to redesign your website (no matter how small or big the redesign) can have a **SIGNIFICANT** effect on the life of your business and on the future of your success.

There are many underlying reasons to redesign your website:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Better represent your brand</li><li>• Improve user experience</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Update website appearance</li><li>• Generate more leads and sales</li></ul> |
|---|---|

When relying on your new website redesign to do any of these things you cannot afford to underestimate the impact (both good and bad) that a redesign may have on your rankings.

Whether you are planning to redesign a site that has already been optimized or you intend to optimize the new site redesign after the fact, take heed from some important lessons that a number of our clients have learned the hard way.

#### *First*, you need to tell the search engines you've moved.

You wouldn't move your home without putting in a "change of address". If you don't properly notify the Search Engines that your site is moving (being redesigned) it is like saying you are shutting down your business completely.

#### *Second*, protect any work that is supporting your visibility in search engine results pages.

If you change any of the internal linking, URL names, page content, Meta Data, page headings or any other "SEO" related work that has been supporting your site's credibility, you will lose your rankings and traffic.

#### *Finally*, transfer your old page credit over to your new redesigned pages.

Current rankings are based on the historical authority that supports your website TODAY so you need to be sure that the search engines transfers any and all credit from your old web pages over to your newly redesigned pages.

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“... you cannot afford to underestimate the impact that a redesign may have on your rankings.”

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## #1 – What affect does site redesign have on Search Rankings?

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Search Engines use 200 – 300 different algorithm criteria to determine where (and for what keywords) your website should rank. When you redesign your website most of these factors are changed, **for better or for worse.**

It's up to you whether or not your site redesign will improve the factors used to evaluate your website.

### How are rankings maintained in the Search Engines?

Search Engines use spider-bots (or **spiders**) to regularly visit and read what your website has to say. The spiders note any changes your website has made and adjusts its indexes (records) based on what it can and cannot see. The updated index is then used to generate a list of relevant websites any time a user does a search in Google.

Search Engines are **frequently** revisiting your website to look for changes and updates. Google says:

“Our spiders regularly crawl the web to rebuild our index. Crawls are based on many factors such as PageRank, Links to a page, and crawling constraints such as the number of parameters in a URL. Any number of factors can affect the crawl frequency of individual sites. Our crawl process is algorithmic ...”

### When will my new website redesign influence rankings?

**Almost immediately**, depending on how soon after the site launch the Search Engines visit your redesigned site and make note of the changes.

From what we have experienced with our clients, this usually happens **within a couple days.**

This means that if your new website launches with some glitches not worked out or your SEO components not properly dealt with, when the Search Engines come to visit the site may appear to have taken a step back in terms of Search Engine friendliness.

**If this is the case you risk losing or seriously damaging the rankings that you do have.**

Improper site redesigns result in significant losses of traffic and leads resulting in frustrated sales departments panicking over lost sales.

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“It's up to you whether or not your site redesign will improve the factors used to evaluate your website.”

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## *#2 – When do you tell your SEO Company that you are redesigning your website?*

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Let your SEO Company know as soon as possible.

### **DID YOU KNOW?**

#### **Plans for a site redesign will affect your current SEO strategy.**

You need to let your SEO know about your timeframe for redesigning your site, whether the process will begin 2, 6 or 12 months down the road. It will influence the decisions they make in your SEO campaign and what work they need to focus on doing for your website now.

Rather than trying to find ways to fix the “SEO unfriendly” areas in your website that will be corrected by a new website design, your SEO will focus on doing things that will be transferred to your new website and boost its performance.

### **6 Ways Your SEO Can Help Throughout the Process**

1. **CONSULT** with your design team throughout the entire redesign process.
2. **CORRECT** any site and server setup issues.
3. **ADDRESS** possible issues with CMS or shopping cart systems.
4. **ENSURE** all redesign work conforms to Search Engine guidelines, as it is completed.
5. **ASSIST** with navigation, internal linking structure and page layout to keep everything “SEO friendly”.
6. **CHECK** that all page credit from the old site is properly transferred to the new redesigned pages.

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**TIP #1:** Let your SEO company know as soon as possible.

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## #3 –Can't a new site go live first and then get SEO later?

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We can't stress this enough:

### **Have your SEO Expert review your test site – before you go live!**

Your SEO person will walk through every aspect of your site and point out everything that could and should be addressed before you go live.

### **2 Biggest Mistakes Made While Rushing to Launch a New Site:**

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#### **Pushing out the new site redesign before it's ready (even if there is a big deadline).**

Meeting a deadline is not nearly as critical as ensuring the website is completely ready to go. It's like getting on stage to perform without rehearsing or giving a set of directions without reading over.

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#### **Losing anything that could have been saved (once it's lost, it's gone for good)**

Take the time to back up the most up to date version of your old website. If something goes wrong during launching the new site you have a safe backup plan. If you just save your new site over your old site you do not have a safety net to fall back on.

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**TIP #2:** Meeting a deadline is not nearly as critical as ensuring the website is completely ready to go.

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## #4 – At what stage should your SEO company be working with your web designer before the new site launches?

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There are a couple key stages during your redesign process that you should involve your SEO:

### CRITICAL POINT 1: Initial Design Concept and Platform Selection

Based on experience with all types of website platforms your SEO consultant will offer invaluable insider information about the best possible platform options on which to build your website. Some platforms are much more “SEO Friendly” and will be much more cost-effective in the long run because the SEO features are built right in. Other platforms are not Search Friendly and may take great effort and resources to maintain.

There are at least three topics to discuss with your SEO:

#### ADAPTABILITY

- Does the platform maintain an attractive website?
- Does the platform have plenty of Search Engine Friendly features?

#### MOBILE FRIENDLINESS

- Can the platform detect when people are using a mobile device? (Mobile devices are on pace to soon out number computers and laptops)
- Does the website display properly (“Mobile Responsive”) for mobile visitors?

#### HOSTING

- Is the host reliable and have little down time?
- Which hosting option is right for you? Do you need a Canadian or a US based host?
- What host will best facilitate the Search Engines to read and rank your website?
- Is your host Apache or IIS? You may regret your decision if you haven't done your research.

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**TIP #3:** Some platforms are not Search Friendly and take great effort and resources to optimize and maintain.

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## CRITICAL POINT 2: 4-6 Weeks Prior to Launch

As you near the final stages prior to launch your SEO can go through and do what we call a Site QA or “**Quality Assurance**” test to make sure that as many of the 200 – 300 SEO factors mentioned in the previous chapter are properly addressed.

Your SEO will have an extensive “**Pre-Launch Checklist**” with a methodical approach to ensuring everything is properly set up.

### PRE-LAUNCH SEO CHECKLIST

- ✓ Proper URL Structure
- ✓ Canonical Setup
- ✓ Proper navigation structure
- ✓ Proper internal linking structure
- ✓ Heading <h1, h2, h3> tags in place
- ✓ Unique title, meta data and headers in place
- ✓ 404 page setup and proper HTTP/ 1.1 404 status displaying
- ✓ Static and XML sitemap setup
- ✓ Robots.txt setup
- ✓ Proper call to action for each page
- ✓ Sufficient and unique page content (avoid duplicate content)
- ✓ Broken links and Title Tags in place for hyperlinks
- ✓ HTML Compliant
- ✓ Optimized images and alt tags, check for missing images
- ✓ Slow page load times



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**TIP #4:** Make sure that as many of the 200-300 SEO factors are properly addressed prior to launch.

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## #5 – What happens if you don't properly transfer your SEO work to your new site?

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Recently one of our long term clients redesigned and launched their new website without giving us the slightest heads up that this was occurring. We had worked for over 6 years to achieve stable and highly visible ranking results which contributed to a steady stream of leads for their Sale's department.

Within the first week of their new website going live we receive panicked emails from the company saying their **traffic had dropped by over 75%!**

They were no longer ranked for their most important and high converting keyword phrases.

The sales department was complaining because their phone stopped ringing and the company's key leaders wanted an explanation as to what was happening from their Marketing team.



### This is the Norm Not the Exception

Unfortunately this story is not unique.

During our 15 years in the SEO business we have witnessed this same situation countless times, where clients failed to inform us that their website had been redesigned and we have to jump in to help with damage control after the new site launch. Unless the client warns us ahead of time, we typically find out that the site has changed while working the site, in reviewing site performance or when our client calls us to say their rankings, traffic, leads and sales have significantly dropped.

What clients fail to understand is that any SEO work that has been done on their website **supports their rankings.**

When you change URLs, rewrite content, remove content, don't link properly, switch your server, set up improper header responses, inevitably your rankings will change for the worse. These are all the components supporting your rankings!

It is like an orthodontist giving you braces and then you ripping all the brackets off when you get home. Of course your teeth won't stay straight without the braces.

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“Traffic dropped by over 75% ... their phone stopped ringing and the company's key leaders wanted an explanation of what was happening.”

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## *#6 – How do you minimize the side effects of a new website redesign in your search rankings?*

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### **Prepare!**

Engage your SEO team first to work through all the redesign aspects that have been planned and what effect (good or bad) each area will have on your site performance so you can address everything that needs to be addressed prior to launch.

### **Listen!**

Your SEO team has the experience, knowledge and skills to ensure your new site redesign is an immediate success on all fronts. Take the advice of your SEO team seriously and trust that they have your best interests in mind.

### **Be Patient!**

Don't rush your new site redesign launch. This is perhaps the biggest failing of most website owners. If you set a launch date and your site redesign is not ready, then be flexible and wait until it is ready. It is much, much easier to avoid damage than it is to pursue damage control after the damage is done.

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**TIP #5:** Don't rush the new site redesign launch. This is perhaps the biggest failing of most website owners. Be flexible and wait until it is ready.

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## #7 – How long does it take to recover from launching a new website *WITHOUT* properly preparing for SEO?

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This can be a tricky question because there are several stages to recovery:

### 1. Assess the SEO Damage = 1 to 2 Weeks

Depending on the size or your website and complexity of the SEO issues at hand it can take anywhere between 1 and 2 weeks to investigate and compile a list of what needs to be fixed or optimized.

### 2. Implement the Changes = 1 to 2 + Weeks

Depending on how much repair work there is to do and the availability of your SEO it can take anywhere from 1-2 weeks (and in some cases months) to get your new website to where it should have been when you launched it.

### 3. Search Engine Acknowledgement = 1 to 2+ Weeks

Depending on how often the Search Engines visit your website it can take a couple of weeks or more for them to revisit your website and start noticing the repairs you have done.

### 4. Wait for Search Engines to Index These Changes = 1 to 2+ Weeks

Depending on how often the Search Engines visit your website it can take another couple weeks for them to index and give you credit for the SEO repairs you have just done.

### 5. Wait for Search Engines to Start Ranking You Again = 1 to 2+ Weeks

Depending on how well you were ranked prior to any changes and how much your rankings dropped as a result of redesign issues it can take anywhere from a couple weeks to a couple months for your rankings to rebound. For some websites it's like starting over, from scratch again.

In total it can take anywhere from **4-6 weeks** to **4-6 months (or longer)** to fully recover from a site redesign launch that failed to include SEO into the new redesign.

For many businesses that rely on their website for income from a steady stream of leads or new orders this can be **DEADLY**.

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“It can take anywhere from 4 weeks to 6+ months to fully recover from a site redesign that failed to include SEO.”

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## #8 – How do you rename URLs without losing credibility?

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Most redesign projects include reorganizing or simplifying the navigation plus renaming URLs.

When you change the URL or the address of any page on your site the Search Engines will lose any old information they have about the page. If you don't tell the Search Engines where the pages are moving to they will simply assume the old page is gone.

This is similar to moving your business to a new location in town and not telling your customers and suppliers where you are moving.

### **TIP: Use 301 Redirects to point to your new pages**

The proper thing to do is set up 301 Redirects from old pages to your new pages so that the information and credit you have established is transferred properly and not lost.

As part of your rebuild, your SEO consultant needs to work with your web designer to ensure listings and site credit is **preserved** and **protected**.

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**TIP #6:** Your SEO Consultant and web designer need to work together to ensure listings and site credit are preserved and protected.

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## #9 – Can't my web designer handle setting up and configure my server settings?

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There are several website attributes that heavily influence your Search Engine rankings but are not design related. This means that depending on the experience and SEO awareness of your web designer, these may or may not be included in your website design. More often than not, the web designer simply may not be aware that these SEO aspects need to be addressed during design phases.

In fact, we frequently have new clients that come to us after their website has just been designed and we find several issues that still need to be addressed even though the website is brand new!



### 7 Common Setup & Configuration Mistakes

- 1 Proper URL Naming**  
Difficult to read, dynamic, duplicate content issues.
- 2 Handling 404 Errors**  
Redirects visitor to a new URL rather than custom 404 error page.
- 3 Domain Unification /Inconsistent URL Linking**  
Links within navigation, text and graphics should point to variations of a URL.
- 4 Server Header Responses**  
Slight differences in response codes that may not be visible to visitors but send very different signals to the Search Engines.
- 5 Dedicated IP Addresses and Server Location**  
Setup incorrectly and not related to your target market which prevents proper indexing and rankings in your area.
- 6 Reverse DNS Setup**  
Problems with SPAM, SMTP server, network backup and so on
- 7 Website Load Time**  
Slow loading pages take too long for Search Engines to crawl and provide a poor user experience.

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## #10 – What about Search Engine Friendly source code?

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The source code is the part of your website that Search Engines actually read and understand.

If your source code is messy, cluttered or not composed using proper protocol the Search Engines can have trouble reading or give up reading it. It is like handing in a scribbled assignment that your teacher can't read – they likely won't give you a grade at all.

It is an SEO best practice to keep your source code as clean and tidy as possible. If your web designer is unfamiliar with this then SEO consulting throughout the design process is recommended.

### Avoid Common Design Mistakes:

1. Failing to move styles to external **.css files** and link to within the <head> section.
2. Failing to move JavaScript to external **.js files** and link to within the <head> section.
3. **Un-optimized images** causing long page load times.
4. Using duplicate **Title, Meta Data and Heading Tags**
5. Neglecting to install **Google Analytics** onto all pages of the new website, preserving historical data in the account.
6. Pasting text directly from Word documents without first stripping out **MS fonts**.

### Your SEO Can Enhance Source Code Even Further

Advanced source code can be placed on your site by an SEO consultant. This includes:

1. **Rich Snippet Integration** (Images and videos to appear in Search results)
2. **Open Graph Protocol** (Facebook search friendliness)
3. **Microdata Markup** (Additional product, event, etc. details to be included in Search results)
4. **Google Authorship** (Blog author's photos to appear in Search results)

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**TIP #7:** Keep your source code as clean as possible. An SEO consultant can help your web designer follow best practices.

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## CONCLUSION

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When you properly integrate SEO into your new site redesign, your website can potentially launch without any significant drops in rankings; and in time, may even perform better.

If the new site redesign really is more Search Friendly than your old site, and provides a much better user experience, it will naturally climb up in the rankings.

### What opportunities are there for a new website redesign to improve your visibility and search friendliness?

#### >>>> Synergy

By combining the knowledge of your web developer and your SEO consultants there can be significant synergy that works to your benefit! Your designer understands how the website will affect visitors while the SEO understands how the website will affect the Search Engines.

The end result is a website that gets found by the Search Engines and appreciated by its visitors.

#### >>>> Save Time and Money

You save **MONEY** by incorporating Search Friendly aspects right into your website redesign and avoid having to hire someone later to go back and address issues that could have (and should have) been addressed during the site redesign.

You also save **TIME** by having a completely Search Friendly website from day 1 of launching.

#### >>>> Get a Head Start

By being visible in the Search Engines and providing an exceptional user experience you can start recovering your costs as soon as your site redesign launches.

You also can look at how to continue to build and improve on the solid foundation you have rather than spending time and resources to fix what could have been dealt with from the onset!





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