10 SEO MISTAKES TO AVOID

search 🔍

DURING YOUR NEXT

WEBSITE REDESIGN

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Redesigning your website isn't just an exercise in aesthetics. Sure, the purely visual elements of your newly designed website will likely get the most attention, but remember: a great website redesign also requires that you consider (and improve) what's under the hood.

A flashy exterior doesn't help much if the actual machine fails to function. If people can't find your website via search, and if they can't intuitively navigate through your site's pages and easily understand what information those pages contain, it doesn't really matter how beautiful it looks.

When it comes to your website redesign, form and function need to be a package deal. So while you should absolutely add those new beautiful calls-to-action (CTA) buttons, and add that big beautiful hero image on your homepage, don't forget about what's happening behind the scenes.

In this guide, we'll cover one particular portion of the less glamorous side of website redesigns: **search engine optimization (SEO)**. While the way we think about SEO is always evolving — with the focus now shifting toward optimizing content for the searchers themselves, as opposed to for the search engines — it's still something you can't afford to overlook. So without further ado, here are 10 SEO mistakes to avoid during your next website redesign.

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Not Thinking About SEO From The Start

When contemplating a website redesign, it's easy to focus only on those features that are appealing to the eye. But to ensure your new site will truly resonate with your target audience (and to save yourself from some major headaches down the road) you need SEO to be ingrained in your redesign strategy from the very beginning.

Think of it this way: you could spend all the money in the world on building a new, beautiful hotel with all the bells and whistles. But if no one knows how to find your hotel, you'll never do any business.

Don't build a hotel that no one can find! When planning out your redesign strategy, make sure to take discoverability and accessibility into account. (Not sure what that looks like from a practical, hands-on standpoint? Just keep reading!)

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Before you bust out the wrecking ball and start demolishing your soon-to-be-forgotten site, make sure you take the time to examine it to determine what's working and what isn't. Here are some key metrics you may want to consider when auditing your site:

- Number of visits/visitors/unique visitors (monthly average)
- Top performing keywords (in terms of rank, traffic, and lead generation)
- Number of inbound linking domains
- Total number of total pages indexed
- Total number of pages that receive traffic

Wish you had a master document where you could record all of these important metrics and track the progress of your website redesign? Contact Us.

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Failing To Identify (And Include) Commonly Searched Keywords

It's a new era for SEO, an era where you can no longer keyword-stuff your way to search ranking success. Nowadays, if Google finds out that you are blatantly overusing (or hiding) keywords on your site, your credibility (and rankings) could take a serious hit. However, this doesn't mean that keywords are totally irrelevant. In fact, if you're doing what Google wants you to do (creating high-quality content), keywords will work there way naturally into your website's pages. To quote from Google directly,

"In creating a helpful, information-rich site, write pages that clearly and accurately describe your topic. Think about the words users would type to find your pages and include those words on your site."

How to Correct: If you're concerned you might have this issue with your website it needs a full scrub. **Your website needs to read well for humans first, search engines second.** Read through every piece of content, asking yourself if this reads well for humans. Remove any keywords that don't fit naturally into the content. If any word doesn't contribute to the education of the visitor it likely doesn't fit.

Rule of Thumb: Each webpage should have a single focus keyword and be included 1-3 times naturally in the page content. Make sure it's also included in your page title, meta description, and H1 text assuming it fits within the parameters. If it doesn't fit well, work towards a more general keyword.

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Not Setting Up 301 Redirects

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect from one URL to another. Whether you're switching domain names, restructuring your URLs (more on that in the next section), or consolidating content as part of your website redesign, setting up 301 redirects is crucial to ensuring any "SEO juice" from your old URLs gets transferred to your new URLs.

Here's an example. Let's say your current site has a "Team" page (at yoursite.com/team), as well as a "Culture" page (at yoursite.com/culture). However, as part of your website redesign, you want to consolidate the content from those two pages into a single "About Us" page (at yoursite.com/about). To transfer the SEO authority of those pages to your new page, you'll want to set up 301 redirects so that yoursite.com/team and yoursite.com/culture both send folks to the new URL, yoursite.com/about.

Failure to set up 301 redirects for pages you move or delete can result in a drop in rankings as well as an influx in 404 (a.k.a. "Page Not Found") error messages for your site's visitors.

Launching a new website without putting 301 redirects in place you lose all of your past SEO history, your rankings (and traffic!) will plummet.

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Failing To Consider Your URL Structure

If your site is littered with lengthy, indecipherable URLs that don't align well with the actual content of your site pages, restructuring your URLs should definitely be a priority during your next website redesign. Wondering where SEO comes into play here? While just like the searchers themselves, search engines prefer URLs that make it easy to understand what your page content is all about.

A general rule to follow when creating your new URLs: **use dashes (-) between words instead of underscores (_)**. Google treats dashes as separators, which means it can return results when you search for a single word that appears in a URL and when you search for a group of words that appears in a URL. In contrast, Google treats underscores as connectors, which means it will only return results when you search for a group of connected words that appears in a URL. The bottom line: using dashes creates more opportunities for your pages to be discovered.

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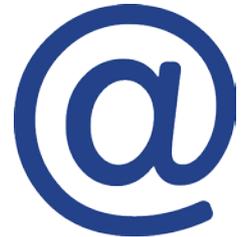
Leaving Shady Backlinks In Place

We all know that getting backlinks (a.k.a. inbound links) from trusted websites is a great way to give your website's search rankings a boost. However, there's also a dark side to backlinks.

If Google suspects that there are spammy, low-quality sites linking to your site, your rankings could suffer. This is known as "negative SEO". (In some cases, spammers will purposely direct lots of low-quality links to your site in order to cause negative SEO.)

A website redesign presents the perfect opportunity for you to analyze your backlinks and remove the shady ones. If you use Google Webmaster Tools, you'll see a "manual penalty" appear if Google detects one of these low-quality links. You'll then have the option to make such links "no follows" so Google stops paying attention to them.

Stop thinking about link-building. Start thinking about link-earning.

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Not Implementing Responsive Design

As Google's preferred configuration for mobile-optimized websites, responsive design is your best option for delivering a great search and browsing experience to mobile users.

With responsive design, all of your website's URLs are the same across all devices, and they all serve up the same HTML code. This isn't the case with other mobile configurations, like setting up a separate, mobile-only site (which requires a different set of URLs) or implementing dynamic serving (which uses the same URLs but serves up different HTML).

With responsive design, the only thing that changes across devices is the styling (which is controlled by CSS). This configuration makes it easier for Google to crawl your pages and retrieve your content.

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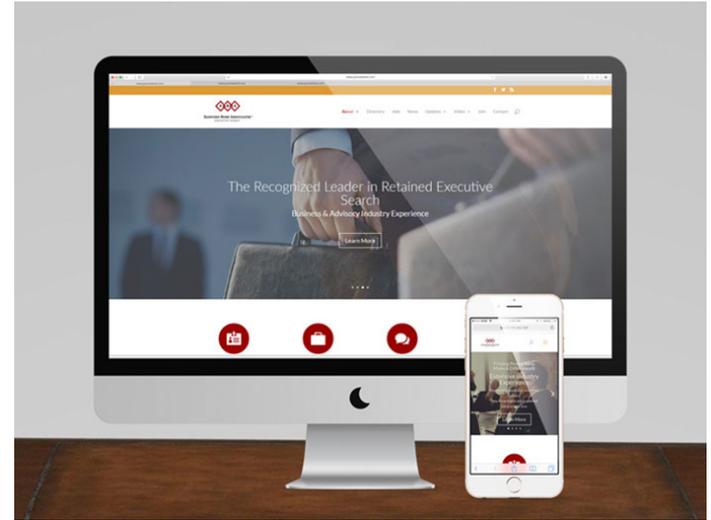
Forgetting To Unblock Search Engines From Crawling Your Site

So there you are, ready to push the big green "LAUNCH" button on your newly designed website. The big moment comes and goes, and after hours of combing through the site, admiring its beauty, you stumble across something peculiar: your new, beautiful website isn't showing up in Google's search results!

Chances are that when your site was under construction, you had blocked the search engines from peaking under the hood until your site was 100% complete. When launching your website after a redesign, it's important to double check that the search engines know where to find you.

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Forgetting To Add Analytics Tracking To Your Site

How are you going to benchmark your redesigned website against your old website if you aren't using analytics software? Answer: you aren't!

As soon as your new website is released into the wild, wild web, you should be collecting data on its performance. Did your content audit and keyword research pay off? Is that new URL structure making it easier for visitors to navigate through your pages? You'll never know if you aren't monitoring key metrics with analytics software.
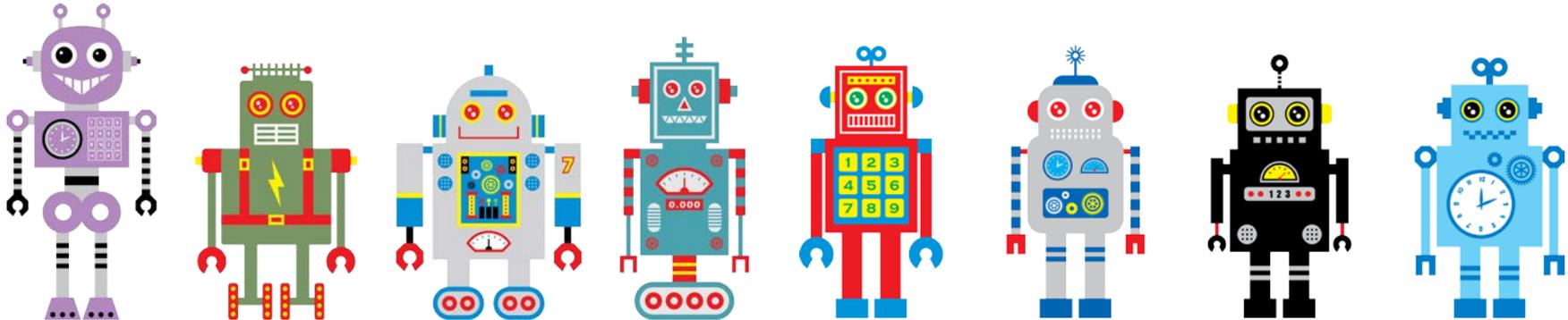
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Failing To Think Like A Human

Google has gained the ability to recognize full-sentence quieries (in contrast to simply picking out the individual words that make up a query). As a result, search has become much more conversational.

Google doesn't want to deliver you "results" anymore, they want to deliver answers. And the best answers don't come from content farms, they come from websites that are crafted with their visitors -- human beings -- in mind.

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About Next Level Marketing Communications

Next Level Marketing Communications is digital marketing communications firm that specializes in business-to-business marketing strategies and business growth solutions.

NLMarCom has always been a boutique digital marketing solutions firm and we're in it for the long haul. Our goals are to add value, constantly drive for excellence, and deliver positive and measurable return on our clients' investment.

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