

# 10 SEO MISTAKES TO AVOID



*DURING YOUR NEXT*

# WEBSITE REDESIGN

REVITAL  
AGENCY

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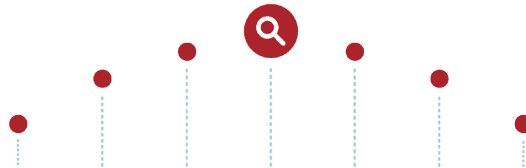
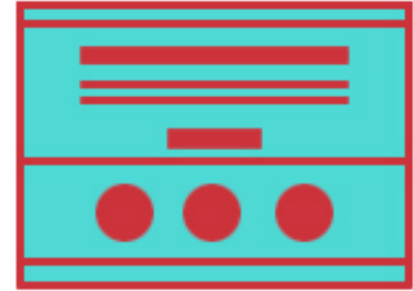
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# INTRODUCTION

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.

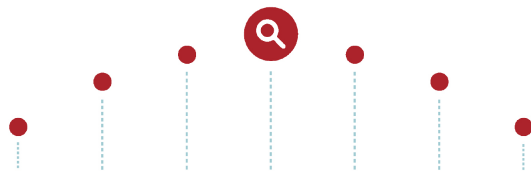
A flashy exterior doesn't help much if the actual machine fails to function. If people can't find your website via search, and if they can't intuitively navigate through your site's pages and easily understand what information those pages contain, it doesn't really matter how beautiful it looks.

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 CTA buttons, and add that beautiful hero image on your homepage, don't forget about what's happening behind the scenes.



# INTRODUCTION

In this guide, we'll cover one particular portion of the less glamorous side of website redesigns: search engine optimization. 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.



## Not thinking about SEO from the start

The glitz, the glam, the glorious design elements that make your website look like a million bucks . 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!)

## Not thinking about SEO from the start

(continued)

The biggest SEO mistake you can make during a website redesign is to not think about SEO until it's too late. If you don't have SEO in mind from the initial strategy session, you're going to lose what you took so much time and effort to build.

Today's SEO requires more than just sprinkling in keywords. The search engines' algorithms have become increasingly sophisticated and base a lot of their rankings on quality content. But not quality content from *your* perspective. Quality content as deemed by your audience. That's why it's super important to consider SEO in the beginning. You can't just hang some content and expect to be found.

Everything from the structure of your website to the meta description of your website pages is important and should be taken into consideration.

# Not thinking about SEO from the start

(continued)

The Waiting until the last minute to have the “SEO guru” look at your website is like waiting until after a few well-meaning construction people lay your foundation and frame your hotel, to get an architect involved. Any changes that person needs to make at that point will be costly and affect your roll-out schedule.

Meeting with an SEO expert in the beginning also gives you time to build out any suggestions he/she might have for you in your website redesign. SEO best practices change frequently. Your SEO person should be an integral part of the process, collaborating and giving input along the way. The best time to build that relationship is in the beginning when the expertise can be heard and incorporated without cost and time delays.



## Not doing an audit of your existing site

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
- Purpose of each page (if you don't know the purpose of the page, neither will your audience. Over time, some pages lose their effectiveness. This audit ensures everything is fresh and relevant.)

After you have everything accounted for, build out a navigation map of how old and new pages will line up. Are there pages you're axing? Are you missing key pages? A map will keep everything organized.

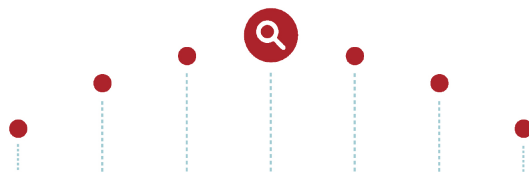


## Not doing an audit of your existing site

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Note: in your redesign you'll be working with a lot of departments with varying interests. A navigation map will ensure nothing of importance (to visitors or your company) meets an unexpected demise and everyone's on the same page. Literally.

Many companies are so eager to roll-out a fresh, clean, minimalistic design that they cut away what they think is no longer important. But what's important to you and your company is not always the same as what's important to your audience. If you don't take the time to look at the data and note what pages are top-ranking content, you risk alienating your audience. And who wants the same level of pandemonium as "new Coke" got when it hit the market?



## 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 their 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.”

Back in the Wild West of the Interwebs, you could write the same content over and over with a list of keywords and substitute them accordingly. You could list keywords in a color font the same as your website background, so they were there but no one knew, and you could use footers with every word you wanted to rank for.

With Penguin's launch in 2012, Google cracked down on those key-word stuffing outlaws. But they didn't go to keyword jail. Much worse. They were banished to the hinterlands of search results. And the days of writing for bots came to a close.

## Failing to identify (and include) commonly searched keywords

(continued)

### How to identify and include pertinent keywords

- Keep in mind your buyer persona/ideal customer and words they use
- Remember most searches are questions
- Use 1 keyword per page and insert it 1-3 times depending on length of text. There are no prizes, and plenty of penalties, for sounding like a parrot with a keyword problem.
- Use keywords and phrases in your H1 and/or H2
- Don't use the same keyword over and over on multiple pages, that's as boring as spending time with someone who only wants to talk about one thing.

Also, it's important to perform a keyword analysis on existing content and content you plan on incorporating in the new site design. Keyword analysis can help you find holes in your content needs while there's still enough time to fill them.

## 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.

Not setting up a 301 redirect is like telling Google you're hosting an awesome party "somewhere" but not telling it where. When all of your previous visitors "ask" where the party is, Google can only shrug and...guess what? No one's at your party!

## Staying Organized

In a website redesign you may have hundreds of pages. Keeping them all straight and ensuring the developers and designers have all the 301s set up properly is critical to your success. Every old page that's being replaced without a redirect means (potential) traffic lost and SEO work negated.

You can compile a very easy navigational map in Excel or another spreadsheet program. Create a tab for each of your menu sections, and list all menu sub items. Track the original page URL, the page that's replacing it, keywords, traffic and link data, and anything else of value.

Again, you'll have a lot of cooks in this redesign kitchen so ensuring they all have a solid understanding of what needs to be done and what's been completed will make it that much easier to complete your website redesign on time.

## 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.

Another thing to keep in mind, URLs aren't just for search engines. They affect the user experience as well. Making them descriptive and friendly, and relatively to the point, can help users understand where they are, what they'll find, and where they're being directed. To rewrite all of your URLs can be an exhausting experience but a site redesign allows you to get some spring cleaning done much more easily.

## 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.

Pre-Penguin sites might be at a disadvantage if you were one of those companies that looked to get backlinks from any joker offering. Don't feel bad, it was common practice. Today, these shady links can cost you. Link farms and other sites of ill-repute should be removed immediately. Luckily, [there's a lot of software](#) out there that can help you identify them quickly and easily, in order for you to minimize their negative impact on your search results.

## Leaving shady backlinks in place

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Google realized there was a lot of shady link building going on prior to 2012. It was too easy for people to pay sites to add a link for them. With Penguin, Google introduced a change in focus from link building to link earning. Google isn't anti-link. It's anti-link without value. It rewards sites for quality content. One of the ways it recognizes quality is through the authority others give it. Links from reputable sites build trust in Google's eyes. Google believes you are very much the company that you keep (or at least links to you).





## 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. To quote Google, *"This improvement in crawling efficiency can indirectly help Google index more of the site's contents and keep it appropriately fresh."*



## 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.

It’s an easy thing to overlook, and luckily, an easy thing to fix. Check your robots.txt file once your site is live. Google Webmaster Tools can tell you if your site’s being indexed.

## 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. (Note for HubSpot customers: **analytics software is built-in to our platform.**)

Google seems to know everything but it's not a mind reader -- at least, not yet. Google Analytics code must be placed onto your new site and you should measure everything from the line in the sand of your new launch date. Marketing is not an exact science it requires testing and measurements. If you leave off the critical measurements aspect of the equation, you're just playing the ponies without odds.

## Failing to think like a human

With the Hummingbird update of 2013, Google gained the ability to recognize full-sentence queries (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.

## How to be more human

Google wants quality content. You want to attract an audience. You can both win if you write like you. Forget what you know about best practices in business writing from the 80s. That means:

- Write in a tone using language your audience identifies with (use of slang, humor,, and emoticons should depend on your ideal customer/ buyer persona).
- Ditch the marketing speak.
- Be helpful.
- Talk about what your audience needs, not what *you* think they need.
- Pay attention to the questions your audience asks. Create content that answers those questions.
- Everyone needs something. Are you solving those needs or adding to them?

## Failing to think like a human

(continued)

Today, you have two audiences -- one is human, one lives in Silicon Valley. Luckily, the Silicon Valley overlords of search, are looking to your human audience for their input. Search engine optimization is nothing more than peer review these days. If people enjoy navigating your site, get what they need from it, and want to share your content with their tribe, Google rewards you with higher search rankings.

If not, it's time to take a look at this list again.



# LET'S TALK

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