10 SEO MISTAKES TO AVOID

DURING YOUR NEXT

WEBSITE REDESIGN

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 the website structure and content.

When it comes to your website redesign, form and function need to go hand-in-hand. So while you should absolutely add the beautiful imagery and design elements, don't forget about what's happening behind the scenes.

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WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #1

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, you need to have SEO incorporated in your redesign strategy from the 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.

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #2

Not doing an audit of your existing site

Before you start dismantling your old website, 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

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #3

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. 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 and 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."

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #4

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, or consolidating content as part of your website redesign, setting up 301 redirects is crucial to ensuring any SEO functionality 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.

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #5

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? 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.

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #6

Leaving shady backlinks in place

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.

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #7

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."

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE #8

Forgetting to unblock search engines from crawling your site

So you're ready to launch your newly designed website. The big moment comes and goes, and after hours of combing through the site, 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 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.

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE

#9

Forgetting to add analytics tracking to your site

You can't benchmark your redesigned website against your old website if you aren't using analytics software.

As soon as your new website is launched, 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.

WEB DESIGN MISTAKE

#10

Failing to think like visitors to your site, people!

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, it wants to deliver answers. And the best answers don't come from content farms, they come from websites that are crafted with visitors – people – in mind.

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