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SMOOTH SITE MIGRATION

Andrew Armitage shares the key things to consider when migrating a website to a new platform

Website migration projects are full of promise. Switching to a new platform is a chance to address the drawbacks in your legacy site and breathe new life and enthusiasm into your digital strategy.

So what are some of the things to consider to ensure a successful migration?

WHY MIGRATE?

There may be several reasons for migrating to a new platform. Identifying specific goals will impact on the platform you choose and your approach to development, as well as providing a measure for the project's success. Simply switching your website to new technology isn't a fix for poor process; it won't suddenly enable you to write more blog posts, but it may make the process more efficient.

Choosing a new platform isn't easy. There will be opinions from other developers or colleagues, and the marketplace is littered with technical terms beyond the knowledge of most of those responsible for making the buying decision. However, most migration projects will have a core set of generic requirements: the future roadmap of the replacement platform, performance and security, affordable cost of ownership and ease of use.

KEEP THE GOOD STUFF

The users of a platform in a migration project will primarily be those publishing and managing content on the site. It's natural during any discovery process to want to explore things that aren't working with the platform. However it's equally

important to expose any positive feedback. The last thing you want to learn during the development phase in a migration is that one of the best features of the old site won't exist in the new one.

AUDIT EVERYTHING

It's easy to get excited about the opportunities a migration project provides but everything on the legacy site still needs to be audited; content, connections to third party tools, Analytics or Tag Manager setup, reporting, search engine visibility and performance. Only once these are fully understood will it be possible to determine the scope of the project and define the success criteria.

SEARCH ENGINE VISIBILITY

Potentially the most crucial aspect of a migration project maintaining search-engine visibility. While there is opportunity to improve SEO-friendliness in a migration, existing page titles and descriptions shouldn't be overlooked and any new markup should at least mirror existing heading structures. Setting up redirects with a 301 status (permanently moved) where pages have moved to a new URL is vital and common practice, but few migrations consider image searches, which can drive significant volumes of traffic. For other pages, setting a 410 (gone) status instead of a default 404 (not found) can improve the visitor experience, although there's no indication this impacts on the wider ranking of your site.

PREPARING TO GO LIVE

During the closing stages of the migration, performance tests should benchmark current page load speeds and search indexing so you can measure the technical success of the migration. Prior to the new site going live, pause any ad campaigns and update target URLs to avoid ads being suspended. Tools such as Google Search Console will help to monitor page indexing going forwards, but ideally URL redirects should be checked daily following the launch to give the best chance to staying one step ahead of Google's crawlers. ■