



KEYS TO MANAGING SEO FOR AN INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE TRANSITION

Site transitions can offer great opportunity for improved site performance, traffic, rankings, and conversions. While all site transitions share many best practices, transitioning a site with multi-country targeting offers its share of challenges and necessary know-how. This checklist will help you clear some of the biggest site transition hurdles.



GENERAL



INTERNATIONAL-SPECIFIC



USE "HREFLANG" TAGS TO VERSION CONTENT BY LOCATION & LANGUAGE

These meta tags specify the country and/or language that the particular page is targeting.

- ✓ Ensures that the correct geo-version of search engines serve your content (Google UK or Google DE, for example)
- ✓ Decrease the likelihood of duplicate content issues for international content
- ✓ The tags should always go in the page's <head> section



LOCALIZED CONTENT & KEYWORD RESEARCH

Every country – even those who speak English – has different spellings, meanings, and definitions of common words.

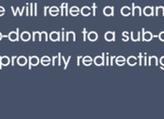
- ✓ Create a localized content strategy that leans on an understanding of local needs & customs and is targeted around keywords that they use
- ✓ Use location-specific currencies, measurement standards, spelling, and vocabulary/slang where possible.
- ✓ Create localized blog posts for targeted content marketing.



CREATING SEO-FRIENDLY URLs

During many site transitions, there is often an opportunity for re-writing URLs to be more SEO-friendly and read more relevant to the page's content. When creating a new URL structure, it is important to keep the following points in mind to have URLs that users and search engines will love:

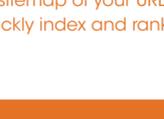
- ✓ Keep the URLs short and relevant, using page-specific keywords.
- ✓ If possible, do not include any dynamic parameters in your URLs (this can quickly create duplicate content issues that are no fun to deal with).
- ✓ When separating words in a URL, use hyphens (-) instead of underscores (_).
- ✓ In most circumstances, opt for sub-directories, instead of sub-domains; search engines tend to see sub-domains as different sites altogether, splitting link credibility amongst the numerous sub-domains.



REDIRECT STRATEGY

If your transitioned site will reflect a change in international URL structure – say, from a sub-domain to a sub-directory structure – ensure that you are properly redirecting the old URLs.

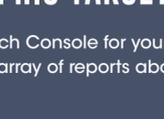
- ✓ This will help maintain your site's post-transition traffic and link equity, along with promoting stable indexation and a good user experience
- ✓ Old pages should be re-directed to the most relevant new URL
- ✓ Redirects should be done using a 301/Permanent redirect



LOCALIZED SITEMAPS

Having a complete XML sitemap of your URLs will help search engines more quickly index and rank your site.

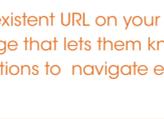
- ✓ XML sitemap files must be less than 50,000 URLs
- ✓ Only use canonical versions of URLs
- ✓ Bundle multiple XML sitemaps into a single Sitemap Index file
- ✓ Submit your XML sitemap(s) to Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools
- ✓ Reference your XML sitemap or index file in your robots.txt for quicker discovery
- ✓ If you are unable to use hreflang tags in your source code, you can also reference your international URLs in your XML sitemap



GEOGRAPHIC TARGETING TOOL

Creating a Google Search Console for your international site will give you access to a wide array of reports about your site's indexation.

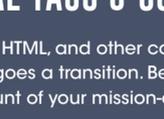
- ✓ It allows you to tell Google what country to target your site in its localized search engines
- ✓ Creating these localized signals will help your site have better geographically-targeted organic traffic



CREATE A 404 TRAPPING PAGE/ERROR PAGE

If a user navigates to a non-existent URL on your site, they should be taken to a user-friendly 404 trapping page that lets them know that the URL does not exist and offer them options to navigate elsewhere in the site.

- ✓ Additionally – and this is important – ensure that these pages deliver a 404 status code. This signals to search engines that this is an error page and does not need to be indexed.



ENSURE ALL VITAL TAGS & CODE ARE IN PLACE

Important analytics tags, HTML, and other code are often accidentally deleted when a site undergoes a transition. Before your site is transitioned, take a detailed account of your mission-critical code including:

- ✓ Analytics tagging
- ✓ Webmaster Tools tagging
- ✓ Social toolbars
- ✓ Pagination code
- ✓ Canonical code
- ✓ Noindex code
- ✓ Title, Meta Description, and Header tags
- ✓ Other important tagging/code



BASELINE REPORTING

Even the best site transitions will cause a temporary drop in organic traffic and rankings. This is an unfortunate side effect of search engines having to re-index your entire site.

- ✓ Prior to the transition, create baseline reports for all of your key site metrics to help you better understand the short and long-term impact of the transition
- ✓ Baseline reporting should be for at least one year prior to the site transition
- ✓ The reporting should be done at least monthly for 3-6 months after the site transition
- ✓ Track important metrics such as organic traffic, rankings, backlink count, conversions, revenue, and indexation

TO BE SURE YOU'VE THOROUGHLY MINIMIZED YOUR MIGRATION'S IMPACT ON SEO PERFORMANCE, REVIEW THE 8 STEPS TO INTERNATIONAL WEBSITE MIGRATION SUCCESS.



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