DRUPALpartners
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Strategies for a successful Drupal 8 SEO migration

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Why you should read this guide

Drupal 8 has better back-end experience, BigPipe technology that vastly improves the performance of sites, Twig theme system, and a host of other benefits. Organizations that upgrade to Drupal 8 needn't go through the hassle of upgrading to another version once Drupal 9 releases. But despite the advantages it offers, one major reason that hamstrings migration efforts is poor SEO performance during the transition phase.

This whitepaper will anatomize the pitfalls site owners face and strategies to ensure hard fought for website traffic and rankings don't fall through the cracks. The need for an extensive migration plan is mission-critical to avoid traffic fluctuations and consequent loss of revenue.

Our SEO strategists outline organic search optimization best practices, strategies to maintain URL equity during migration, tips on how to structure the migration workflow and key factors to consider while making the big leap.

Here's why SEO is important

Do you know that SEO should be your first priority while performing a website redesign/upgrade? Despite numerous content marketing opportunities and paid campaign options available most businesses focus on SEO. It remains the numero uno marketing priority for businesses across industries and verticals.

Recent surveys reveal that:

- 61% of businesses reveal growing organic traffic is their #1 priority
- PPC campaigns account for just 15% of clicks made by searchers
- 75% of internet users never scroll past the first page of search engines

Sources: Hubspot. Junto. GoodFirms.

Common SEO blank walls facing websites while migrating are:

- 404 errors due to URL inconsistencies

- Uncrawlable content

- Missing analytics codes such as Search console codes

- Improper 301 redirects

- Dynamic URLs

- Incomplete migration of existing content

- Lost backlink history

- Incompatible theme files

- Digital assets not being inventoried properly

A well mapped out SEO migration plan should consist of

Phase 1

Pre-launch evaluation

Phase 2

Launch day actions

Phase 3

Post launch testing

Phase 4

Site performance review

Pre-launch evaluation

5 key factors to consider during the pre-launch migration phase

1. Working out the project scope

2. Assignment of stakeholders

3. Accurate URL/content transition plan

4. Wireframes review

5. Tech specs

1 ## Working out the project scope

The first and primary goal of your migration should be to retain existing rankings and traffic. It is vital to start with clear, unambiguous objectives to meet project deadlines, address legacy issues, contain costs and reduce downtime. Factor in critical aspects that'll be affected during the transition phase and carry out a SWOT analysis to identify opportunities and threats.

Calculate the ROI of addressing major issues and allocate resources accordingly. Key decisions such as naming conventions for folders, overall navigational structure and redirect mapping plans will have to be communicated clearly with internal teams.

Analyze your current data to identify top performing landing and transaction pages. Extract these key pages and associated metadata. Thoroughly evaluate demographic, search intent and content consumption pattern to inform your strategy and give it a perspective. Share findings with technical and business development teams to avoid costly errors.

Perform a holistic competitive analysis to expand your target keywords and tap into new revenue opportunities.

2 Assigning key stakeholders

To stay on track and make incremental changes it is important that stakeholders are involved throughout the process. It will enable you to analyze areas of opportunity and risk at a more granular level. Have your content, UX design and technical SEO team to create a website migration roadmap. As site migration can be a time consuming it is important to keep internal teams in the loop as early as the pre-launch stage.
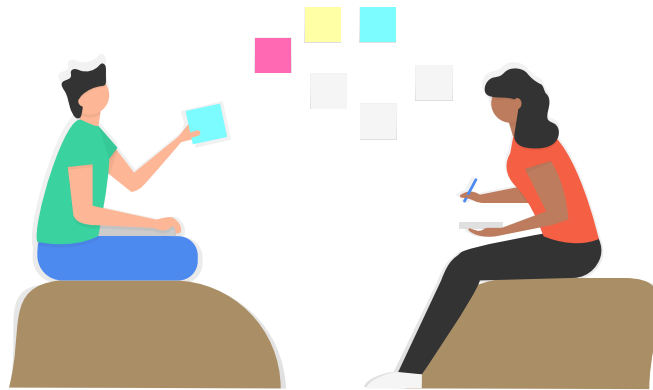
3 URL Equity

URLs are the axis points that drive and distribute traffic throughout your site. During the migration stage it is important to have a detailed URL transition plan. It is imperative that URL equity is not lost during the transition stage.

A quick checklist on URL equity

To assess the quality of existing link structures and to make course corrections it is vital to understand what comprises of link equity. Here's a quick-read checklist.

- **Link Equity**

    Link equity is the number of positive links that have built up overtime. The internal URL structure of a site has to be protected during the migration process. Internal links will have to be preserved to maintain organic search engine presence and to maintain URL equity.

- **Search engine equity**

For sites with domain authority and positive history with search engines, URLs gain trust capital and are worth their weight in gold. Missing URLs or changing URLs during migration means the search engines will have to crawl and index pages all over again. This will result in loss of ranking position.

- **Cost equity**

Most Drupal sites have extensive internal site structures. Time and costs incurred on link development campaigns and promotions to drive traffic to deep site links, risk being lost. To prevent this, top performing pages will have to be extracted and strong backup plans need to be implemented.

4 Wireframes Review

Developing and reviewing wireframes will help you fix technical, navigational, and UX problems. The migration of content rich sites span a few months. It is the best time to review the existing site and seal cracks.

- **Develop wireframes based on the user's journey. Check whether existing site is user friendly and identify areas for improvement.**

- **Determine whether underperforming/irrelevant pages need to be eliminated or merged.**

- **Fix up messy architecture.**

5 Technical Review

An extensive technical review can to a large extent minimize negative impact on rankings, user engagement and conversions.

Closely review…

- **Canonical tags**

  Canonical tags let the search engines know which pages are original and accurate to crawl and display.

- **Sitemaps**

  XML sitemaps and HTML sitemaps should be reviewed to weed out inconsistencies.

- **Robot Txt files**

  Ensure pages that needn't be crawled by robots are marked *disallow*

- **AMP pages**

  Ensure your new site follows a mobile first approach and has the infrastructure to handle large volumes of mobile traffic.

On page optimization and digital transformation case study

Challenge

A large food manufacturing company wanted to not just migrate to Drupal 8 but rebuild their site to handle the demands of an evolving marketplace. The goal was to centralize their fragmented lead capture system. They wanted DrupalPartners to create a unified and engaging digital experience for users.

Drupal 8

The Texas based company wanted to move from Drupal 7 to 8 as the latest version offered more integrations and scalability.

Solution

We performed a complete site audit and carried out a SWOT analysis. Changes were implemented across the site and powerful integrations with marketing automation and lead orchestration tools helped to eliminate inconsistencies across the lead capture continuum.

- **Offered KPI-focused support during and after the project launch**

- **Ensured transparent and continuous communication with key stakeholders to maintain brand consistency**

- **Optimized on-page SEO and navigation structure to increase search traffic and conversions**
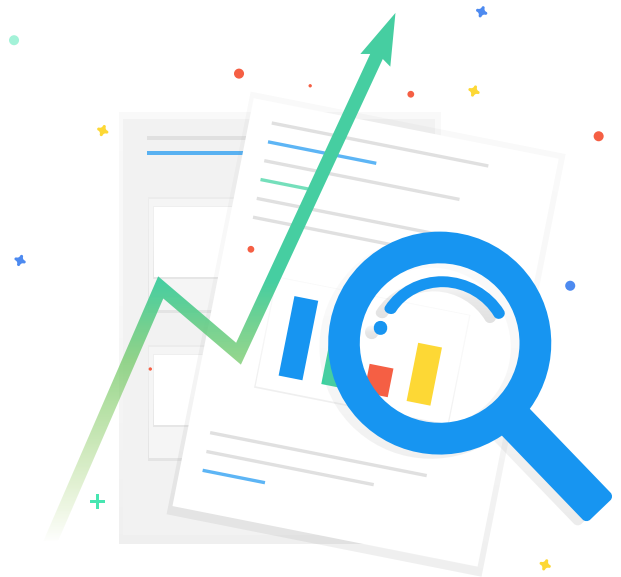
Results:

- **40% increase in site engagement level**

- **17% improvement in bounce rate**

- **30% increase in conversion rate across multiple devices**

Launch day actions

Test. Test. Test

- **Technical checks**
- **Search console checks**
- **Live site testing**
- **Integrations with other software**

Technical checks

Before go-live it is important to check that redirects are working properly. Check whether self-referring canonicals are correct. Recrawl old URLs using a tool like Screaming Frog. It will bubble up issues such as incorrect redirect response codes. Use the Google Search Console to test your new sitemap and eliminate errors. Check page rendering.

Search console checks

Upload XML sitemap to search engines so the latest version is crawled and indexed. Verify whether the site structure is user friendly. Check page rendering.

Live site testing

The most important aspect of a website is page loading time. You don't want to lose visitors because of slow loading time. Use online tools to check site loading times and identify problem areas.

Integrations

All those painstakingly built integrations? Ensure they make the transition with you while migrating. Check whether all integrations and extensions are operational.

Ongoing site maintenance

Bug fixes

Fix up those bugs! There are chances of bugs creeping up during the migration process. Eliminate them.

Performance monitoring

Monitor vital metrics such as traffic volume and bounce rate. Monitor the performance of your top ranking/converting pages.

Check sitemap

This cannot be stressed enough. Check for sitemap errors and correct them. Resubmit sitemap after the audit.

Wrap up

Migrating to Drupal 8 could be the best decision you've ever made. It is the most SEO friendly Drupal version yet. From pre-defined Robots txt to the Yoast SEO plugin it provides sites with the SEO superpowers needed to thrive in the hyper-competitive organic landscape. But do it right.

Don't let pressure or tight deadlines hamper your migration efforts. Stick to the process. And watch all pieces of the migration puzzle fall in place.

Need Drupal 8 Migration Support? Call

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