10 SEO MISTAKES TO AVOID

during your next website redesign

ArcStone

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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.

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.
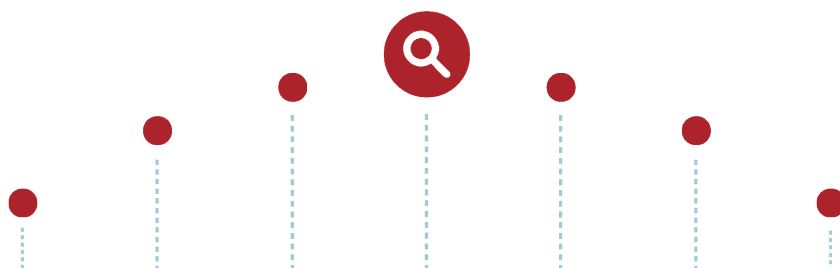
MISTAKE #1

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. If you are choosing ab outside vendor to build your site, make sure SEO & marketing are a part of their process.

Jeff Ferguson
CEO,
Fang Digital
Marketing

" The most common SEO mistake that I see marketers make when redesigning their websites is not involving the SEO team early in the process.

All too often, when we're brought in for SEO work on a redesign, it's often late in the process, such as when the site is being coded or even totally complete. "Hey, we should probably have the SEO guy take a look at this before we launch," but by then, it's too late.

The advice that usually needs to be passed on at this point will most likely cost the company much more in design, coding, and more.

MISTAKE #2

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

MISTAKE #3

Failing to Identify (and include) Commonly Searched Keyboards

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 there 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."**

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 (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. Unfortunately, this is a common and *very* costly mistake.

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? 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 in your URLs creates more opportunities for your pages to be discovered.

MISTAKE #6

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.
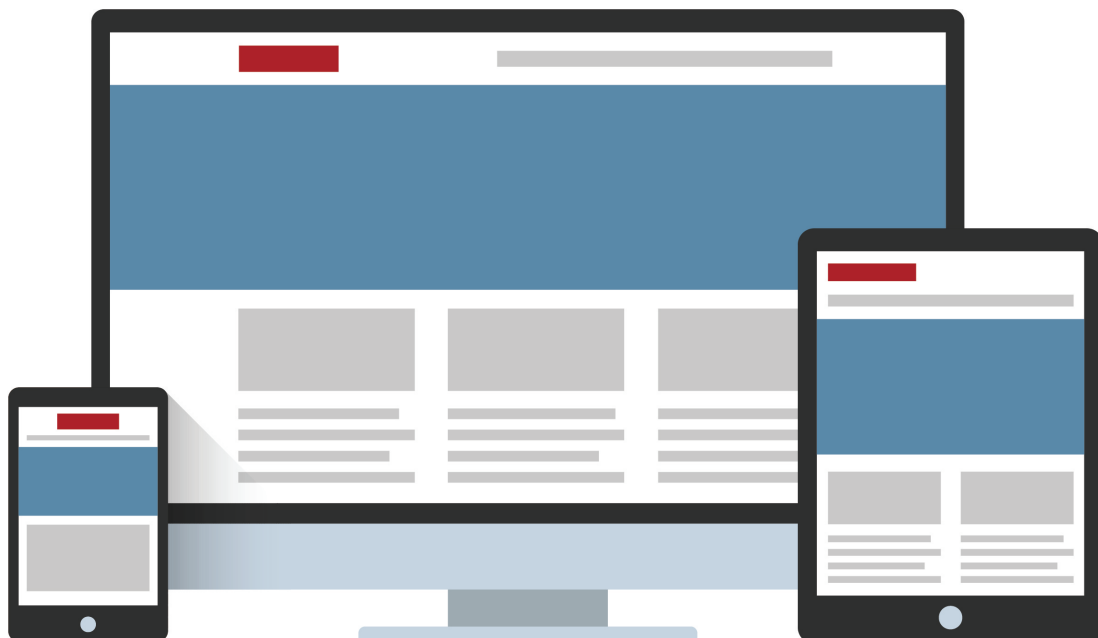
MISTAKE #7

Not Implementing Reponsive 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."

MISTAKE #8

Not Evolving Content Over Time

Aside from considering your content and SEO at the start of a project, you also need to contribute throughout the project. Multiple content drafts should be completed as you go to ensure you are covering all bases.

Each description and call-to-action on the site should attract and support your user's end goals.

MISTAKE #9

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.

MISTAKE #10

Failing to Think Like a Human

With the Hummingbird update of 2013, Google gained the ability to recognize full-sentence quieries (in contrast to simply picking out the indivudal 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.

Thinking about a redeign or in need of some marketing guidance?
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