

A *SaltedStone* EBOOK

# 10 SEO FAILS TO AVOID DURING A WEBSITE REDESIGN



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# 10 SEO FAILS TO AVOID DURING A WEBSITE REDESIGN

Website redesign is about far more than what meets the eye. The aesthetics of your new website may garner the most attention, but a truly great redesign requires taking a holistic approach and thoroughly considering one of the most invaluable aspects of web design — search engine optimization.

If people can't find your website via search or intuitively navigate through your site's pages, none of the visual bells and whistles will matter. Form and function are a package deal when it comes to remarkable website redesign.

While SEO best practices are always evolving — with the focus recently shifting toward optimizing content for searchers themselves over the search engines they use — it's still something you can't afford to overlook. To that end, we've compiled 10 SEO fails to steer clear of during your next website redesign.



## SEO FAIL #1:

### Not Thinking About SEO From the Get-Go

When contemplating a website redesign, it's easy to prioritize only those features that are appealing to the eye. However, to ensure your new site will resonate with your target audience (and to save yourself some major headaches down the road) you need SEO to be woven into your redesign strategy from the start.

To put it in layman's terms, you could invest all of your capital in building a glitzy hotel with all the finest amenities. But when it comes down to it, if no one knows how to find your hotel, you'll never do any business. Be discoverable. When planning out your redesign strategy, make sure to take accessibility into account.

## SEO FAIL #2:

# Skipping the Preliminary Audit

Before you scrap your existing site, make sure you take the time to determine what's working and what isn't. Here are some key metrics you may want to consider when auditing your current site:

- Number of visits / visitors / unique visitors
- Top performing keywords (in terms of rank, traffic, and lead generation)
- Number of inbound linking domains
- Total number of pages indexed
- Total number of pages that receive traffic



### **SEO FAIL #3:**

## Skipping the 301 Redirects Set-Up

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect from one URL to another. Whether you're switching domain names, restructuring URLs, or consolidating content, 301 redirects are necessary to make the most of your existing SEO.

Let's say your current site has a "Team" page (at [yoursite.com/team](#)), as well as a "Mission" page (at [yoursite.com/mission](#)). However, as part of your website redesign, you want to consolidate that into an "About Us" page (at [yoursite.com/about](#)). To transfer the SEO authority of those pages to your new page, set up 301 redirects so that [yoursite.com/team](#) and [yoursite.com/mission](#) both send visitors to [yoursite.com/about](#).

Otherwise your website could experience a drop in hard-earned rankings as well as an influx in "Page Not Found" error messages.

### **SEO FAIL #4:**

## Failing to Consider Your URL Structure

If your site is crammed with complex URLs that don't reflect the content of your pages, prioritize URL restructuring during your next website redesign. Search engines prefer digestible URLs that make it clear what your page content is all about. Your search engine results will thank you.

#### **PRO-TIP**

A website redesign is also the perfect opportunity to optimize your URLs for UX and search engines. Your URLs need well-targeted and relevant keywords. Your URL structure must also be organized and aligned with your site map. Subfolders add value to parent pages.

When creating your new URLs, use dashes (-) between words instead of underscores (\_). Google treats dashes as separators, so that it returns results when you search for both a single word and a group of words that appear in the URL. On the other hand, Google treats underscores as connectors, only returning results for a group of connected words that appears in a URL. Using dashes translates into more opportunities for being discovered.

## SEO FAIL #5:

# Over-Saturating with Irrelevant Keywords

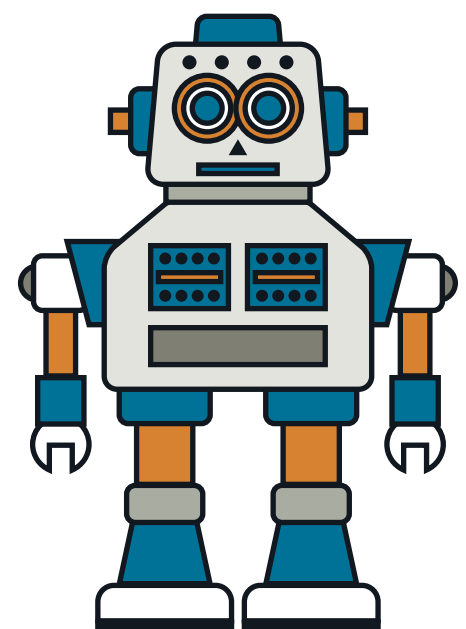
Keyword stuffing your way to search ranking success is no longer an acceptable practice. Google's Penguin algorithm ensures extreme punishment for sites containing too many poorly placed keywords. If Google notices abuse of keywords, your credibility could take a severe hit.

However, if you're doing what Google wants — creating high-quality content — keywords will naturally work their way into your website's pages. The way Google puts it, "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."

Each webpage should have a single focus keyword that's included 1-3 times naturally in the page content. Include it in your page title, meta description, and H1 text. Most importantly, don't forget that your website needs to read well for humans first, and search engines second. Read through every piece of content, asking yourself if it reads well for humans. Being a human will benefit you during this process. Remove any keywords that don't fit naturally. If content doesn't contribute to the education of the visitor, scrap it.



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## SEO FAIL #6:

# Allowing Shady Inbound Links

We know that getting inbound links from trusted websites is a great way to give your website's search rankings a boost. However, not all inbound links are created equally.

If Google suspects that there are non-credible sites linking to your site, your rankings could suffer. This is “negative SEO.” Spammers will sometimes purposely direct low-quality links to your site in order to cause negative SEO.

A website redesign is an ideal time to analyze inbound links and scrap the negative ones. Google Webmaster Tools can show you where Google detects one of these low-quality links. You then have the option to make such links “no follows” so Google disregards them.

A common SEO mistake marketers make is believing that their site will receive more SEO traffic if only they can find enough websites to build links to. Focus on link-earning rather than link-building. Your content should be easy for your audience to consume, understand, and share.

## SEO FAIL #7:

# Not Using Responsive Design

Responsive design is Google's preferred configuration for mobile-optimized websites, making it your best option for delivering a great experience to mobile users. Unlike other mobile configurations like a mobile-only site or dynamic serving, responsive design allows all of your site's URLs to be the same across all devices and use the same HTML code.

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.”

#### **SEO FAIL #8:**

## Blocking Search Engines From Crawling Your Site



### **PRO-TIP**

In the development stage, we often have robots.txt set to block all search robots. If the site is taken live with the all-exclusive robots.txt file still in place, the site’s traffic will abruptly drop. To avoid this error, check your robots.txt file once your site goes live. And then check again with Google Webmaster Tools to make sure your site is being indexed.

After heeding our warnings, your newly designed website is a work of SEO art. You launch it, sit back, and wait to get a call from Chuck Norris on how to bump up his search engine game. That is, however, until you notice that your website isn’t showing up in Google’s search results.

When your site was under construction, you may have blocked search engines from crawling your website until it was complete. When launching your website after a redesign, be sure that search engines know where to find you.

#### **SEO FAIL #9:**

## Skimping On Analytics Software

As soon as your new website is launched, start 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 your pages? You’ll never know if you aren’t monitoring key metrics with analytics software.

Integrating Google analytics code on the new website will prove invaluable. Tracking conversion rate success can get pretty tricky if you forget to include the analytics tracking. Create a redesign checklist to ensure avoiding snafos like this.

## SEO FAIL #10:

# Failing to Think Like a Human

As we just mentioned, effective SEO is all about putting yourself in the shoes (and search habits) of your clients. 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, 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.

Create value for your personas and deliver the user experience they would like. When you focus on those items, SEO happens.

Want to find out more about SEO optimization ahead of your next website redesign? Schedule a consultation today.

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