# SEO for
# Site Migrations

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# Introduction

**Renovating your website is much like moving your business.**

There's the potential to bring in more leads and make your clients' lives easier, but there's also the risk of losing existing customers and missing out on traffic that's valuable to your business.

Despite all the technical trouble that comes with redesigning or migrating your site, it's a necessary step for many businesses. After all, your website is your online storefront. It's the first impression that you give potential clients and partners. Your site is a huge part of your brand image and what your company stands for.

Much like a moving checklist, the following is a guide on what to keep, purge, or slap a fresh coat of paint on when the time comes to migrate your site.

# Redesign

Redesigning your website is only changing the visual appearance. This includes:

- Adding new functionalities to your site like responsive design or live customer support
- Tweaking existing content by adding images or editing copy and messaging on your site

In this case, you're not changing page names or URLs or significantly altering the content of your pages.
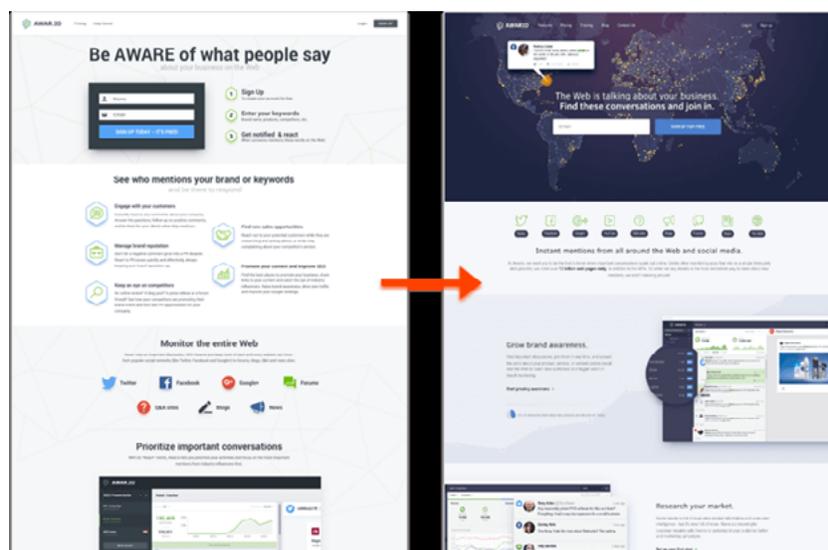
# Renovate

Renovation is the most common type of website change. Renovating your site includes a full redesign and – most importantly for SEO – changing the physical pages on your site. The domain name of your website (www.example.com) will stay the same, but you may make changes to the following elements:
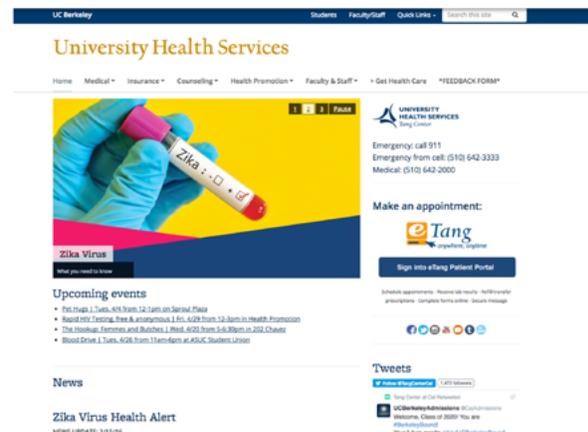
**APPEARANCE**
Reconstructing the visual appearance of your site

**CUSTOM INTERFACE**
Changing customer interface items like navigation menus and contact forms

**OLD PAGES**
Removing pages for products or services you no longer offer



**NEW PAGES**
Creating new pages for new products or services your business offers

**DUPLICATE CONTENT**
Consolidating pages with similar or duplicate content

**PLATFORM**
Implementing a new website platform

We recommend considering renovating before relocating. **From an SEO perspective, relocation is the most dangerous option for your business**. It can take a significant hit on your traffic and rankings. It's highly advised against unless there is a valid reason for doing so.

# Relocate

Relocation is changing the domain name of your site entirely. It isn't as common as renovation, but there are several reasons why it might be necessary.

**COMPANY MERGER OR AQUISITION**
- Boxes, Inc. (www.boxes.com) has merged with Bags, Inc. (www.bags.com)
- The new operating company is Boxes & Bags, Inc. (www.boxesandbags.com)

**A MAJOR FOCUS SHIFT IN YOUR BUSINESS**
- Chicago Bathroom Remodelers specializes in bathrooms (www.chibathroomremodel.com)
- The new company does more than just bathrooms (www.chihomerenovation.com)

**PHYSICAL RELOCATION**
- Joe's Plumbing (www.joesplumbingchicago.com) is a one man operation
- Joe moved from Chicago to New York (www.joesplumbingnyc.com)

# Goals and factors

You move houses for a reason. Much like your household, you should clearly define the purpose of moving your site before making any adjustments. Factors include:

**VISUAL STYLE**
One of the most common reasons to change your website is to update the  visual style.

Your site should be modern and fit the personality of your brand. You can improve the visual appeal of your site with a redesign or renovation.

**WEBSITE MANAGEMENT**
Sites built on old platforms, or no platform, are hard to edit and expand.

Often, part of a site migration is changing the backbone of your site to something more developer friendly.
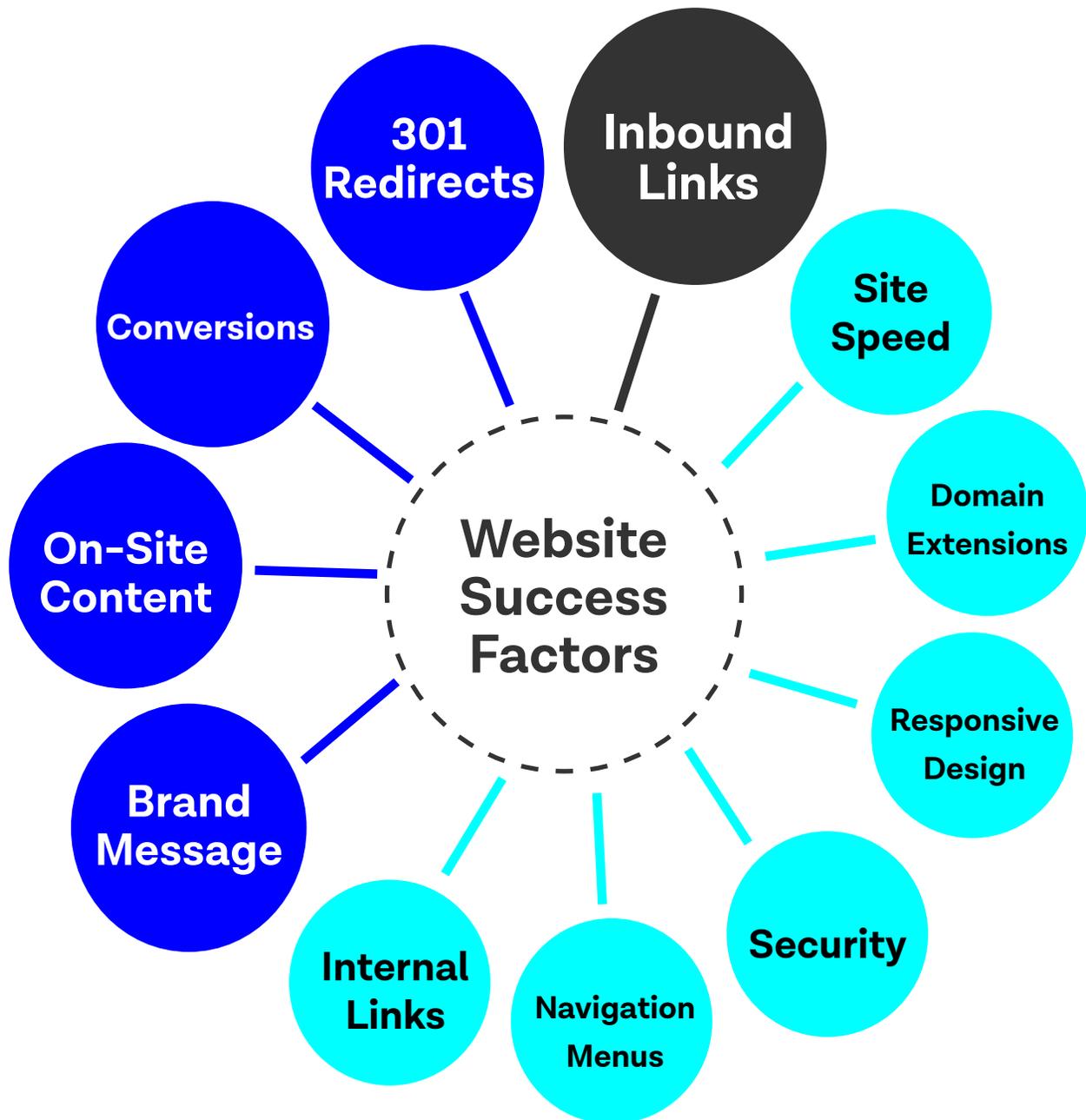
**USER EXPERIENCE**
Old websites can hurt your brand by providing an outdated image of your company and neglecting user experience.

Web users expect modern sites to be fast, secure, mobile accessible and easy to navigate.

# Shipping SEO to your new home

How do you determine what's important when making changes to your website? Here's an overview of some critical things affecting your website's performance, both in organic search and from a user experience standpoint.



Website Success Factors:
- 301 Redirects
- Inbound Links
- Site Speed
- Conversions
- Domain Extensions
- On-Site Content
- Responsive Design
- Brand Message
- Security
- Internal Links
- Navigation Menus

# Inbound links

Inbound links are a critical factor in organic search performance, but remember – links don't mean success! All the inbound links in the world won't help you make money if your site doesn't provide your customers with the information or services they seek.

Inbound links are votes of confidence for your site. You want as many votes as possible from quality sources. In the eyes of Google, a few high-quality links mean much more than a large quantity of low-quality links.

# Redirects

If you remove a page from your site, change a URL or change your domain name, you must redirect that URL to a new page. This is the best way to preserve the link equity of that page.

Ensuring URLs are appropriately redirected to their new page is the most critical component of a site migration.

**301 REDIRECT**
A 301 redirect is a redirect from one URL on your site to another.

Note, a link that passes through a 301 redirect is not as valuable as one that goes directly to your site. There is no exact estimate on how much link equity is passed in a 301 redirect.

**SERVER-SIDE REDIRECT**
A server-side redirect affects the entire domain. A typical example is moving from HTTP to HTTPS.

If you're implementing HTTPS, have your developer set up a server-side redirect to send any HTTP pages to their new HTTPS homes. This will save your link equity and avoid creating duplicate content.

**ADDITIONAL REDIRECT TIPS**
All URL formats should point to a single URL.

Your website's IP address should also redirect to homepage of your website.

Avoid chained redirects. One redirect should not forward to another redirect

# What stays, what goes?

What's defined as significant? Giving an exact number is hard. In general, you can use the **rule of 5**:

- 5% of organic traffic total
- 5% of conversions
- At least 5 inbound links

Anything less is likely safe to toss. Anything exceeding this should be handled with care.

| stays | factor | goes |
|---|---|---|
| • **Significant number of links**<br>• **Links are from a high-quality source** | **INBOUND LINKS** | • **Low number of links**<br>• **Links are from spammy websites or irrelevant sources** |
| • **Receives a large number of visits**<br>• **Generates conversions** | **CONTENT** | • **No organic traffic**<br>• **High bounce rate**<br>• **Low time-on-site**<br>• **No conversions** |
| • **> 400 words**<br>• **Covers a subject no other page covers**<br>• **Is specific to a customer need** | **TRAFFIC** | • **Thin content**<br>• **Topic is narrow and covered on another page** |

# Moving  checklist

## Identify goals and objectives

**VISUAL APPEAL**
Clearly state what you want
your site to look like. Find
examples of similar websites
you want to take inspiration
from.

**BRAND MESSAGE**
Identify the value proposition
of your company. What type of
information are your potential
customers looking for?

**USER EXPERIENCE**
Examine your existing site for
issues with functionality.
Address these during your
migration.

## Take inventory

**LINKED IN PAGES**
> Google Webmaster Tools
> Search traffic
> Links to your site

**TRAFFIC AND CONVERSIONS**
> Google Analytics
> Aqusition
> All traffic
> Secondary dimension: landing page

## Improvements to your new home

**ENSURE CONVERSIONS ARE AS EASY AS POSSIBLE. INCLUDE:**
- Phone number
- Simple contact form on key pages
- Clear CTAs or easy to use shopping cart

**ENSURE ANALYTICS AND TRACKING CODES ARE TRANSFERRED AND ADJUSTED**
- Upgrade to the latest version of your analytics tracking code
- Adjust goal paths to the goal URL on your new site
- Ensure internal search tracking and call tracking is set up properly

**MAKE SURE TECHNICAL ITEMS ARE UPDATED**
- XML sitemap
- Robots.txt
- SSL certificate
- 301 redirects