



7 Reasons Why Ecommerce SEO Migrations Fail

“Explore Consulting provided us with excellent guidance and seamless integration between our Ecommerce site and Google Analytics, giving us back control of the critical online metrics we depend on to run our business. And they did it fast.”

- John Hubbs, President, Metallo Design LLC



As Ecommerce requirements become more sophisticated for growing organizations and the search engine algorithms for ranking your Webstore grow more complex, the need for organizations to migrate their website's platforms is usually inevitable. Unfortunately, many of these migrations are performed with little to no consideration for **SEO Migration**. For those websites that do take SEO into consideration, most tend to follow the best-practice *SEO Migration* guides available on the web. These guides haven't changed much since they first started to appear more than 5 years ago. Typically they will ask you to do the following:

Standard SEO Migration Plan

- Password-protect the test environment and/or allow access by IP only
- Crawl the legacy website using a tool like [Screaming Frog](#) or [Deep Crawl](#).
- Gather up your URLs, sorted by HTTP status code
- Analyze these URLs in a tool like [Open Site Explorer](#) or [Ahrefs](#) to determine which have valuable backlinks
- Extract the list of organic landing pages that receive impressions, clicks from Search Console, Bing Webmaster Tools and traffic from Google Analytics or other web analytics tool.
- Create 301 Redirects from old URLs to new – ideally with all pages or at a minimum with pages receiving impressions in search.
- If you have pre-existing 301 redirects, replace these with new target URLs for the new website.
- If you have dead (404) product pages, redirect these to the category page. If you have dead category pages, redirect to the home page.
- If you have pages with temporary redirects (302), likely they should be permanent (301)
- For any page in your new website that lists the same content (like sale pages), make sure to include a rel canonical.
- Create a friendly 404 page that helps get your users back on track if they happen to hit a URL that is missed.
- Create a XML (and preferably an HTML) sitemap for your website. Only include pages with a 200 HTTP status, exclude any page that is canonicalized to a different URL.
- Add a robots.txt file and include your sitemap location in the robots file.

- Once the site is live, update the sitemap in Search Console and Webmaster tools and run a Fetch.

Follow these simple steps and you're all done, right? Unfortunately, the answer to this is no, particularly for more sophisticated, larger scale websites. So what's missing? Why aren't these best practices sufficient for an SEO migration?

Reason #1: 301 Redirection Performance

If you are a large scale website with thousands or perhaps tens of thousands of product pages, when you create that long list of 301 redirects, you are putting a lot of potential stress on the web server. You could always add more resources to your web server, but this may be cost prohibitive and with some platforms, not even a choice. So what is the fix?

- **Set up redirections on your server vs. CMS**

If you find that you have a lot of URL changes, you will want to set up your redirections on the server vs. using your CMS. Using your CMS for re-direction limits the rate at which Redirections can occur by the rate at which your CMS can talk to your server. The best way to avoid doing redirections with your CMS is to create an htaaccess file.

- **Use Regex to create pattern matching rules**

If at all possible, make use of regular expressions for redirections when you can. This reduces the number of redirections your server will have to execute comparing source URLs to targets.

Reason #2: Avoiding Duplicate Content From Query Parameters in URLs

There are lots of good reasons to update your website, but keep in mind, if you focus all your effort on building a store without a proper SEO Migration plan, all you will end up with is an online warehouse. At Explore Consulting, we specialize in providing customized SEO Migration and Recovery plans. Contact us today about how we can assist you in successfully migrating your business.

- **Indicate Search Engine URL Parameter Handling**

Most modern Ecommerce platforms allow users to search, sort and filter pages. This is often handled through the passing of query string parameters that are appended to your base URL. Unfortunately, it is often the case that Google will crawl and index versions of your pages with these various query string parameters. When this happens, you often end up with the dreaded problem of duplicate content. Google doesn't know which version of the URL to display in the Search Engine Results Pages. They will do their best to select the right choice, but often they end up selecting a version of your URL with the query string. To end consumers this will seem like gobbledygook and reduce their incentive to click. The good news is that this can be prevented by adding these parameters into both Google Search Console and Bing Web Master tools for exclusion for indexation. The best time to do this is before a site launches vs. after the new URLs are indexed.

Reason #3: Page Speed Performance

- **Determine Cause Of Page Speed Declines**

One often overlooked reason for why your SEO traffic falls after migration has to do with non-optimized pages. There are a whole host of reasons why a page might be slower after migrating to a new platform than before. It could be something as simple as having loaded fresh, non-optimized images on your new website. Alternatively, it could be that the code created either by your designer/developer or by the platform itself is more cumbersome and lengthy or perhaps the order and number of HTML (content), CSS (design) and JS (interactivity) files loaded slows down the page. If you are an image heavy website, it may have to do with a lack of browser caching. Each time a user re-renders a page, without browser caching, additional server are required to pull the same assets again and again. Whatever the reason, if your pages are substantially slower on your new website vs. your old, be prepared for higher bounce rates – particularly from older devices and devices running on slower networks. Search engines will then

interpret this as your website being less qualified and your rankings will likely fade over time. This is not something you check simply by loading up your new website in your browser. If you have Google Analytics installed, go check out the page load times there to get larger sample size. You can also use any number of free or paid tools like [Google Page Speed](#) insights, [Pingdom](#), [GTmetrix](#) or the performance tool at [Varvy](#).

Reason #4: Changes to Internal Link Structure

- **Focus Internal Links on the Critical Necessary**

Search engines use internal links to help understand how topics on pages are contextually interrelated. It also helps distribute equity throughout the website. Significant changes to your internal link structure can have both a positive or negative impact. Generally, without an internal link plan, many new websites default to having more links on a page. Not only does this not help a consumer since more choice can create more confusion, having links from all pages to all pages makes it impossible for search engines to determine context. Try to keep your links to as few as possible. Within ecommerce, beyond basic navigation best practice is to provide links to your navigation; a breadcrumb to help users navigate between product, sub-category and category pages; links to the product in different sizes or colors and a limited number of links to related products – either sibling products, product often purchased by other customers at the same time or related sale products. But keep in mind, less is often more.

- **Make Sure To Link From Higher Authority Pages to Lower**

Generally, you can tell if your page is ranking appropriately or not based on how many different keywords you might see it show up on impressions within Google Search Console. If you exclude the brand terms and their misspellings, you know you will have a problem if you see a page rank for either a long list of keywords or none. To resolve this issue, take a specific keyword ranking on a page that you wish ranked on a different page. Create a link between the page that is ranking and the one that you wish was ranking. If there are multiple situations where this occurs, feel free to create links between each of these pages, but be sure to diversify the anchor text. Don't automatically create exact keyword anchor text links to your targeted page as that's likely to get you penalized.

Reason #5: Changes in Content and Content Prominence

- **Investigate Keyword Rank Loss After Launch**

Usually after you launch a new website, search engines will take a period of time to re-evaluate your website. Remember their job is to align consumer's searches with pages on the web. If the content on your pages has changed, Google needs to understand how those pages have changed and determine whether or not these pages still answer the same user searches. Understanding why you might have lost rank on a particular keyword can be a complicated process. Keyword ranking tools generally are insufficient at helping diagnose this issue since many keywords often rank on multiple pages. The best way to determine what is going on with your keywords is to take a 90 day snapshot of your keyword / URL data just prior to launch and another one 2-3 weeks after launch. The best source for this data is going to be Google's Search Console. Extracting the mass amount of data can be hard work made easier either by directly using the Google API or tools like [URL Profiler](#).

- **Diagnose Keyword Rank Lost After Launch**

Once you've identified drops what keywords have fallen in rank by URL – you can prioritize these by opportunity. Given the volume and rank of your keyword on a particular URL, you can usually predict how impression volume and click through should change with improvements in rank. Once you have your prioritized list, the next step is to understand why a particular page may be underperforming. Start by placing that keyword into an on-page grader like Moz's [On Page Grader](#) or [Ranks.nl](#). Hopefully you've kept a copy of your legacy website on a hidden domain that you can access. If so, you can diagnose how the use of keyword and keyword theme usage has changed before and after the changes. These tools will

help you see if your keyword/theme has been used as prominently before and after any changes. They will look at the usage and prominence of keywords in page titles, headings, list items, image captions, body copy and a whole host of other locations. Be sure not to overdue as well. Once you find deficiencies, make updates to your content as appropriate to improve the significance of the keyword on a specific page.

Reason #6: Not Monitoring Changes in User Behavior on Organic Landing Pages

- **Monitor Bounce Rates and Time on Site**

Search engines closely monitor how consumers interact with pages. There are many ways they do this, but in general the two metrics to focus on are bounce rates and time on site. You might think your new website looks swell, but if visitors are bouncing off your new pages at a higher rate and/or they are exiting your website after having spent far less time on your website, and you've eliminated technical performance issues, that's a sure sign that you have a presentation issue. Is your content presented well across different devices? Is your implementation of responsive or dynamic mobile page renderings working effectively? Google's Mobile Friendliness grader is a great place to start here. If you want to do this in bulk, try [URLitor](#).

If this doesn't seem to be the issue, start looking for tools that can diagnose how users are engaging with your page. There are lots of options here. Lower cost solutions include [CrazyEgg](#) and [Hotjar](#). Ideally your landing page will clearly match the keyword you have targeted, is focused on your specific user audience and helps define a problem, provide a solution and or makes suggestions about specific items. Thoroughly check all the UX/Interaction features on your pages and try them in several browsers. There are generally easily identifiable reasons for major declines in bounce rate and time on site.

Reason #7: Failing to Have and Execute On Content Plan

- **Develop and Execute on a Content Plan**

No matter how well you do at migrating your legacy website, with any change, search engine re-evaluation of your website will be a given. There's no better way to recover from a change than to develop and execute on a content plan. Creating a fast, responsive website with clean and easy understand navigation, product and category descriptions, useful images, reviews by customers, and well maintained re-directs for your old backlinks certainly will help. That being said nothing beats having a content strategy that creates and distributes content that meets your target audience's needs across their buying journey is the only way to continue to grow organic traffic. Don't depend on "build it and they will come". Watch for our next post where we mention how to create a content plan for your Ecommerce website at [Exploreconsulting.com](#).

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Client Testimonials

Smashbox Cosmetics

"Explore's ongoing SEO consulting has consistently improved our ranking for competitive keywords. Within one month of rebuilding our website, Explore helped Smashbox gain significant increases in traffic from the search engines."

– Orion Hand, Senior Manager of Ecommerce

The Madden Corp.

"After doing much research on Ecommerce options and qualified consulting firms, we decided to work with Explore Consulting. We need their expertise on best-practices on website development and marketing strategies. Thus, they have done a wonderful job in these areas and have been on top of all matters in keeping the project on target with our overall Ecommerce timelines and marketing objectives. Good job!"

– Lloyd Uyeda, SV

About Explore Consulting

Based in Bellevue, Washington, Explore Consulting was founded in 2001 and is a professional services company dedicated to providing innovative and cost-effective solutions for their customers' database and IT systems needs. Having specialized in SaaS solutions for more than 14 years, Explore Consulting is the largest and most experienced NetSuite reseller and solution provider in the Northwestern United States.

Explore Consulting is well-known as a leader in NetSuite implementation, customization, integration and Ecommerce, and has also been a 10-time NetSuite Star Performer, won 24 NetSuite awards and was named as 2014 NetSuite Partner of the Year, Americas. For more information, visit www.exploreconsulting.com.