



A Website Redevelopment Check List



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Introduction

So, you're developing a new website? Congratulations! But also - *Brace Yourself!*

Redeveloping a website is very different than creating a new website for a new business. While constantly evaluating your marketing and technology properties is important, there are many reasons that companies try to delay a web development project. When your project involves changing platforms or moving to a new provider, there are some delicate aspects to consider. In a nutshell, it requires a lot of planning and a lot of work to make sure the replacement of a website goes smoothly.

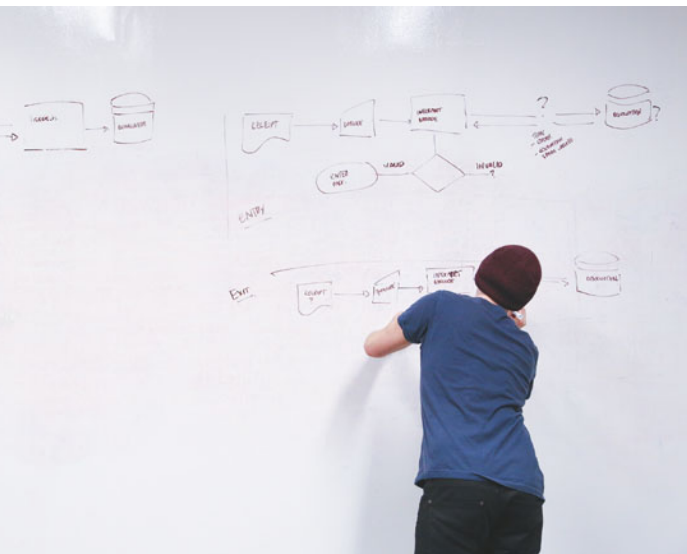
While this list is not exhaustive, it covers many of the important elements in a website redevelopment process.



Goals

SET YOUR WEBSITE LAUNCH GOALS

Developing a new website is not an overnight process. It requires planning and effort from many different people, namely your web designer, web developer, web hosting manager or IT professional and the marketing team. When you decide to dive in head first on a website project, make your goals known. Inform your web developer, marketing and even sales team when you prefer to launch the new site. Collaborate during kick off to determine if your goal date is realistic. Sometimes, you must plan the website re-launch in phases if certain aspects are complicated and require more time to complete.



Back Up

MAKE BACK UPS OF THE OLD WEBSITE

The best practice in website maintenance is to perform regular back ups. There is usually a back up tool available through your web host's control panel. Or, you might back up the site by directly copying your files and databases. Even if you have automation in place and perform back ups daily, you should still ensure that you have a valid backup of the entire site before you launch the new one. We recommend making a final fresh back up right before launch day, especially if there are customer activities or order activity happening on the site.

Resources you may need for backing up:

- Control Panel / cPanel access
- Database credentials
- FTP credentials
- Login for the CMS (eg: WordPress)
- Sufficient storage space for the back up files
- IT personnel

Staging

SETUP A STAGING SITE

To keep your current website up and running during the project's development, create a staging area for the web developers to work on. This provides a safe space that will not impact your live website. It can be fully tested before everything is approved to launch.

Where does a staging site live?

Your staging site might live on a subfolder of your existing web server (such as www.mysite.com/staging/) or it might be setup as a subdomain (such as dev.mysite.com) or it might be built using a completely separate web hosting space at a different url.



Process

DOCUMENT YOUR DIGITAL FULFILLMENT PROCESS

There may be several processes that originate with your website. When someone fills out a contact form, whose email is it sent to? When someone places an order online, what payment gateway options are integrated? Who receives the order email notifications? What about shipping service integrations? What email newsletter service is connected with your website? You will likely also need to collect credentials for all of the integrations so the web developer can properly add those settings in the new website platform. For example, a typical payment gateway like Authorize.net or PayPal requires API credentials. Review these details and create some documentation. The documentation will help your internal employees as well as your web development team.

What could be part of your digital fulfillment process:

- What email addresses are linked with forms?
- Where is email hosted?
- What CRM programs are integrated?
- Who manages the web sales leads?
- Who received online orders?
- Which shipping rate providers are used?
- Which payment gateway is used?
- What parts of the site does IT manage?
- Who is the current web developer?
- Who confirms the funds are received for orders?
- Who delivers the product?
- Who updates the blog?
- Who controls the email newsletter?
- Who moderates the forum?

Coordinate

COORDINATE YOUR WEB DEVELOPMENT AND IT TEAMS

To complete a successful launch, there are usually several steps involved. These steps may include gaining access to a production server, making back ups, updating databases, and updating DNS records for a domain name. Coordinate the web development team and the persons in charge of your other IT services, so each person is able to accomplish their task for the scheduled launch date. Some projects require many days of planned steps to deploy a new website.



Content

GET A HANDLE ON CONTENT

Whose in charge of content? Will the content of the new website be exactly the same as the old one? As content is one of the most common causes of a website launch delay, it is important to assign and plan your new website content. Even if your web development company is also writing your new content, they will require some information from you to write it and your feedback.

Tip: Have trouble gathering bios from all the employees for the new About Us page? Assign one person to walk the office and interview each employee for 10 minutes using a short list of questions. This brief meeting will cause minimal disruption and allow you to check this content off your list faster than herding all those cats.

Redirect

REDIRECT OLD URLS

If the urls of the web pages in your new site are going to be different than the old ones, it is important to prepare 301 redirects in the new site. This can be done by your web developer or the SEO professional on the team. With the 301 redirects properly in place, a visitor who tries to locate an old page will be automatically sent to new website content.

What about domain name changes?

If you are changing your domain name entirely, you may need to work with the domain registration provider, DNS provider or web host to properly forward the old domain name to the new site.

Data

EXPORT AND PREPARE CUSTOMER DATA

If your website has features that allow customers to login or place orders, you probably want to retain your customer data. This is a delicate and sometimes very challenging process when you are moving to a new platform. Your web developer will require the exported customer data from the previous site, so they can reformat it and import it to the new site. In some cases, it might not be possible to copy everything over the exact same way. But having proper copies of this data should not be forgotten. If your website does not store any customer information or have any registration, login or order features, this is probably not applicable to you.

Review, Consider and Compromise

Sometimes moving to a new platform has advantages that far outweigh the inconvenience of creating a new login or password. If perfectly migrating all your previous customer data is too challenging, you may need to compromise by asking your customers to follow a new process to gain access. The important thing is to prepare for these changes ahead of time, instead of catching your customers off guard after launch day.

Announce

MAKE YOUR ANNOUNCEMENTS TO CUSTOMERS

When there are significant changes, I feel it is best to inform your customers and set expectations. Some companies send an email newsletter update to all of their customers announcing the new website with an exciting tone, and giving them instructions to use the new tools. The customer's features might have changed or their passwords might need to be reset. You can use this as an opportunity to give those instructions and reduce customer service calls. I also highly recommend having a maintenance period for your site launch. You can announce the upcoming maintenance window to your customers, and then shut off access to the site's ordering and registration features for that time period. This will reduce the risk of new customer activity happening right in the middle of your launch and then getting lost in space.

Type of announcements you might prepare:

- Warning about scheduled maintenance period
- Happy announcement of the new website benefits
- Instructions for accessing the new website
- Special offer / coupon celebrating the new launch
- Follow up survey for feedback on the new site

Test

DO POST-LAUNCH TESTING

Let's assume you did everything right and the website launch went smoothly. It's time to do some testing in the live environment. You want to confirm that everything is still working after the move. I recommend placing at least one order on your website (simulating a customer experience), browsing the pages, and filling out all the contact forms. Find any problems and fix them before your customer reports it.



Press

ALERT THE PRESS

Everything is perfect and the new website is so beautiful! Does the world know? Think about all the advantages that your new site brings to customers and visitors and make an outline. Write a press release about the launch and benefits of your new site. Plan some marketing outreach to your existing customers to entice them to use the new site. Announce the website on your social media channels. Maybe even celebrate the successful project with your employees in a launch party.

Potential activities:

- Write a press release
- Distribute the press release with local media
- Distribute the press release online (PR Web, PR Newswire)
- Host a launch party with clients
- Host a town-hall meeting with employees
- Write a feature in your newsletter
- Post an announcement on your blog
- Update your digital marketing campaigns

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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