Google Explains Why Staggered Site Migrations Impact SEO Outcome via @sejournal, @martinibuster



Google's John Mueller recently answered a question about how Google responds to staggered site moves where a site is partially moved from one domain to another. He said a standard site move is generally fine, but clarified his position when it came to partial site moves.

Straight Ahead Site Move?

Someone asked about doing a site move, initially giving the impression that they were moving the entire site. The question was in the context of using Google Search Console's change of address feature.

They asked:

"Do you have any thoughts on this GSC Change of Address

> *question?*
>
> *Can we submit the new domain if a few old URLs still get traffic and aren't redirected yet, or should we wait until all redirects are live?"*

Mueller initially answered that it should be fine:

> *"It's generally fine (for example, some site moves keep the robots.txt on the old domain with "allow: /" so that all URLs can be followed). The tool does check for the homepage redirect though."*

Google Explains Why Partial Site Moves Are Problematic

His opinion changed however after the OP responded with additional information indicating that the home page has been moved while many of the product and category pages on the old domain will stay put for now, meaning that they want to move parts of the site now and other parts later, retaining one foot in on a new domain and the other firmly planted on the old one.

That's a different scenario entirely. Unsurprisingly, Mueller changed his opinion.

He responded:

> *"Practically speaking, it's not going to be seen as a full site move. You can still use the change of address tool, but it will be a messy situation until you've really moved it all over. If you need to do this (sometimes it's not easy, I get it :)), just know that it won't be a clean slate.*
>
> *…You'll have a hard time tracking things & Google will have a hard time understanding your sites. My recommendation would*

> *be to clean it up properly as soon as you can. Even properly planned & executed site migrations can be hard, and this makes it much more challenging.”*

Google’s Site Understanding

Something that I find intriguing is Mueller’s occasional reference to Google’s understanding of a website. He’s mentioned this factor in other contexts in the past and it seems to be a catchall for things that are related to quality but also to something else that he’s referred to in the past as a relevance topic related to understanding where a site fits in the Internet.

In this context, Mueller appears to be using the phrase to mean understanding the site relative to the domain name.

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