How changing domains challenge SEO

An insight on the relation of Domain and SEO, and how it impacts your digital footprint altogether.

When you are running a website, the digital footprint you build plays an imperative role in how your website fares among search engines. But be it a blog, online store, or a video stream, the goals are more or less the same – get traffic, create awareness, and generate conversions. To achieve this, webmasters spend vast amounts of their time increasing their organic web traffic, improving conversion volumes, and practicing different SEO techniques to enhance the visibility of their brand.

At some point on this online journey, there may come a time when you feel your website needs to achieve certain milestones in order to grow and establish a stronger position in the market. During this phase, you may come across the decision of changing your domain name to re-brand for expansion, enter a more popular TLD, or increase your digital marketing potential.

What happens when you switch domains?

Unfortunately, moving domains can do a serious number on your

search engine rankings. Not because your brand virtually disappears for a short while, but because top search engines such as Google determine rankings through metrics based on both domain level and page level. When you decide to switch to a new domain, you basically reset these domain metrics back to zero. Fortunately, there are ways where you can minimize the damage and if you are careful, you can effectively negate the effects of moving to a new domain.

Whitepaper

In this article, we are taking the opportunity of explaining why website owners change their domains and the imminent and long term effects domain changing can bring on their SEO. We have also added a mini-guide that will help you get a proper walk-through on migrating your old domain to the new one.

Why do webmasters consider changing their domain?

In the vast majority of situations, website owners refrain from changing their domain name. However, some conditions may require webmasters to transition into new domain names in order to achieve certain merits that come with it. Here are some of the reasons why.

1. They don’t like the domain name

Often, website owners need a change in taste or outlook to increase relevance with their business and distinguish their position in the marketplace.

2. The domain does not perform well

Perhaps the domain name has failed to accumulate the organic traffic volume or positive feedback that was expected. This

prevents webmasters from and achieving their business goals.

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3. Change in business

Many online businesses experience transition in their business model, go through an acquisition, change business activity or switch industry. This makes the current domain irrelevant or inapplicable with the current incorporated status of the business.

4. You want a better top-level domain (TLD)

Webmasters also register with lesser-known domain extensions since their desired one is unavailable at that time. Once the opportunity presents itself you might want to move to a more mainstream TLD that suits your business and brand presence.

What challenges does changing domains bring on SEO?

SEO is a key determinant in this entire process and counts as one of the central pieces in the digital marketing toolbox. So, while we know that moving to a new domain directly affects your SEO efforts, the question is how far does it impact your website’s SEO performance or in what ways does it deter its progress.

For new website owners, it may take time to properly understand the implications of changing a domain name. For instance, if you are moving to a new domain name and you have

sold your old one, you will lose all the link equity you had built over the life of the old domain. This means your organic traffic takes a nosedive and your domain authority begins to diminish.

Moreover, failing to implement proper redirects during the migration can result in almost immediate loss of traffic. Once you lose your live page front, the only thing greeting your visitors is the dreaded 404 page. It is also important to timely convey your website's search engine rankings to the new domain since Google search engine metrics will consider your new domain with zero visibility. Another major challenge is content duplication since your site could already be going through canonicalization issues and may start at the domain level. This will eventually exacerbate plagiarism and you will need to implement a canonical URL extension helps you remove duplicate content issues.

Website owners who dearly care about their online presence will never risk losing their link value or quality score they have earned so tirelessly. Therefore, the best course of action during domain migration is to maintain strict adherence to Google's migration guidelines and track every change with proper tools to remain informed about your website's progress. Sometimes even the slightest change in direction can end up with several undesired outcomes further down the line.

SEO guide: How to properly move domains

Here your main objective is to effectively redirect all of the pages to an entirely different domain. This guide by MOZ will briefly take you on a step-by-step action plan of doing it professionally and keeping your rankings abreast. Moz also underwent a re-branding phase where it changed its domain name from SEOmoz to Moz so there is a lot here that you can learn from the SEO behemoth.

- Your old domain will need a sitemap so your first step would be to create one
- Develop content for the new domain, such as the description of your company, about us, contact information, mission statement and other basics that can be easily linked
- Now once you have set up the domain, its time you make it live
- Go to Google Webmaster Tools and get your new domain and old domain registered and verified
- To inform your visitors about the transition, enable a 404 page with the old domain so your visitors remain aware of the process and the new domain
- Test the redirects in the development environment from the old domain to the new one. (This should be a 1:1 redirect)
- Now implement a 301 redirect for your old domain to the new domain
- To allow search engines to crawl your old URLs, submit the old sitemap to search engines such as Google and Bing. (You can change their index accordingly as the submission pages are within Bing Webmaster Center and Google Webmaster Tools)
- From Google Webmaster Tools, open and fill up the "Change Address"
- To make sure all URLs have been verified by Google and Bing, create a new sitemap and submit it to the search engines
- Google Webmaster Tools and Bing Webmaster Center will run the diagnostics for the sitemap and fix any errors found

Now you are good to go. To make sure your new domain is stable and properly indexed you must monitor search engine results.

Don't forget to drop a comment with your queries about changing domains.

Zeeshan Khalid is a web entrepreneur and an eCommerce specialist, and the CEO of FME extensions.

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Your images, infographics, and memes, too, can be used for link bu

ilding to turn your page into a link magnet. Image link building tips with examples.

The Transformation of Search Summit 2019 will take place in New York on Oct. 25. Spea

kers include experts from Disney, Pinterest, Mastercard, and Microsoft.

Data science focuses on eliminating guesswork from SEO. Brands like Airbnb and Ne

tflix are doing it and so can you. Tips to improve SEO using data science.

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