

DELIVERY TEMPLATE

Website Migration Runbook

A migration plan that protects the traffic you already have, with the rollback written before the cutover rather than during it.

Migrations lose traffic for boringly consistent reasons: an incomplete URL map, canonical tags pointing at the old host, or a cutover nobody could reverse. This runbook sequences the work, keeps a real inventory, and forces a rollback decision with a named owner and a trigger before anything moves.

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How to use this runbook

The single biggest predictor of a clean migration is whether the URL map was built from a crawl or from someone's memory of the site.

- 1 **Baseline first.** You cannot prove a migration went well without numbers from before it. Capture them in section 3 and keep them.
- 2 **Crawl the old site, do not list it.** Sites always contain more indexed URLs than anyone thinks, and the forgotten ones are usually the ones with links.
- 3 **Change one thing at a time.** A redesign, a platform change, and a domain change in one release makes any traffic drop impossible to diagnose.
- 4 **Write the rollback before the cutover.** Under pressure, nobody designs a good rollback. Decide the trigger and the owner while it is still hypothetical.
- 5 **Expect a dip and say so up front.** A short fluctuation is normal. Setting that expectation before launch is the difference between a routine week and a crisis call.

SITE	MIGRATION TYPE	PLANNED CUTOVER

Migration types and what each risks

TYPE	WHAT CHANGES	MAIN RISK	TRAFFIC RISK
Hosting move	Server only	DNS and email cutover, missed cron jobs	Low
Platform move	CMS and templates	URL structure changes silently	Medium
Redesign	Templates and content	Content pruned without redirects	Medium
Domain change	Hostname	Redirect chains, lost authority signals	High
Consolidation	Several sites into one	Duplicate content and cannibalisation	High
HTTPS or URL scheme	Protocol or structure	Mixed content, canonical mismatch	Medium

ONE AT A TIME

Combining a redesign with a domain change halves your ability to diagnose what went wrong. If the schedule forces both, separate them by at least four weeks so each has its own before-and-after.

This migration

TYPE SELECTED

WHAT IS DELIBERATELY NOT CHANGING

Protects your diagnosis later

Inventory and baseline

Capture these before touching anything. Every one of them is impossible to reconstruct after cutover.

Baseline numbers

METRIC	SOURCE	VALUE	CAPTURED ON
Indexed pages	Search Console		
Organic clicks, last 28 days	Search Console		
Total sessions, last 28 days	Analytics		
Conversions, last 28 days	Analytics		
Top 20 landing pages	Analytics		
Top 50 ranking terms and positions	Rank tracker		
Referring domains	Backlink tool		
Core Web Vitals, mobile	Field data		

Inventory to export and keep

- ☐ Full crawl of the old site, exported
- ☐ All indexed URLs from Search Console
- ☐ All URLs with external links pointing at them
- ☐ Current robots.txt and sitemaps
- ☐ Existing redirect rules already in place
- ☐ Structured data currently emitted
- ☐ Tracking tags and their trigger conditions
- ☐ Email and DNS records as they stand today

KEEP THE CRAWL FILE

Archive the pre-migration crawl somewhere permanent. Six months later, when somebody asks why a page disappeared, it is the only record that it ever existed.

The URL map

Every old URL gets a destination and a decision. No blanks, no bulk redirects to the homepage.

OLD URL	DECISION	NEW URL	STATUS CODE	TESTED

Valid decisions

DECISION	USE WHEN	CODE
Map	A direct equivalent exists on the new site	301
Merge	Several old pages become one new page	301
Retire	Content is genuinely gone and has no equivalent	410
Keep	URL is unchanged by the migration	200

REDIRECTING EVERYTHING TO THE HOMEPAGE IS WORSE THAN A 404

Bulk homepage redirects get treated as soft 404s, so you lose the signal and give the visitor a worse experience than an honest error page. Where nothing relevant exists, a 410 is the more useful answer.

Pre-cutover build

- ☐ New site complete on staging, password protected and noindex verified in the response headers
- ☐ Every redirect rule implemented on staging and tested in bulk against the URL map
- ☐ No redirect chains: every old URL reaches its destination in one hop
- ☐ Canonical tags on the new site point at the new host, not the old one
- ☐ Internal links updated to final URLs rather than relying on redirects
- ☐ Structured data reimplemented and validated
- ☐ Analytics and tag manager configured on the new site with the same goal definitions
- ☐ Search Console property created and verified for the destination
- ☐ robots.txt for production written and reviewed, not copied from staging
- ☐ Sitemaps generated for the new URL structure
- ☐ DNS TTL lowered to 300 seconds at least 24 hours ahead
- ☐ Email records confirmed so mail survives the DNS change
- ☐ Full backup of the old environment, with a restore tested
- ☐ Rollback plan written, section 6 complete and signed off

TEST THE REDIRECTS IN BULK, NOT BY SAMPLING

Run the entire old-URL list through an automated checker against staging. Spot checks pass on the URLs you thought about and miss the ones you forgot, which are exactly the ones at risk.

Cutover sequence

- 1 Announce a content freeze on the old site and confirm everyone has stopped editing.
- 2 Take a final backup of the old environment.
- 3 Deploy the new site to production with the noindex flag still in place.
- 4 Point DNS at the new environment and watch propagation from several locations.
- 5 Verify SSL on the live hostname and every variant, including www.
- 6 Remove noindex and confirm in a live response header that it is gone.
- 7 Verify robots.txt on production allows crawling.
- 8 Run the full redirect test against the live site.
- 9 Submit the new sitemap in Search Console. Keep the old sitemap reachable so the redirects get discovered.
- 10 Use the change of address tool if the domain changed.
- 11 Confirm analytics is recording, and that goals fire on a real completion.
- 12 Crawl the live site end to end and compare page count against the URL map.
- 13 Restore the DNS TTL to its normal value.

KEEP THE OLD SITEMAP ALIVE

Leaving the old sitemap reachable for a few weeks helps search engines find and process the redirects faster. Remove it once coverage has settled.

Rollback plan

Fill this in before cutover. Under pressure, nobody designs a good rollback.

ROLLBACK DECISION OWNER

DECISION DEADLINE

One named person, not a team

How long you will wait before deciding

Triggers: roll back if any of these are true

TRIGGER	THRESHOLD	CHECK BY
Site unreachable or erroring	<u>15</u> minutes	
Checkout or forms failing	Any failure	
Redirects returning 404 in bulk	<u>5</u> percent of mapped URLs	
Traffic collapse against baseline	<u>40</u> percent for <u>4</u> hours	
Data loss or corruption	Any	

Rollback steps

- 1 Point DNS back to the old environment. This is why the TTL was lowered.
- 2 Confirm the old site is serving and SSL is valid.
- 3 Restore any content created on the new site during the window.
- 4 Tell the client what happened, what you are doing, and when you will retry.
- 5 Write the cause down the same day, while it is still accurate.

Post-migration monitoring

WHEN	CHECK	COMPARE AGAINST	DONE
Day 1	Uptime, errors, forms, checkout	Working, not baseline	
Day 1	Crawl live site for 404s and chains	The URL map	
Day 3	Search Console coverage and errors	Pre-migration state	
Week 1	Organic clicks and impressions	Baseline table	
Week 2	Rankings for the top 50 terms	Baseline table	
Week 4	Conversions and revenue	Baseline table	
Week 4	Core Web Vitals field data	Baseline table	
Week 8	Indexed page count settled	Baseline table	

WHAT NORMAL LOOKS LIKE

A short dip in the first two weeks is common while search engines reprocess redirects, and recovery usually follows. What is not normal is a decline that is still deepening at week four. That is a signal to go back to the URL map and the canonical tags rather than to wait longer.

CLOSE IT OUT

At week eight, write one page: what moved, what recovered, what did not, and what you would sequence differently. It takes twenty minutes and it is the only reason the next migration goes better than this one.

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