.blog

How to move your blog to a new domain

A step-by-step guide to moving to a new online address with your traffic and rankings intact

CONTENTS

Step 1 - Migration

Step 2 - Planning

Step 3 - Going Live

Step 4 - Monitoring your migration

Finish

Worried about changing your online address? The impact it could have on traffic and your ability to rank?

Moving your blog to a new name can seem, well, a little scary. But it doesn't have to be!

Domain migrations are actually common practice. With a bit of organisation, discipline & technical know-how (which we're going to give you!), you can switch to a new online address.

If done correctly, both your visitors and the search engines will understand that you've moved. Plus, you'll be far less likely to see a long-term drop in traffic.

Our guide will give you an overview of the process. Every migration causes a period of fluctuation, but you can make the transition as smooth as possible.

Whether you are doing this yourself or passing the work to a developer, this guide will put you in control.

There's a space for you to mark each step as you progress, and a handy checklist at the end. We'll even share our favourite tools for each task and some helpful reading.

Ready to get started? Great, let's begin!

Planning and running the move from your old domain to your new one can be broken down into four key stages.

The good news is that you don't have to do them all in one go. In fact, going through each as a separate project is a great way to keep in control and not be overwhelmed with information.

1. Knowing when you need a domain migration

Not sure if you should migrate your blog to a new online home? In what situations you should consider it? We'll talk you through the times the move to a new domain is a great option.

2. Pre-launch: Planning a migration

Before you do any kind of migration, you need to define your plan. And in this chapter, we'll show you how to map out the process, understand what you're changing and keep in control during the move.

3. Launch: Going live with your new domain

It's time to move to your new online home! All the hard work and preparation can now be put into practice, but a strict set of steps must be implemented to ensure it goes smoothly.

4. Post-launch: Monitoring your migration

Once your new domain is up and running, you're close to finishing your migration. Now you need to perform a series of checks to make sure all is working as expected and that your visitors and search engines are getting the experience you want.

Knowing when you need a new domain

For many of us, our reason for considering a new domain will fall into one of several common causes.

Rebranding

One of the most common reasons is an overall rebranding of your blog. This can present questions we have to answer.

Firstly, how will your audience react? You'll want to take extra care with the customer experience of the new site. Secondly, we know that search engines such as Google take notice of how often a brand is mentioned and searched for.

Changing to a more relevant domain

Another common reason is changing from a long unspecific domain to a shorter more relevant domain. Relevance can be related to things like site content or geographic location.

Moving from a hosted service to your own domain

Often, websites start out on shared hosted services, such as WordPress.com, Squarespace or Tumblr.

These usually live on a sub-domain[1] on that service's domain, such as yourblog. wordpress.com.

Upgrading to your own domain puts your identity first and allows you to remain platform independent. This allows you to move between platforms without changing your address. These hosted services will often handle the migration process for you, but if you are also moving to your own hosting at the same time, you'll need to follow the migration process.

Footnotes

1 A subdivision of a domain, each of which can act as a separate website

When NOT to migrate to a new domain

If possible, try not to do the domain migration at the same time as other big changes such as

- Changing your blogging platform[3]
- Editing the design of your blog (the look and feel, imagery, logos, etc.)
- Editing your content (the copy on the blog)
- Changing the structure of the site, such as removing/ combining sections, editing the URLs, changing the navigation, etc.

There are times when doing two or more of these in parallel can't be helped. Reducing or staggering the work as much as possible will not only reduce stress, it will make it easier to get each stage correct!
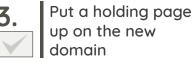
Want to learn more?

- What are ccTLDs? - wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_code_top-level_domain
- Telling Google your target country - support.google.com/webmasters/answer/62399
- How to tell if your website has been hit with a search engine penalty - semrush.com/blog/tell-site-hit-google-penalty

Planning your migration

So, you've looked at the options and know that a domain migration is the perfect move. Now it's time to get started.

1. Check the history of your new domain

Before you do anything else, make sure you know the history of your new domain. Has it ever been used before? Does it have backlinks[2] pointing to it? Even a manual penalty applied to it?

3. Put a holding page up on the new domain

Even if it is something as simple as a single page introducing the new brand or saying Coming Soon. Add contact information and any detail you can to make it helpful to anyone who finds it.
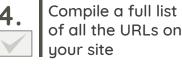
2. Verify domains in Search Console

Google's Search Console gives you detailed (and free!) information on what it thinks about your site, so claim and verify your new domain. Invaluable for any website, but especially helpful during migrations.

4. Compile a full list of all the URLs on your site

Gather all the page addresses you can find. First of all, crawl your blog[3] to find all the URLs Google would see. Then use your blogging platform to list all URLs (if an option) and get all the pages from Google Analytics that have had traffic. Our aim is a comprehensive master list of URLs.

Footnotes

2	A link from another website pointing to your domain
3	Using a tool called a web crawler, which we use to find all the pages on a website. Popular ones include Screaming Frog's SEO Spider, DeepCrawl and the Xenu Link Sleuth

5. | Audit the current site

Using your crawl and Search Console, look for existing redirects, references to pages that don't exist (known as 404 errors[4]) and soft 404 errors[5] that are being reported. Decide if any old URLs need to be redirected or if they should be marked as removed.

6. | Gather all the external links pointing to your domain

Not only will this help with identifying all your URLs, we want to pinpoint our most important external links.

7. | Benchmark your current rankings

In order to know how successful the migration has been, we need to know how well we are doing right now. Which search terms does your old domain appear for? This can be done with paid tools such as Sistrix, SearchMetrics and SEMrush or with Google's Search Console. If you are using rank tracking software to monitor your target keywords, take a reading of these.

8. | Benchmark your current traffic

We also want to understand the success of our content and the pages driving organic traffic. Use your analytics software to record the visits, sessions, conversions, bounce rates and anything else important for each URL.

9. | Benchmark your current indexation

In Search Console (& Bing's Webmaster Tools) note how many URLs are indexed. Also submit an XML sitemap[6], if you haven't already, to see how many of the URLs you think you have are indexed - we want to make sure this matches up (or improves) on the new domain!

Footnotes	
4	A 404 error occurs when a page cannot be found on the server – essentially it tells the visitor that a file can't be found at this address
5	When a site acts as though a page doesn't exist, but without giving a correct 404 error
6	A file that lets us communicate all our important URLs directly to search engines

10. | Generate a sitemap for the new domain

When the new blog is launched, you will submit this new one to the search engines so they quickly have the new URLs. There are lots of tools online to help you generate your XML sitemap. One tool we recommend is **https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/xml-sitemap-generator/**
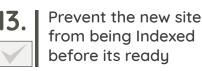
11. | Create a custom 404 (page not found) page for the current domain

You can make users who experience errors aware of the site migration and even ask for feedback by adding a temporary message on your new 404 page. For example, "We recently moved to a new domain. If you think this page should be here, please let us know by emailing **support@yourdomain.com**".

12. | Map your redirects[7]

Map your existing pages to your new ones (we recommend using a spreadsheet). In many cases, your URL will remain the same, but with the new domain in place, so a rewrite rule can be set up to replace the old domain with the new. For example, **http://www.olddomain/about-us** would map to **http://www.newdomain/about-us**. This way, any URL that has not been redirected will return your new 404 page. You might also take this opportunity to remove some pages and deal with errors (such as 404s) or existing redirects. This can be a detailed task, so be patient!

13. | Prevent the new site from being Indexed before its ready

Apart from your landing page, we want to stop the new domain from being indexed (to stop search engines seeing the same content twice). This can be done via your robots.txt file,[8] using meta=noindex tags[9] and/or password protection.

Footnotes	
7	An instruction we can add to our server, redirecting a visitor from one address to another address
8	A text file on your site used to give instructions to web robots or crawlers (such as Googlebot)
9	These are special bits of code on the page that ask search engines not to include a page in their index

14. Create redirects

Importantly, we want to be using 301 redirects.[10] These tell search engines and - from an experience perspective - your users, that the new domain page has replaced the old one. It also instructs search engines to pass all authority associated with the old page to the new one. If you are moving to a new domain with exactly the same URLs, you can do a domain-wide redirect rule - one rule to capture all uses of the old domain. This requires only a little bit of learning on how to use your server (or asking an expert for help).

15. Check Google Analytics tagging

To maintain data, we need to ensure the Google Analytics (or your analytics package of choice) tagging is fully retained on the new domain. Check the development version of the site before launch. Even though it is the same website, we want to be sure important elements such as our Google Analytics code (which is added to track visitors) have been kept.

Footnotes

10 A type of redirect that tells anyone who requests a page that it has permanently moved and where it can be found

Want to learn more?

- Guidance from Google on changing your website's domain name - youtube.com/watch?v=wATxftE8ooE
- Google's advice on moving content to a new location - webmasters.googleblog.com/2012/04/how-to-move-your-content-to-new.html
- How to verify your site on Google's Search Console (vital for doing a migration!) - support.google.com/webmasters/answer/35179?hl=en
- Advice from Google on moving a site with URL changes: support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6033049
- How do I create a 301 redirect? - www.sistrix.com/ask-sistrix/onpage-optimisation/http-status-code/3xx-redirection/how-do-i-create-a-301-redirect/ & www.webconfs.com/154/301-redirects-how-to-redirect-your-website/
- Tools to help you see the backlinks for your domain (These all have free options, but require payment for full data):
  - moz.com/researchtools/ose/
  - ahrefs.com
  - majestic.com
- How redirects work - moz.com/learn/seo/redirection
- A tool that helps you create redirect instructions for htaccess files - www.aleydasolis.com/htaccess-redirects-generator/
- How to use Screaming Frog to crawl & audit your website - www.seerinteractive.com/blog/screaming-frog-guide/

Going live with your new domain

The exciting bit! This stage is when the hard work of your planning comes together.

16. Launch the new domain!

Publish your blog on its new domain (which will likely look very similar to the current site, but with updated internal links).

17. Open up the new domain for business

Remove the password protection, any meta robots noindex tags and the line disallowing access in the robots.txt file. Now everyone (especially the search engines) can crawl the site and see your content!

18. Implement the 301 redirects

Back on your original domain, put your 301 redirects live. Preferably, these are 1:1 redirects[11] for each original URL. Any redirects for URLs you have should also be live at this point.

19. Use Google's Change of Address tool

Within Search Console there is a handy feature called the Change of Address tool. It does exactly what you'd think - it tells Google that this domain has now been moved to another. You have to have both domains verified to do this.

Footnotes

11 A direct redirect from the old URL to the new, without jumping to any other URLs along the way

20. Encourage Google to check out your new domain

Within the Search Console account for the new domain, use the Fetch as Googlebot tool to make sure Google sees your homepage and most important pages as a human visitor would. Then, use the Submit to Index option for that URL to request that Google indexes your new page.

21. Submit your XML sitemap(s) in Search Console

This will encourage Google to crawl all your new URLs. You will also see how many of those pages are indexed, a number that should increase over time. You can also submit the XML sitemap you created for your old domain to encourage Google to see the 301 redirects in place and visit your new site.

22. Test your redirects

Using your crawling tool, enter in the master list of all URLs from your old domain. Make sure every single URL is redirecting to the new domain

23. Check, rename & annotate Google Analytics

Go to your Google Analytics profile (if you have one) and use the Real Time reports to make sure it is working correctly. Then you should add an annotation to note when the migration was launched and rename the account.

24. Update external links

Remember those important external links we identified earlier? Now is the time to get them changed to the new domain. Reach out to the site owners, explain the situation and ask if they can help and update their site. Additionally, any other links you can change, such as social profiles, should be done now.

Want to learn more?

- Using the change of address tool in Search Console - support.google.com/webmasters/answer/83106
- How to rename your Google Analytics profiles after a migration (to help prevent any confusion) - koozai.com/blog/search-marketing/how-to-change-website-domain-in-google-analytics-9918/
- Asking Google to crawl and index your new URLs - support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6065812?hl=en
- Starting the site move - support.google.com/webmasters/answer/6033080

Monitoring your migration

The new domain is live! The migration is complete! We're close, but not done yet.

25. Create fresh links to your new domain

To encourage search engines to crawl the new domain and boost its authority, you need to create fresh promotion for your blog. By doing so, you'll earn new links which will be found by the search engines. PR around the new blog/branding is a great way to start.

26. Monitor indexation numbers

Using the Sitemaps and Index Status tools within Search Console, regularly check how many of your URLs are indexed by Google. If the number of URLs is much lower or higher than the number of pages in your sitemap, then this may be a sign that there are indexation issues.

27. Crawl the new blog for errors

Keep checking your new domain for any errors or issues visitors or search engines might find. The best way to do this is to use one of the many crawler tools available to proactively look for issues. You should also check out the Crawl Errors[12] report in Search Console every day for the first few

28. Check your rankings & visibility

Using the benchmarks we took in the planning stage, monitor how well the new domain is ranking for your target keywords. Also use visibility tools to see how it is performing overall. If all goes well, you'll see a cross-over in your charts as the new domain replaces the old.

Want to learn more?

- How to identify indexation and content issues: https://www.branded3.com/blog/how-to-identify-indexation-and-content-issues-in-10-minutes/

Footnotes

12 A tool in Search Console that tells you how many broken links and other types of issues Google finds on your site

29. Traffic & conversions

Obviously, your biggest indicator of success is traffic and conversions.[13] All migrations see some turbulence, but you've given yourself the best chance to see it return to normal (usually in 4-12 weeks). Pay attention to the individual pages that performed well for you before - are you seeing a comparable performance?

30. Maintain your redirects

You should keep your redirects in place at least until all activity for the old domain stops (which can take many months). We'd recommend keeping your redirects in place **permanently** however, just to make sure all visitors will always end up in the right place.

Footnotes

13 When someone performs a target action on our blog, such as filling out a form or signing up for the newsletter

And to finish

That's it! You've made it.

You now know all the steps you need to migrate your domain. Remember, even though your blog content might be the same, Google will treat it for what it is, an entirely new identity.

You will always see some bumps in rankings and traffic. But, a migration and redirection strategy is the best way to protect the investment you've made in your blog.

Planning carefully, informing your audience about the change and monitoring what is happening are your tools for success.

You can make sure that your visitors continue to have the great experience they expect from your blog, and that they will be taken to the right content, no matter how they access it.

Now get out there and launch your perfect domain!

Planning your migration

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3. Put a holding page up on the new domain
4. Compile a full list of all the URLs on your site
5. Audit the current site
6. Gather all the external links pointing to your domain
7. Benchmark your current rankings
8. Benchmark your current traffic
9. Benchmark your current indexation
10. Generate a sitemap for the new domain
11. Create a custom 404 (page not found) page for the current domain
12. Map your redirects
13. Prevent the new site from being indexed before it's ready
14. Create redirects
15. Check Google Analytics tagging

Going live with my domain

16. Launch the new domain!
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18. Implement the 301 redirects
19. Use Google's Change of Address tool
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21. Submit your XML sitemap(s) in Search Console
22. Test your redirects
23. Check, rename & annotate Google Analytics
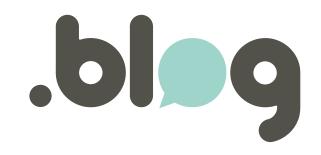24. Update external links

Monitoring your migration

25. Create fresh links to new domain
26. Monitor indexation numbers
27. Crawl the new blog for errors
28. Check your rankings & visibility
29. Traffic & conversions
30. Maintain your redirects

Notes

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About us

.blog run by Knock Knock, WHOIS There is a subsidiary of Automattic, the parent company of WordPress.com and Jetpack. It was created in 2015 to manage the launch and development of the .blog gTLD.

Automattic has been working towards offering .blog domain names almost since its inception, in 2005. Our goal is to offer bloggers across the world a great new name space at a great price — whether they are WordPress users or not.

.blog

Why .blog?

Blogs have grown from simple online diaries into the content that fuels the Internet. But no matter what you create - or why you create it - own what you create by putting it on your domain. It's time to be heard. It's time to stop compromising. It's time to own your online presence.

Get your .blog

Join the blogging evolution.

Go to **my.blog**

Created in
association with

the UK
DOMAIN
by NOMINET

.uk   .co.uk   .org.uk   .me.uk

theukdomain.uk