SkillNewton

Website Launch SEO Checklist

Launch or relaunch a website without losing search traffic: pre-launch checks, launch-day steps and what to monitor for 30 days.

Use this checklist when you launch a new website, redesign an existing one or move to a new domain or CMS. Most launch problems that hurt search traffic are avoidable: a leftover noindex tag, a robots.txt that blocks everything, or old URLs with no redirects. The checklist is split into three stages, before launch, launch day and the first 30 days, so you can assign each task to the right person and the right time.

How to use it

1. **Start before development ends.** Begin the pre-launch section while the site is still on staging, especially the redirect map.
2. **Agree owners and timing.** Assign each item to a developer, SEO or content owner and schedule launch-day tasks.
3. **Follow the launch-day list in order.** Remove staging protections, check robots and redirects, then submit the sitemap.
4. **Monitor for 30 days.** Check Search Console and analytics regularly and fix new errors quickly.

Pre-launch: staging and planning

- [ ] Protect the staging site with a password or IP restriction
  This keeps search engines and the public out; robots.txt alone does not stop pages being indexed.
- [ ] Crawl the current live site and save the results
  Keep a full list of URLs, titles, status codes and canonicals as a baseline.
- [ ] Export top pages by traffic and backlinks
  Use Search Console, analytics and a backlink tool so you know which URLs must be preserved.
- [ ] Record current performance
  Save clicks, impressions, top queries and key events so you can compare after launch.
- [ ] Decide the final URL structure
  Keep existing URLs where possible; every changed URL needs a redirect.

Pre-launch: redirects and content

- [ ] Build a redirect map from every old URL to its new equivalent
  Map one-to-one to the closest matching page; avoid sending everything to the homepage.
- [ ] Test the redirect map on staging
  Crawl the list of old URLs and confirm each returns a single 301 to a 200 page.
- [ ] Carry over titles, meta descriptions and headings
  Check that optimised on-page elements were not lost in the new templates.
- [ ] Keep valuable content
  Do not cut text from pages that rank well just to fit a new design.

- [ ] Update internal links to the new URLs
  Internal links should point directly to final URLs, not through redirects.
- [ ] Prepare structured data on all templates
  Validate each template with the Rich Results Test before launch.

Pre-launch: technical and tracking

- [ ] Prepare the production robots.txt
  Make sure it does not contain `Disallow: /` carried over from staging.
- [ ] Prepare the XML sitemap with new canonical URLs
  It should generate automatically on the live domain.
- [ ] Install analytics and tag manager on all templates
  Test that page views and key events fire once, using GA4 DebugView or Tag Assistant.
- [ ] Test page speed and mobile layout
  Check key templates in Lighthouse and on real phones before launch.
- [ ] Confirm HTTPS is ready on the live domain
  The certificate must cover all hostnames you use, including www.

Launch day

- [ ] Remove password protection and staging noindex
  Check meta robots tags and X-Robots-Tag HTTP headers on key templates.
- [ ] Check the live robots.txt
  Open it in a browser and test key URLs in the robots.txt report in Search Console.
- [ ] Test the redirects on the live site
  Crawl the old URL list again and fix any 404s or chains straight away.
- [ ] Check canonical tags use the live domain
  Canonicals pointing to the staging domain are a common launch mistake.
- [ ] Verify the site in Search Console
  A Domain property verified by a DNS TXT record covers all subdomains and protocols.
- [ ] Submit the XML sitemap
  Submit it in the Sitemaps report and check it is fetched without errors.
- [ ] Use the Change of Address tool if the domain changed
  Run it from the old domain's Search Console property after redirects are live.
- [ ] Inspect and request indexing for key pages
  Use URL Inspection on the homepage and main category pages.

First 30 days

- [ ] Monitor the Page indexing report
  Watch for spikes in "Not found (404)", "Page with redirect" or noindex exclusions.
- [ ] Check 404 errors and add missing redirects
  Use Search Console, server logs and analytics to find old URLs still being requested.
- [ ] Compare traffic and rankings with the baseline
  Track clicks and impressions for top pages and queries; investigate pages with large drops.

- [ ] **Check Crawl stats**
  An increase in crawling after launch is normal; persistent server errors are not.
- [ ] **Watch Core Web Vitals as field data arrives**
  Real-user data takes several weeks to build up for a new site.
- [ ] **Update external links you control**
  Change URLs on social profiles, Google Business Profile, directories and email signatures.
- [ ] **Keep redirects in place**
  Do not remove migration redirects after a few weeks; Google recommends at least a year.

Online version, with the matching free guide: skillnewton.com/resources/templates/website-launch-seo-checklist/

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