

INSTANT REGRET



**10 SEO MISTAKES
TO AVOID WHEN
REDESIGNING YOUR WEBSITE**

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Mistake #1: Not Making SEO a Priority from Day 1

The glitz, the glam, the glorious design elements that make your website look like a million bucks ... When dreaming of a website redesign, it's easy to focus only on those features that are appealing to the eye. But to ensure your new site will truly resonate with your target audience (and to save yourself from some major headaches down the road) you need Search Engine Optimization to be ingrained in your redesign strategy from the very beginning.

“You have to make room in your budget for SEO work or it won't get done.”

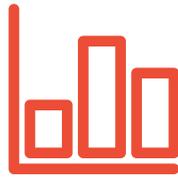
Think of it this way: you could spend all the money in the world on building a new, beautiful hotel with all the bells and whistles. But if no one knows how to find your hotel, you'll never do any business.

Don't build a hotel that no one can find!

How You Make SEO a Priority:

1. **You ask for it from a web design agency.** They need to know that you understand the value of an optimized website and that this should be a part of the project plan.
2. **You budget for SEO work.** Optimizing a website takes time, it's hard to see with your eyes, and the rewards won't come for months. So design agencies will skip the tedious work of SEO if you aren't willing to pay for the service. SEO is not a free add-on.
3. **You vet web design agencies for competence.** Make sure they understand how to optimize websites for search engines. Agencies loves to talk about SEO, but be diligent and vet the agencies.

Learn More on Page 10: “Vetting a Design Agency”



Mistake #2: Not doing a Traffic Audit of Your Existing Website

Before you bust out the wrecking ball and start demolishing your soon-to-be-forgotten site, make sure you take the time to examine it to determine what's working and what isn't. Here are some key metrics you may want to consider when auditing the traffic of your site:

- Most popular pages / sections.
- Top performing keywords (in terms of rank, traffic, and lead generation)
- Inbound links from other websites
- Number of visits/visitors/unique visitors (monthly average)
- Total number of total pages indexed
- Total number of pages that receive traffic

“Get Google Analytics going today, not after you launch your new website.”

Knowing this information is critical for several reasons. It makes sure that you understand which sections have real value, what keywords are working, who is linking to your site (good and bad), and what is being utterly ignored.

This data informs a lot of awkward conversations that you will have within your company. (e.g. “I know that you worked hard on that section of the website, but fewer than 10 people visit it per quarter.”) Plus, it helps benchmark the success of the new website.

How to Set Up Google Analytics

1. Go to [Google.com/analytics](https://google.com/analytics) and sign up for an account.
2. Copy and paste a tracking code into the header of your website's code. This should be easy if you are using Wordpress or SquareSpace as your current website platform.
3. Confirm that the tracking code is working. Watch your dashboard each day to see your traffic numbers grow.



Mistake #3: Failing to do Keyword and Key Phrase Research

If you listen to the conversations in the hallways and in high level meetings within your company, you will hear a lot of acronyms, jargon, and language from within your industry.

When this language spills over onto your website, it is very off putting to your website visitors. Even worse, it makes your website dead to search engines. Your competitors may find you, but not your potential customers. This is the result of not doing Keyword Research.

For example, smithHOUSE was hired on by Arizona’s #1 landscape design firm to redesign their website and improve their ranking within Google’s search results. We found that when we used the keywords and phrases from around their studio, very few people actually searched for these.

However, after some indepth Keyword Research we came upon some more **casual words and phrases** that people searched for in very high numbers.

“People at a company rarely use the same language as their customers. This is a serious SEO problem.”

<i>Company Language</i>	<i>Most Popular Related Searches:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Landscape Design</i> • <i>Landscape Architecture</i> • <i>Garden Design</i> • <i>Landscape Design and Build</i> • <i>Design and Build Firm</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Backyard Ideas</i> • <i>Landscape Ideas</i> • <i>Cool backyards</i> • <i>Pool Ideas</i> • <i>Beautiful Phoenix Homes</i> • <i>Cool Arizona Landscapes</i> • <i>Arizona Garden Ideas</i>

When we designed the website, we included only the essential words and phrases from the left column. But we put much more focus on titling out images and loading our metadata with the most searched words and phrases in the right column.

The results: 5 months later, our client was on Page 1 of Google’s search results.



Mistake #4: Not Setting Up 301 Redirects

A 301 redirect is a permanent redirect from one URL to another. Whether you're switching domain names, restructuring your URLs (more on that in the next section), or consolidating content as part of your website redesign, setting up 301 redirects is crucial to ensuring any "SEO cred" from your old URLs gets transferred to your new URLs.

Here's an example. Let's say your current site has a "Team" page (at [yoursite.com/team](#)), as well as a "Culture" page (at [yoursite.com/culture](#)). However, as part of your website redesign, you want to consolidate the content from those two pages into a single "About Us" page (at [yoursite.com/about](#)). To transfer the SEO authority of those pages to your new page, you'll want to set up 301 redirects so that [yoursite.com/team](#) and [yoursite.com/culture](#) both send folks to the new URL, [yoursite.com/about](#).

Failure to set up 301 redirects for pages that you move or delete can result in a drop in rankings as well as an influx in 404 error messages for your site's visitors. Nobody wants to see "404 Page Not Found."

The Process

This takes patience and time. Pour some coffee. Open up Google Sheets or MS Excel and pull up your old and new websites:

1. Create a new spreadsheet and label three columns: Old Section, New Section, and Notes.
2. Click through every section of your old website and paste the URL
3. Click through your new website and paste in the URL of the corresponding section.

Don't have time for a full website review? Grab the URLs of the top sections on your primary nav bar. Then pull URLs of the the most popular 20 pages from your Google Analytics dashboard.

Where do I set up a 301 Redirect?

301 Redirects can be created in different places:

- **DNS** - Your Domain Name Server, which is often the same company where registered your website domain name (e.g. GoDaddy.com or Register.com).
- **Web Host** - 301 Redirects can also be set up with the company that hosts your website (e.g. BlueHost.com, WPengine.com).

You can also edit your website's htaccess file.



Mistake #5: Not Implementing Responsive Design

As Google's preferred configuration for mobile-optimized websites, responsive design is your best option for two reasons:

1. **Better User Experience** - Google rewards companies who give users on mobile devices a good experience. Your website gets more cool points than an old school website.
2. **Better Page Indexing** - With responsive design, all of your website's URLs are the same across all devices, and they all serve up the same HTML code. This isn't the case with other mobile configurations, like setting up a separate, mobile-only site (which requires a different set of URLs) or implementing dynamic serving (which uses the same URLs but serves up different HTML).

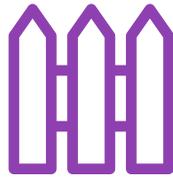
With responsive design, the only thing that changes across devices is the styling (which is controlled by CSS). This configuration makes it easier for Google to crawl your pages and retrieve your content. To quote Google,

“This improvement in crawling efficiency can indirectly help Google index more of the site's contents and keep it appropriately fresh.”

Responsive Design Defined

When the same website looks good on a desktop computer, on a iPad, or an iPhone. The website “responds” to the size of your screen and rearranges content and navigation so that it's useful to you.

If you open a website on a desktop computer in your web browser, you drag the corner of your browser to make it wider or more narrow. If the website magically changes to fit the new size and looks great doing it, then it is **responsive**. Sometimes responsive design is described as “mobile responsive design.”



Mistake #6: Failing to Consider your URL Structure

If your site is littered with indecipherable URLs that don't align well with the actual content of your site pages, restructuring your URLs should definitely be a priority during your next website redesign.

Just like real people, search engines prefer URLs that make it easy to understand what your page content is all about. For example:

Bad: http://yoursite.com/?page_id=81

Good: <http://yoursite.com/secret-wedding-reception-locations-in-san-diego>

General Rules for Crafting a URL:

- Don't be afraid of long URLs. A descriptive URL helps your users. They may take up a lot of character space when you paste them into email or Twitter, but that's what URL shorteners like Bit.ly and TinyURL are for."
- Make sure the keyword or key phrase focus of the website shows up in your URL.
- Don't repeat a keyword twice in a URL. It's a sign of "keyword stuffing" which is an old school SEO trick that doesn't work anymore.
- Use dashes (-) between words instead of underscores (_). Google treats dashes as separators, which means it can return results when you search for a single word that appears in a URL and when you search for a group of words that appears in a URL. In contrast, Google treats underscores as connectors, which means it will only return results when you search for a group of connected words that appears in a URL. The bottom line: using dashes creates more opportunities for your pages to be discovered.



Mistake #7: Leaving Shady Inbound Links in Place

The two pillars of early SEO strategy (*think early 2000's*) were On-page Search Engine Optimization and Inbound Links. Let's take a look at how those pillars hold up in today's environment:

I. On-page SEO

This pillar made sure that you were focused on a single keyword and that your title, URL structure, content, tags, categories, and meta-data all included this keyword.

This strategy is still a good rule of thumb today. It's more refined and nuanced today, but it's the same mechanics. On-page SEO is fundamentally about creating focused content wrapped in metadata that search engines love.

II. Inbound Links

These links proved that other websites liked your website enough to link to you. This validated that you were a cool kid and therefore you should show up first on Google's search results. I'm popular!

This created a massive industry of people gaming Google's system by creating **1000s of fake websites that linked to your website.**

Over the last several years, Google has improved its algorithms so that it's clear when you have shady links coming to your website. Now, in a spirit of justice, Google punishes you if you have shady links. This is known as "negative SEO". (In some cases, spammers will purposely direct lots of low-quality links to your site in order to cause negative SEO).

How do you know if you have shady inbound links?

- If you paid for SEO work several years ago and you didn't understand what they did, you probably paid for shady links.
- If you use Google Analytics, you can see when people arrive at your website through a link from some other website. Click on the links one at a time and you'll know if its a spammy website



What to do about it:

Sign up for Google Webmaster Tools, you'll see a "manual penalty" appear if Google detects one of these low-quality links. You'll then have the option to make such links "no follows" so Google stops paying attention to them.



Mistake #8: You Forgot to Unblock Search Engines

So there you are, ready to push the big green “LAUNCH” button on your newly designed website. The big moment comes and goes, and after hours of combing through the site, admiring its beauty, you stumble across something peculiar: your new, beautiful website isn’t showing up in Google’s search results!

When you search for your web address through Google search, you get a loser alert like this:

YourSite.com

The content of this website cannot be detected because the robots.txt prevents search engines from reading this site.

What’s going on here?

The smartest web agencies design websites in “staging environments” that are hidden from your competitors, your customers, and from Google. This way you, the client, can see their progress, but nobody else can.

However, when those pages are pushed from “staging” to “production” when you officially launch your website, it’s easy to forget this final step to update a file called “**robots.txt**” to allow search engine bots to explore your website. Don’t let this happen!

For Wordpress? Go to...

Settings > Reading

Uncheck the box next to “Discourage search engines from indexing this site”

“Forgetting to uncheck the box in Wordpress is a silly mistake, similar to forgetting to renew your domain name. The good news is that its easy to remedy.”



Mistake #9: Failing to Think like a Human

It's easy to focus on the mechanics of SEO. With the Hummingbird update of 2013, Google gained the ability to recognize full-sentence queries (in contrast to simply picking out the individual words that make up a query). As a result, search has become much more conversational.

Google doesn't want to deliver you "results" anymore, they want to deliver answers. And the best answers don't come from content farms with generic blogs, they come from websites that are crafted with their visitors -- human beings -- in mind.

“Google doesn't want to deliver you 'results' anymore, they want to deliver answers.”

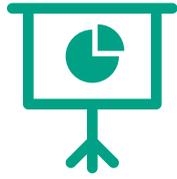
Are Keywords Irrelevant Today?

It's true that you can no longer keyword-stuff your way to search ranking success. Today, if Google finds out that you are blatantly overusing (or hiding) keywords on your site, your credibility (and rankings) could take a serious hit.

But make no mistake--**keyword and key phrases are absolutely relevant**, but for different reasons. Deciding on the keyword or key phrase for a blog or section of your website gives focused, clear content for your readers. It's no longer a game that you play with the Google bots. It's winning search engine ranking based on the value that you offer readers when you write something awesome.

In fact, Google rewards websites that have focused, valuable content. To quote from Google directly,

“In creating a helpful, information-rich site, write pages that clearly and accurately describe your topic. Think about the words users would type to find your pages and include those words on your site.”



Mistake #10: Forgetting to Follow-Through

SEO is an essential part of designing a great website, and you should see results in the the first months after launching your website.

One of our clients was not ranked in the top 200 pages of Google. (That's 20 pages of the Goooooogle search results. We gave up after that and stopped looking). Twelve months after we launched their new website, their company was on Page 1 of Google search results.

This stuff really works.

Benchmarking Success

Track your progress every week after your launch:

1. Remember your keywords and keyphrases you discovered through research early in the project? Make a habit of searching for those same keywords and phrases.
2. Use a free app like Evernote to capture your screen. Mark it up with notes that highlight where you are showing up in the search results.
3. Watch your Google Analytics. Compare your old site with your new site. Google Analytics has some beautiful charts and graphs that everyone adores.
4. Bring this data into the meetings with your company's leaders to assess your progress. This will make for an informed, productive discussion about what's working and what's not working on your website.

And don't forget to celebrate with your team. You've all worked hard and you deserve the rewards! ■

Does SEO Drive Sales?

An Optimized Website is Step 1. *Inbound Marketing* is Step 2.

Now that you've made it through the mechanics of SEO, it's time look forward to the next burst of activity on your website. It's all about your visitors:

“SEO is essential when rebuilding your website. But there is more work to be done”

- How are you answering common questions about your industry? How will your company show thought leadership through your blog?
- How are you crafting new content and resources for your company's buyer personas?
- How are you moving them along in their buyer's journey?
- How are you nurturing those leads through email outreach?
- Have you crafted and scheduled campaigns to draw in new visitors through social media?

The answers to all of these questions inside a razor-sharp **inbound marketing strategy** powered through top software. But that's for another eBook.

Keywords Go Where?

Where do you put all of these key words and key phrases?

On-page SEO

It's easy to paste in content, but it takes time and patience to make sure each page and post is optimized:

- Tags
- Categories
- Page name
- Page content
- Page title
- Page meta description
- Summaries for when people share your page on Twitter and Facebook.

This should go well if you have Wordpress and a plugin called Yoast SEO.

Image Names, Image Metadata

You should never call a photo something generic because this says nothing of what the image is about. This is easy to skip this step when building a website. What image name below is better for you?

- [ourStaff.jpg](#)
- [webDesignServices_phoenix_smithHOUSE_ourStaff.jpg](#)

Link Structure

Don't be lazy and use links link "click here" when linking to different sections of your website. Be specific, and use the Title attribute.

Our [inbound marketing services](http://smithhousedesign.com/web-design-seo/inbound-marketing/ "Inbound Marketing in Phoenix") help drive traffic to your site and turn visitors into customers.

Outbound Links

Throughout your website, and especially in your blog, you should link to reputable, related websites. e.g. industry trends websites, university research, popular bloggers, current news and events.

Inbound links

If you have a good relationship with others in your industry, or with clients that you've worked with in the past, ask them to link to your website. Make it easy for them by creating the proper code and asking them where to put it. Learn about the dangers of inbound links on page 11.

Where else?

- URL Structure - Page 10
- Focused Content - Page 13

Vetting a Web Design Agency

How do you know they know?

Your design agency should have a very strong opinion when it comes to SEO. They should be able to speak confidently on the subject and give clear answers to specific questions. They should be able to address misconceptions, discuss trends, and have SEO integrated into their project plan.

“If you cannot explain SEO simply, you don’t understand SEO well enough.”

- What are your favorite SEO practices?
- What SEO techniques do you think are often overlooked?
- What SEO tricks do you see going away?
- How is SEO different today than it was a few years ago?
- Where do you see SEO going in the upcoming years?
- Can you show me examples of other SEO work that you’ve done with other clients?
- Can you show me side-by-side pages of their old website with their new website, and what you did to make the new page better?
- How much time on a project do you commit to SEO?
- What tools do you use to make sure websites are optimized for search engines?

Bottom Line: Good Practitioners are Good Teachers

Good agencies should be eager to teach and to show you how they work. Ignore the agencies who act like it’s secret science. Trust the agencies that make you feel informed and confident.



About the Author

Matt S. Smith is the president and founder of smithHOUSE, a creative/digital agency based out of Phoenix, Arizona. Smith has a BS in Industrial Design from Georgia Tech and an MBA from the W.P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University. He is married and has four daughters.

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