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Guide to moving to a **.cpa** domain

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Overview

Moving your website from one domain name to another can be confusing – but it doesn't need to be, especially considering that companies have been moving domains for years and have amassed a wealth of tips and best practices. Following these best practices will help ensure a smooth transition to your firm's new .**cpa** domain, and can even enhance your online presence and search engine results.

About this guide

This guide to moving to a **.cpa** domain name is a technical guide. It serves as a blueprint for the technical team to make the necessary updates and changes to the website to facilitate a move. It does not provide any guidance about when or why you should move your website to a **.cpa** domain name. If you're reading this, you've most likely already decided to make the move.

This document should be used by the people responsible for developing and making changes to your website. This could be the website team, the webmaster, web developer, or web designer.

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Let's get started

This technical guide covers the most up-to-date best practices for moving your domain name. Its structure mirrors the four-part sequence in which this move should take place:

☁ **Pre-Move** │ ☑ **Pre-Planning** │ ⧉ **Moving Day** │ 💻 **After Moving Day**

Each part of the process involves its own set of tasks, which are detailed here, as we track an imaginary firm's move from myfirmname.com to myfirmname.cpa.

☁ Pre-Move

Successfully accomplishing the tasks in this first phase helps ensure that the entire process will go smoothly – starting with backing up your current website. You will need a copy of the website so that you can technically move the website from one location to another. We recommend making a copy of the website, moving it to a temporary location or to a new web server, and working on the copy – which won't be live to the public.

Make a Website Backup

When is the best time to perform your website backup? It depends on how often you update content on the site. For example, if updates and changes are taking place on a daily or weekly basis, then set a specific date and time based on when you can avoid making further changes to the current version. Think of this as a "code freeze" that allows you to move the files to a new temporary location on another web server, where subsequent changes can be made. Without a code freeze, updates to the current website will be lost when the new site is moved to its new domain.

Once you've made a website backup, move the copy to the new location. There are a few ways to do this, depending on your current setup and web hosting parameters.

- **Set up the new yourfirmname.cpa and add a "disallow" line in the robots.txt file.** This is the ideal setup. Using this approach, the search engines won't index the new website while you work on it – but it will still work, and you'll be able to make necessary changes and updates. Some of the changes you'll need to make are links from one page to another. Since they will be pointing to another page on yourfirmname.cpa, this is a good way to make sure they work properly.

- **Set up a "subdomain" on the current domain name.** This could be something like newsite.yourfirmname. com. While this is not ideal, it can be a temporary place to put the copy while you work on it and make changes.

Each domain name (both the old one and the new one) will have its own location at the end of the move, so it's better to set up the new location at this time. Talk to your web host about adding a new location for the new domain name. This can typically be done on the same web server, or you may need to add a separate web hosting "package" for the new domain name.

Analyzing and Crawling the Website

Once you have made a backup of the website, you'll need to analyze the website using a website crawler tool. This will help you make a comprehensive list of pages on the site. Depending on the size of your website, there are a range of crawlers — some free, some commercial — that can help. Here are several of the leading tools:

Siteliner

This option is often used with more basic websites – those with fewer than approximately 200 pages. Siteliner allows firms to enter the site's home page URL and will then crawl your website, producing a list of pages that can be exported to a file. It delivers more information worth reviewing, but its most important function here is to deliver a list of all the pages on the website.

This is a screen shot of the crawl results from **Siteliner.com**, which can be used to assemble a list of all the pages discovered by the tool. Combine all of the URLs identified into one list.
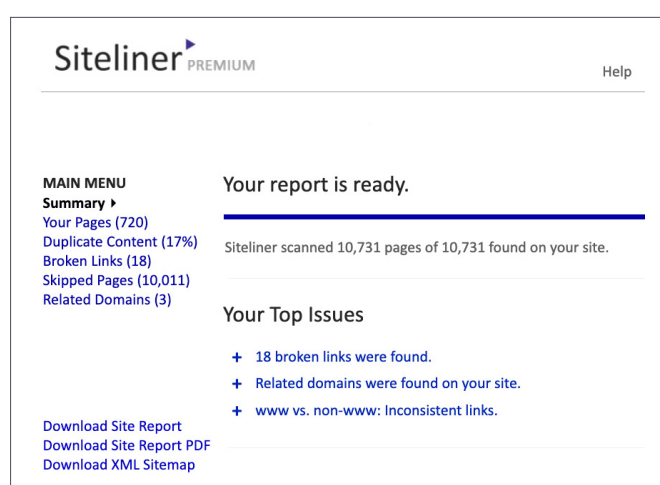

Then, using Google Analytics, (as shown here), log in, select your website (if you have more than one), navigate to the Behavior tab on the left site, then choose **"Site Content"**. Change the time period to at least one year (or more), then click **"Export"** to produce a list of all pages on the website.
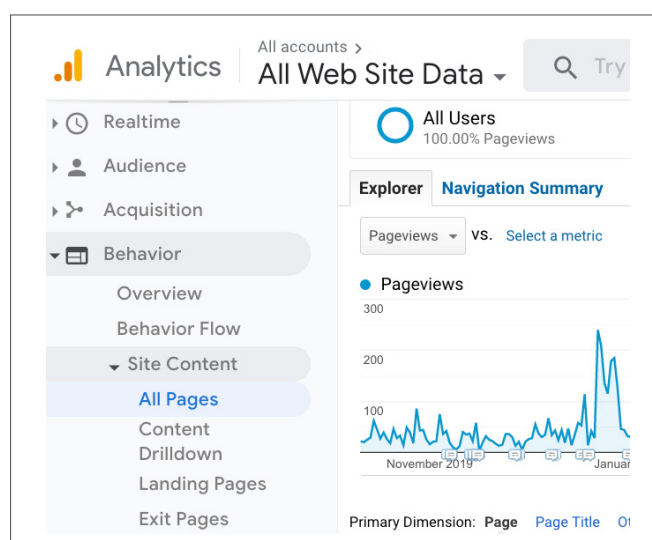
Making sure to verify your website first:

- Enter Google Search Console and click **"Links"** on the left side.

- You will find a page with a list of **"Internal Links"** on the right side of the page. Look for **"Top Linked Pages"**.

- Scroll down to the bottom of that table to find **"more"**. This will take you to the Top Linked Pages –internally list.

- On the top right menu, you can export the list of pages, as shown above.
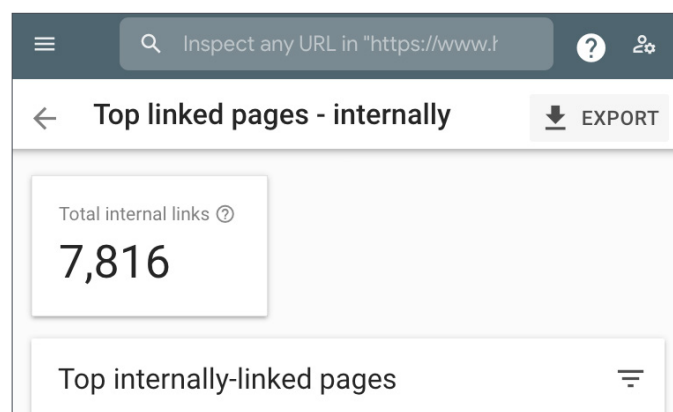
For those using Siteliner, it is recommended that they should also use Google Search Console in tandem with Google Analytics in order to obtain a list of all the web pages on your website, as referenced in the above image. For firms without deep technical know-how on staff, and a smaller website, a tool like Siteliner may be ideal for crawling the site and exporting a list of all pages included there. Combine the lists from Siteliner, Google Search Console, and Google Analytics into one list and remove the duplicates. (Use Microsoft Excel to combine the pages in a list and remove the duplicates.) Save the list for later. This crawler can be found at www.siteliner.com.

Screaming Frog SEO Spider

For firms with basic websites that include up to 1,000 pages, Screaming Frog SEO Spider (a crawler available in both a free and paid version) can be used to scan the site. As with Siteliner, after users enter the website's home page URL, Screaming Frog will find all pages on the website. Connect it to Google Analytics to identify URLs from Google Analytics. This is particularly important since there may be pages on the website that are not "linked" on the current version of the site. By connecting to Google Analytics, users avoid the time investment required to manually export the pages from Google Search Console. Export the pages list to Microsoft Excel to remove any duplicates. This crawler can be found at https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/. We recommend the paid version to ensure you have full access to this tool.

OnCrawl

For firms with extensive websites that include over 1,000 pages, or for those who would like to use a more powerful crawler tool that can ultimately save a significant amount of time, we recommend OnCrawl. This crawler combines a crawl of your website, Google Analytics data, Google Search Console data, and website log files. For firms with expansive websites, it can be cumbersome to find all of the pages that ever existed on the site – OnCrawl can generate such a list. The best approach is to combine data from multiple sources. This paid tool can be found at https://www.oncrawl.com.

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Remove References to the Old Domain Name

The next step is to examine website copy and prepare for the new domain name. Firms using a crawler like Screaming Frog or OnCrawl will be able to find references to the old domain name. The goal is to find any and all references to the old domain name, replacing them with the new domain name. For example, all links in the website's navigation, as well as links to other pages on the website, will need to be updated.

If the website links to yourfirmname.com/contact/ for the contact page, then the firm will need to update all of the links on the website to point to yourfirmname.cpa/contact/. This way, when the site content is live on yourfirmname.cpa, the links do not direct visitors to the old domain name. There are also going to be references in the website's code to images and other files such as .CSS and JavaScript files. Any mentions of the old domain name in the code of the site needs to be updated to reference the new domain name. There are several ways to accomplish these updates.

If your website uses WordPress, there is a plugin that makes such changes relatively easy – especially the **"Better Search Replace" plugin**. Once you add this plugin, use it to search and replace mentions of the old domain name. Simply search for "yourfirmname.com" and replace it with "yourfirmname.cpa".
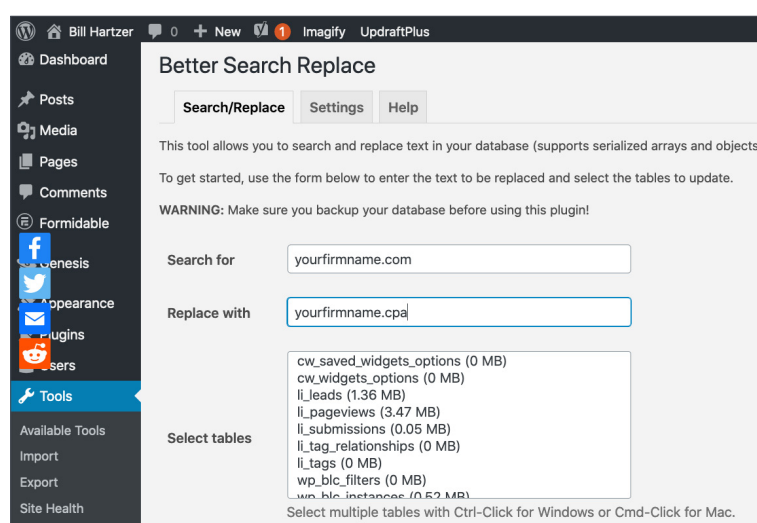
Once the Better Search Replace plugin is installed and activated, navigate to the Tools menu to find Better Search Replace. Enter yourfirmname.com and replace with yourfirmname.cpa. Start with a dry run, which can help make sure that the plugin can find the old domain name. From there, activate the changes on the website by removing the "dry run" checkbox. Once complete, go to Settings, then General to update the WordPress Address (URL) and Site Address (URL) with yourfirmname.cpa, the URL of the new domain name.

For firms with larger websites or those that don't use WordPress, their sites may be using a database. The fundamental concept is the same, however: Search the website files for any reference to the old domain name, and replace it with the new domain name. Consult with IT team members such as the webmaster or web design team to help with this task. For any further questions, contact the **.cpa** team.

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Review Links to the Old Domain Name

Next, review the links from other websites linking to your site. In light of your move to a new domain name, take care to document the links. If there are any you believe can be updated to point to your new domain name, take special note of them. The easier ones to get updated are those you have control over. For example, links from social media profiles and industry-related websites such as directory listings should be on the list. Get as many as possible updated to the new location. Through this process you will get a clearer sense of how many need to be updated and how big this project will be once the website has been moved and is live on the new domain name.

To determine which links are pointing to your website, firms can use Google Search Console's data.
Here's how:

- In Google Search Console, click on **"Links"** on the left side.

- On the right side of the next page, click on **"Export External Links"**. That will give you a list of the websites that are linking to your website.

- Combine **"More sample links"** with **"Latest links"** into one list. It's important to export both lists.

- Review the list and save it for later—in order to make a list of the web pages to be updated.
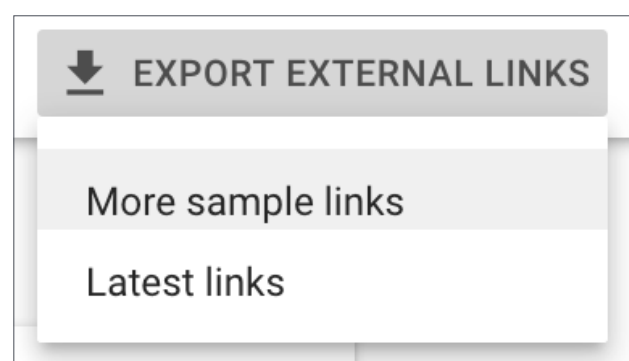
The list of links pointing to your website will likely include links that are "local" in nature. For example, YellowPages.com, Yelp.com, BBB.org, all may be websites linking to your website. These can typically be updated manually (by contacting the site owner or logging into the website), or with tools like AdviceLocal.com or Yext.com designed to help update listings and links to your website.

Majestic.com is also another popular tool for generating a list of links to your website. Google Search Console can identify many of the links, but it may not be comprehensive. Majestic.com can help – and it offers the ability to export the list of links. Majestic will also identify which links are more important.

Verify Your Website Ownership

In this stage, firms should verify the website in Google Search Console. We also recommend verifying the website in Microsoft Bing Webmaster Tools. The URLs for Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools:

- https://www.google.com/webmasters/
- https://www.bing.com/webmasters

Make sure your current website is set up on HTTPs and does not use HTTP URLs. Both the old and the new domains will need to be HTTPs URLs, such as https://www.yourfirmname.com and https://www.yourfirmname.cpa. Your move to **.cpa** will address the HTTPS requirements (the SSL Certificate) for your **.cpa** domain name. If the "old" domain name is not HTTPs, change it during this pre-move phase.

Set Up Redirects

At this point firms should have a list of all of the pages on the website. The list of URLs should be a unique list, with no duplicates. In a spreadsheet, this list will be used to match up old URLs with new ones. For example, the spreadsheet could look like this:

Old URL	New URL
https://www.yourfirmname.com/	https://www.yourfirmname.cpa/
https://www.yourfirmname.com/about/	https://www.yourfirmname.cpa/about/
https://www.yourfirmname.com/contact/	https://www.yourfirmname.cpa/contact/

Depending on the type of web server in use, the process of setting up redirects should be straightforward. There are a few ways to do this.

If the website uses WordPress, a plugin can handle the redirects. There are several popular redirect plugins, and anyone who is not a web developer, or does not have website server experience, should plan on using one due to their relative ease of use. In the plugin, users can enter the old URL and then add the new URL. Most plugins will allow users to import a file that has the list of the old URLs, as well as the new URLs, if there are many of them. The redirect plugin should be added only on the old domain name. Firms should plan on keeping the old website updated (only the version of WordPress and the plugins) so that the redirect plugin continues to work in the future.

For users who are familiar with web servers, we recommend adding entries to the .HTACCESS file of the old domain name. All that is required is the .HTACCESS file on the old domain name. By adding the redirects to this website server file, users do not need to continue maintaining the old website on the old domain name – it can essentially be removed, and only the .HTACCESS file would need to be on the old domain name.

For more information about setting up 301 redirects in an .HTACCESS file, visit Google's help center: https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/93633?hl=en

The basic code typically looks like this:

```
Redirect 301 / https://www.yourfirmname.cpa/
Redirect 301 /about/ http://www.yourfirmname.cpa/about/
Redirect 301 /contact/ http://www.yourfirmname.cpa/contact/
```

For Windows servers, please refer to the Microsoft documentation for httpRedirect: https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/iis/configuration/system.webserver/httpredirect/

Setting up the redirects is important, and requires having the proper web server files (or the plugin installed and set up) beforehand so they are ready to implement on Moving Day.

Pre-Planning

Pre-planning is critical. Start by establishing a date and time to actually move – the moment when users type in yourfirmname.com and are redirected to yourfirmname.cpa. These considerations should shape your planning efforts:

- Review the steps in the pre-move process and estimate how long it will take to complete each of them.
- The larger the website (based on the number of pages on the website), the longer it will take to make it ready in the pre-move phase.

As you review the pre-move tasks, identify who will be responsible for completing each task and how long it will take (how many hours, days, weeks). Use a calendar. Clearly identify who will be responsible for completing which tasks, and who will check each task to ensure satisfactory completion. (This can be the same person.) Once the full timeline is established, consider adding an additional two weeks, since unanticipated challenges can arise during the pre-move process. The target date for the move should be one on which your firm is not likely to be very busy – perhaps even a Friday evening or weekend, when traffic to your site is typically low.

Moving Day

Being ready on moving day requires completing several key tasks first. You should have already prepared the 301 Permanent Redirects, either adding them to the plugin on the website, or setting up the proper code in the .HTACCESS file or the settings on the web server. Make sure the redirects are in place.

Verify Redirects Are Working

Next, check the redirects and make sure they are working properly. Consider using a server header check tool to determine whether the old domain is being redirected properly. A server header check tool will also show what the web server is doing "behind the scenes", and how it is responding when users enter the old domain name into a web browser. Here are a few popular server header check tools:

- https://dnschecker.org/server-headers-check.php
- https://www.whatismyip.com/server-headers-check/
- https://www.webconfs.com/http-header-check.php

These free tools will show you the web server's response code when you try to reach the old domain name. These free tools will show you the information in a few different ways. Ultimately, the tool should indicate that there is a "301" redirect from one page to the other.

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This is an example of the server header response when http://www.cpa.com is entered. There is a *301 Moved Permanently* code that shows that it's redirecting to https://www.cpa.com – which is what you should see. In this case, the website is redirecting the http version of the website to the https version of the website. When redirecting from an old domain name to a new domain name, the 'location' specified above would be the new domain name. This is the manual method of checking some of the pages on the old website to make sure they are redirecting to the new domain name.

```
HTTP/1.1 301 Moved Permanently =>
Server => nginx
Date => Fri, 09 Oct 2020 15:20:05 GMT
Content-Type => text/html; charset=iso-8859-1
Content-Length => 228
X-Content-Type-Options => nosniff
Location => https://www.cpa.com/
Cache-Control => max-age=1209600
Expires => Fri, 23 Oct 2020 15:20:05 GMT
X-Request-ID => v-e8b8413e-0a42-11eb-84a6-7300f1f3ef75
Age => 904575
Via => varnish
X-Cache => HIT
X-Cache-Hits => 2968
Connection => close
```

Another way to check the response codes and make sure that the redirects are set up properly is to crawl the old website from a list. In some crawlers, such as Screaming Frog's SEO Spider and Oncrawl, you can crawl the website using a list of URLs. Use the previously-created redirect list to check every page on the old website to make sure it is redirecting with the 301 redirect.

Crawl the Live Website

Next, use a crawler to scour the website for the new domain name. Start with the new domain's home page, and let the crawler visit every page. Afterward, look for any errors or references to the old domain name. As you crawl the website on the new domain name, you should not encounter any references to the old domain name. If there are any, they need to be fixed.

Notify Google that you have changed the address from the old domain name to the new domain name. Google has specific instructions about moving your website from one domain name to another domain name, which can be found in their Help Center: https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9370220?hl=en. By this time, firms should have already verified the old domain name in Google Search Console, as mentioned earlier. Verify the new domain name in Google Search Console as well. Once you have selected the old domain name, you will encounter this page:

Having already selected the old domain name, select the new site on this page. This will already be in the list of websites that you have verified in Google Search Console. Select **"Validate and Update"**. Google will check to make sure that the redirects are in place. Once validated, notify Google that your firm is changing from the old domain name to the new domain name. That's all that is required at this point.

Settings > **Change of address**

❶ **Set up**

To change your site address, you must set up 301 redirects from the old site to the new one and perform any other relevant setup steps. Learn more

❷ **Update Google (recommended)**

After performing all your setup tasks, update Google about your site's change of address. Learn more

• Skip the 'Update Google' step if you're moving from http to https
• Make sure that you are a verified owner of both sites

Select new site   ▼

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Update Google Analytics

Google Analytics is the next stop for updating the domain name to the new domain name. Log into Google Analytics and choose the old website. On the bottom left corner, select **"Admin"**. In the middle of the page, under Property Settings, update the Default URL so it indicates the new domain name.

Property Settings

Basic Settings

Tracking Id
UA-67111427-1

Property Name
SPI, Inc

Default URL
https:// ▾ | www.yourfirmname.cpa

These directions assume that the code for Google Analytics is the same on the new domain name that it was on the old domain name. This is important, because updating this will allow you to see data from the old domain name such as visits, and then continue to see the visits on the new domain name. Your firm will be able to compare the visits from the old website to the visits on the website with the new domain name. Consider adding a "notation" so that anyone who visits Google Analytics will be able to see when the website was moved to the new domain name.

Go back to the Google Analytics home page by clicking on the home button on the left side of the page. Then select **"Acquisition"**, **"All Traffic"**, and **"Source/Medium"**. Make sure you can see the current date. There is an arrow near the date, under the graph, as shown below. Click the arrow:
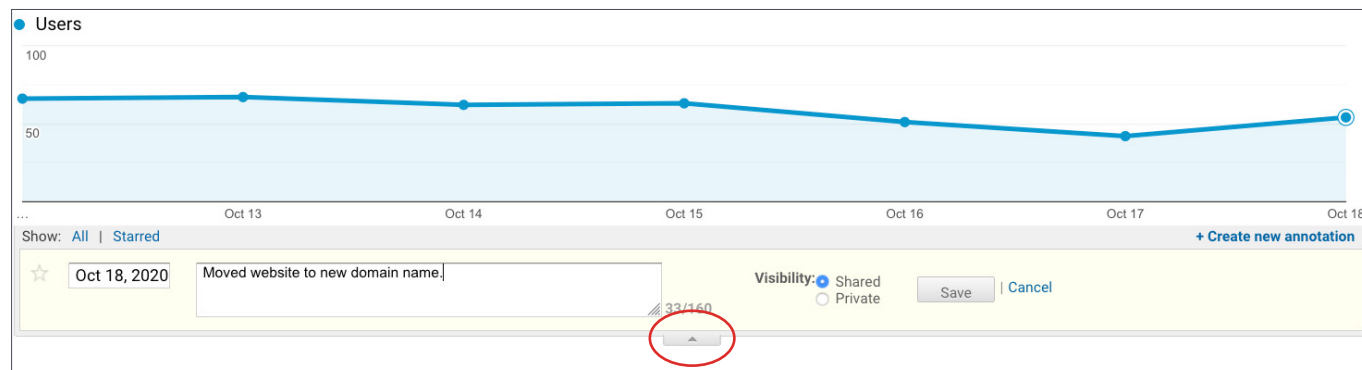
The arrow reveals a hidden feature in Google Analytics allowing users to leave notes. Users who click the **"Create new annotation"** will find a place for the date, as well as a box where you can leave a note. Consider adding a note about the fact that you moved to the new domain name on that date. Click **"Shared"** under Visibility so all users who log into this Google Analytics account can see the note in the future. Then click Save.

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Additional Tasks on Moving Day

Some other important tasks to be addressed on Moving Day include:

- Update social media profiles with the new domain name.

- Update email signatures and email addresses with the new domain name. The old domain name is still under your control, so emails will still work even though the domain name is redirected in the web browser. You'll eventually want to start using the new email addresses on the new domain name. But it's not a necessity for moving.

- Update company internal themes, documents, PowerPoint presentations, etc. with the new domain name.

- Update your company newsletter with the new domain name. Maybe send a newsletter announcing the move to the new domain name?

- Distribute a press release about the move to the new domain name.

- Implement any planned marketing campaigns about the new domain name.

- Notify your customers, clients, and business partners about the new domain name.

Remember the list of links to your website that we already collected from Google Search Console and other sources such as Majestic.com. Now is the time to notify the websites and update links so they point to the new website.

After Moving Day

After Moving Day, continue to watch Google Analytics, as well as the new domain name's Google Search Console data. If there are important keywords that the website was "ranking for" previously, those should be transferred over to the new domain name. It may take a few days until the pages on the website all show that they've been moved. This depends on how fast the search engines crawl the website and notice the redirects to the new domain name.

Keep the 301 Permanent Redirects in place – even if the old domain name shows up in the search engine result pages and traffic goes to the old domain name, visitors will be redirected to the new domain name.

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Resources

The following is a list of helpful resources and links that we have mentioned in this guide.

Website Backups

UpDraftPlus – For smaller websites using WordPress. WordPress website backup plugin, offers free and paid versions.
https://updraftplus.com/

cPanel Backup – Many websites use cPanel as a part of the website hosting solution. cPanel offers a built-in backup.
https://docs.cpanel.net/cpanel/files/backup-for-cpanel/

GoDaddy Backup Solution – If your website is using GoDaddy, consider using their backup service.
https://in.godaddy.com/web-security/website-backup

CodeGuard – Website code backup and change detection service.
https://www.codeguard.com/

Website Hosting – Your website host offers a backup solution. Contact them for more information. Some website hosts will also move the website copy for you if you're adding a new domain name.

Website Crawlers

Siteliner - Crawls up to 250 pages for free, offers a pay-as-you-go service, depending on the size of your website.
https://www.siteliner.com

Screaming Frog SEO Spider – Crawls up to 500 pages for free, offers a paid service at an annual fee.
https://www.screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider/

OnCrawl – Crawls up to millions of pages. Paid service, allows you to combine website log files, Google Search Console, Google Analytics, and other data to be combined with a crawl of the website.
https://www.oncrawl.com

Search and Replace Old Domain Name

Better Search Replace – WordPress plugin for searching for the old domain name and replacing it with the new domain name. Only for WordPress websites.
https://wordpress.org/plugins/better-search-replace/

PHPMyAdmin – Search and replace the old domain name with the new domain name in PHPMyAdmin. This is installed on many websites. Only for advanced technical users.
https://www.phpmyadmin.net/

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Verifying Your Website Ownership

Google Search Console
https://www.google.com/webmasters/

Bing Webmaster Tools
https://www.bing.com/webmasters

Setting Up Redirects

Change Page URLs with 301 Redirects (Google)
https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/93633?hl=en

Apache Web Server Code for Redirects
http://httpd.apache.org/docs/2.0/howto/htaccess.html

Microsoft IIS Server Code for Redirects
https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/iis/configuration/system.webserver/httpredirect/

Verify Redirects are Set Up

DNS Checker Server Headers Check
https://dnschecker.org/server-headers-check.php

What Is My IP Server Header Check
https://www.whatismyip.com/server-headers-check/

WebConfs Header Check
https://www.webconfs.com/http-header-check.php

Check Links to Website

Majestic
https://www.majestic.com

Ahrefs
https://www.ahrefs.com

Moz
https://www.moz.com

Google Search Console
https://www.google.com/webmasters/

Bing Webmaster Tools
https://www.bing.com/webmasters

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