

Replatforming to Shopify Plus: Key SEO Considerations to Protect Traffic, Rankings & Revenue



Intro to Replatforming



Any ecommerce brand will know that organic traffic can be a huge driver of sales and revenue, so if your website isn't ranking well in search engine results this can have a big impact on your business. Online retailers invest significant time and resources into SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) so that their website might outrank competitors across 'high value keywords' and drive traffic to their site.

If your business is growing at the rate you want it to, you'll probably reach a point where you outgrow your ecommerce platform and will be looking to move to a scalable enterprise ecommerce platform like Shopify Plus. When this happens, it's crucial to have a plan in place to protect your hard earned SEO rankings and maintain revenue for your business. This is also known as an SEO migration.

Without a properly executed SEO migration, your search engine rankings can drop significantly, resulting in losses of organic traffic of up to 50%

To avoid these negative consequences, we've mapped out an SEO plan to protect traffic, rankings and revenue during the replatforming process.

While every business will have a different strategy (depending on its size, site structure, current performance, business goals, etc.), this outline will generally apply across every ecommerce brand looking to scale their business with Shopify Plus.

1 Planning Phase

Conduct an assessment comparing your current ecommerce platform with Shopify Plus to determine whether your business will benefit from replatforming.

Before you take the leap to migrate to a new platform, you first need to consider whether this is the right move for your business. Assessing factors such as platform capabilities, scalability, and the associated cost and timeframe of replatforming should all form part of your initial planning.

Analyse Your Current SEO Performance

Firstly, understand what is and what's not performing on your current website with respect to SEO. For example, if your website is ranking well organically and drives a decent amount of quality traffic and customers, identify *how* (the performing keywords) and *why* (elements on the site that are satisfying search engines). This is so you can carry these elements over to your new site



Pinpoint Areas for Improvement

To drive more traffic to your online store, it's important to highlight areas that aren't working on your existing site, so you can capitalise on any available SEO opportunities.

For example, landing pages that aren't ranking well or converting visitors into customers can be optimised on your new site to increase sales.

This is also an opportunity to resolve any 'penalties' that have been applied by search engines, so that these aren't inherited by the new site. An example of this is where a 'manual penalty' might be applied by Google on specific areas of your site if spam or dangerous activity is perceived by the search engine (this can easily be checked within the Google Search Console property for the site).



Identify What You Need From Your Ecommerce Platform

An important part of the initial planning phase is outlining what you don't like about your current platform and the 'must have' aspects required for the new platform. For example, your current platform might impose a restrictive template on your product pages, which only allows for a small amount of copy space.

With an enterprise ecommerce platform like Shopify Plus, you'll be able to create product pages with more detailed and useful information about your products for Google and other search engines to crawl.

However, it's also important to ensure Shopify Plus is going to work with your existing ecommerce technology stack / broader marketing software. You don't want to get down the road of replatforming only to find that the new platform doesn't integrate with your CRM or email automation platform. These roadblocks often require complex workarounds, which can be costly and time consuming.



Chat to an SEO Expert

Once you've conducted this initial assessment, it's a good idea to chat to a Shopify Plus Partner to determine whether the platform will suit your business needs and long-term goals, before taking the next steps towards replatforming.

This is also the perfect time to bring in your SEO experts, who will be able to help you establish all of your SEO benchmarks and KPIs. Getting SEO guidance at this stage of the process also allows you to; properly chart a course for how the migration should be carried out, establish key milestones and how any associated risk might be mitigated throughout.



2 Preparation Phase



Now that you've made the decision to replatform to Shopify Plus, it's time to put everything in place to prepare your site for launch and enable you to track the success of the migration post-launch.

Conduct an SEO Risk Assessment

To protect your search engine rankings, it's important to identify what's changing on your site and by how much. Any significant changes to your URLs, site size, top-level navigation (TLN) and information architecture (IA) could impact your site's performance.

Whenever possible, it's worth assessing any 'variables' that could be changing with the migration and reducing these where possible. Occasionally, brands will even undertake a phased out approach; whereby they perform the replatforming process, then make more structural changes later down the track so as to incrementally reduce the impact of changes to the site.





SEO Risk Assessment cont.

Replatforming to Shopify Plus means your server environment will also likely be changing. This comes with its own set of concerns, as Google's bots (and user's browsers) will need to recognise the new location (server) of your web content. This is where an SEO agency experienced in these sorts of projects will be able to help you understand what's at risk and account for this in a suitable migration plan.

It's also crucial that you plan the migration around your peak periods. Plan to launch the new platform outside of a busy period where many sales are expected. This reduces the impact of any issues that might come up from a migration, and also means that you will be well prepared (on your shiny new Shopify Plus store) for when a seasonal uplift of market demand comes.



Plan Your Timeline

An SEO migration is a complex process, which often takes longer than expected. Make sure you allow plenty of time to complete all the necessary tasks to prepare your site and your business, and allow for a sufficient buffer period. The time required will largely depend on the size and complexity of your site, including the number of product pages, blog pages, on-page content, etc.

At a minimum, the SEO migration process will involve:

- *Mapping URL redirects*
 - *Removing duplicate content*
 - *Resolving 404 errors*
 - *Optimising page titles and meta descriptions*
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Redirect Mapping

The Shopify platform uses unique URL conventions, which will most likely differ from those on your existing site. This means you'll have to allocate time to redirect all page URLs from your old site to a corresponding page on your new site. Shopify also requires these redirects to be stored within the Shopify platform *before* you migrate. This process can be time consuming, but it's important not to rush it if you want your new site launch to go smoothly.

In addition to the mapping of URLs, allowing sufficient time for rounds of feedback and edits to be made by both your internal marketing team as well as your SEO experts should be accounted for.

For most companies, redesigning and replatforming is something that you don't want to have to go through regularly and getting it done right will save a lot of headaches in the future - "a stitch in time saves nine".



Consolidate Your Content

Brands will often seize a website migration as an ideal opportunity to consolidate site content. This can take the shape of:

- 01 Merging brands
- 02 Merging multiple websites
- 03 Combining subdomains
- 04 Combining pages & subfolders

These ‘web consolidation projects’ will come with all sorts of SEO considerations that will need to be catered for. If you’re merging brands as part of your replatforming project, you’ll need to think about how your brand terms are going to be picked up in Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs), redirecting links to your new site in directory profiles, forums and other external sites, and updating your Google My Business profile with new branding and assets. It is recommended that this is assessed and planned for within a risk assessment phase by an SEO professional well versed in migrations of this nature.

Keep in mind that the more elements you change on your site during the replatforming process, the more you'll be putting your rankings at risk. Try to keep as many variables as possible the same, so Google doesn't lose confidence in your new site. With that said, the reason you're replatforming is most likely to refresh and update your brand, so your business and customer experience motivations behind your decision should always come first, followed by making sure you put in place a suitable SEO plan.

Benchmark Your Site Performance

To determine whether your site migration has been properly executed, it's important to keep records of a range of metrics and data sets, so you can set appropriate benchmarks for your website performance post-migration. From an SEO standpoint, these metrics may include keyword rankings, number of keywords, organic revenue, engagement statistics, as well as link related data points. Almost all of these metrics can be tracked via Google Analytics and Search Console. For maximum visibility, we recommend setting out these metrics in a Data Studio report or dashboard, so you can easily pinpoint areas of concern during the post-launch period.





3 Launch & Beyond

WARNING: To minimise impact on sales and revenue, never schedule your launch during a busy period of the year or at a busy time of day.

In the hours following the launch, your developers and internal team will need to be on-hand to manage any issues as they arise. No matter how smoothly a site migration goes, there will always be some form of follow-up work, whether it's cleaning up 404 errors, an organic traffic performance analysis, link outreach or reclamation, or even a full scale SEO strategy for your new site.

The larger the site, the longer your post-launch monitoring period should be. Generally, you should schedule checkpoints at one month, three months and six months post-launch to evaluate whether you're meeting or exceeding your pre-launch benchmarks.

Following a migration, you should always check in on your site performance at least once a week to ensure everything is running as it should be.



While replatforming might seem like a daunting and risky process, a properly executed replatforming SEO plan can actually result in increased organic traffic and sales in a relatively short timespan.

To ensure the process goes as smoothly as possible, we highly recommend engaging an SEO agency experienced in ecommerce and working with high-volume merchants. Get in touch with Reload today to find out whether migrating to Shopify Plus is the right move for your business.

Ready to begin your ecommerce partnership?

Reload Media is a digital marketing agency that specialises in providing customised solutions for leading brands across SEO, Pay Per Click Advertising, Social Media, overarching digital strategy and everything in between. We believe in becoming Your Digital Marketing Partner.



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