



A PLATFORMDEVELOPMENT FIELD GUIDE

The Website Redesign Playbook

A practical, stage-by-stage framework for planning, designing, building, and launching a website that actually performs — from the first audit to day ninety.

10 STAGES · A 35-POINT LAUNCH CHECKLIST · A 90-DAY POST-LAUNCH PLAN

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

How to Use This Guide

Most redesigns don't fail because of bad design — they fail because nobody wrote down what success looked like, search authority was thrown away in an afternoon of careless redirects, or the new site launched half-tested. This playbook is the ten-stage process we run every redesign through, start to finish — or jump straight to Section 08 for a standalone pre-launch checklist.

PART ONE — PLAN

01

Know When It's Time

The real signals worth acting on, and the ones that aren't.

02

Discover & Audit

Content, analytics, competitors, and a technical baseline.

03

Define Strategy

Goals, personas, information architecture, and a content plan.

PART TWO — DESIGN & BUILD

04

Design for Every Body

Mobile-first, systemized, and accessible from the first sketch.

05

Build for Speed

Core Web Vitals, image and font strategy, and choosing the right stack.

06

Protect Your Rankings

Redirect mapping and the SEO migration steps most teams skip.

PART THREE — LAUNCH & GROW

07

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08

The Launch Checklist

Thirty-five items across five categories — the week-before-launch pass.

09

The First 90 Days

What to watch at week one, day thirty, sixty, and ninety.

PART ONE

Plan

Every good redesign is decided before a single screen is designed. This part covers whether it's actually time, what to learn before touching anything, and what "success" needs to mean in writing.

01 Know When It's Time

02 Discover & Audit

03 Define Strategy

Know When It's Time

A redesign is a resource-heavy undertaking — time, budget, and organizational attention. Before scoping one, make sure the signals are real rather than a reaction to fatigue with how the site looks.

- ◆ Traffic is holding steady, or even growing, but conversions keep sliding — the site is bringing people in and losing them once they arrive.
- ◆ The site breaks, lags, or feels visibly dated on mobile devices, which now account for most first visits in nearly every industry.
- ◆ Content and product lines have outgrown the original navigation — new sections got bolted on wherever they'd fit.
- ◆ The brand has visibly moved on — new positioning, new visual identity, new offer — and the website is still telling the old story.
- ◆ Every small content change requires a developer, which means the site quietly stops getting updated at all.
- ◆ Competitors are visibly out-positioning the business in search results and in the first five seconds of a visit.

PRO TIP

A redesign isn't the fix for a marketing problem. If the real issue is acquisition — not enough of the right people arriving at all — solve that first. A new site won't manufacture demand that doesn't exist yet.

Discover & Audit

Everything downstream — architecture, content, design — is only as good as what gets learned here. Budget real time for this stage; it is the cheapest place in the whole project to catch a mistake.

01 Content audit

Catalogue every existing URL. Tag each as keep, merge, or retire, and record its organic traffic and referring domains — this becomes the foundation of the redirect map in Section 06.

02 Analytics review

Pull the last twelve months of data. Identify top landing pages, the worst-performing templates, device split, and exactly where users tend to drop off.

03 Competitive scan

Review three to five direct competitors on positioning, page speed, and first impression. Note specifically what they do that the current site doesn't.

04 Stakeholder interviews

Talk to sales and support before design work starts — they hear the objections, confusions, and questions that customers never put in a contact form.

05 Technical baseline

Record current Lighthouse or PageSpeed scores, Core Web Vitals, and total page weight before anything changes, so improvement is provable rather than assumed later.

COMMON MISTAKE

Skipping the content audit and letting the CMS migration import everything by default. Orphaned pages and years-old duplicate content quietly follow the business straight into the new site.

Define Strategy

A redesign without a measurable goal attached to it is just a new coat of paint. Write the goals down before any design work begins.

01 Set two or three measurable goals

For example: +20% qualified leads, -30% mobile bounce rate, or sub-three-second load on the templates that matter most. Specific and dated, not aspirational.

02 Revisit personas

Confirm they still reflect who is actually buying today — not who was buying when the last site launched.

03 Rebuild the information architecture

Card-sort or tree-test the proposed navigation with real users where possible. Internal assumptions about “where things should live” are usually wrong.

04 Map the new sitemap against the old

Decide what changes, what's retired, and what's renamed. This map feeds directly into the redirect plan in Section 06 — build it here, not later.

05 Set the content plan

Decide what gets rewritten, what gets consolidated, and what gets cut for good, before a designer starts laying out pages that may not survive.

PART TWO

Design & Build

Decisions made here are expensive to reverse once development is underway. This part covers designing for real people on real devices, building for speed, and protecting the search visibility already earned.

04 Design for Every Body

05 Build for Speed

06 Protect Your Rankings

Design for Every Body

Design decisions made here are expensive to reverse once development starts. Get real content and real constraints in front of real users before that happens.

01 Design mobile-first

Design the smallest screen first. Everything larger is an expansion of that design, not an afterthought bolted onto a desktop layout.

02 Build a component system, not one-off pages

Buttons, forms, and cards should be consistent from the first page designed, so the eventual site stays maintainable long after launch.

03 Design with real content

Swap in actual headlines and true copy length as early as possible. Real content breaks layouts that placeholder text never will.

04 Build accessibility in from the start

Body text contrast of at least 4.5:1, every interactive element reachable and visibly focused by keyboard, and alt text planned per image during design — not added afterward as an afterthought.

05 Usability test the key flows

Even five participants reliably surface most major issues — do this before a single line of production code gets written.

BY THE NUMBERS

WCAG 2.2 is the current, stable standard most regulations reference today — including ADA Title II and the EU Accessibility Act. Treat Level AA as the minimum bar to clear, not the target to aim for.

Build for Speed

Speed is a design decision as much as a technical one. Google's Core Web Vitals measure it directly, and increasingly it's what visitors judge a site on before they've read a single word.

METRIC	GOOD	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	POOR
LCP Largest Contentful Paint	≤ 2.5s	2.5–4.0s	> 4.0s
INP Interaction to Next Paint	≤ 200ms	200–500ms	> 500ms
CLS Cumulative Layout Shift	≤ 0.1	0.1–0.25	> 0.25

01 Treat images as a performance decision

Responsive sizes, modern formats such as WebP or AVIF, and lazy-loading for anything below the fold.

02 Load fonts deliberately

Subset the character set, preload the one or two weights used above the fold, and set font-display: swap so text is never hidden while a webfont loads.

03 Match the stack to the scale of the site

A site with a handful of editors and a modest page count rarely needs the overhead of a full custom application framework.

04 Configure caching and a CDN before launch

Not after the first slow-load complaint arrives from a visitor on the other side of the world.

Protect Your Rankings

This is the single most common way a redesign quietly costs a business money: months, sometimes years, of accumulated search authority disappearing because nobody built a redirect map.

01 Redirect every indexed URL individually

Build a 301 redirect for every old URL that has a live equivalent — mapped one-to-one, never blanket-redirected to the homepage.

02 Avoid redirect chains

Preserve the logic of the URL structure where possible. Where it must change, redirect at the individual page level rather than daisy-chaining A to B to C.

03 Carry structured data forward

Schema.org markup for every page type that had it — product, article, FAQ, local business — should exist on day one of the new site, not added back later.

04 Resubmit sitemaps immediately

Push an updated XML sitemap to Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools the moment the new site goes live.

05 Watch coverage reports closely

Daily for the first two weeks, then weekly through week six — this is where redirect gaps and crawl errors actually surface.

COMMON MISTAKE

Redirecting every old URL to the homepage. It's fast to implement, and it quietly tells search engines the old content no longer exists anywhere — rankings tend to follow it down.

PART THREE

Launch & Grow

A site is never really finished at launch — it's handed off to whoever maintains it next. This part covers proving the work before it ships, a full pre-launch pass, and the ninety days that decide whether the redesign actually worked.

07 Test Before You Trust It

08 The Launch Checklist

09 The First 90 Days

Test Before You Trust It

A staging environment that isn't identical to production isn't really staging — the differences are exactly where bugs hide until launch day.

01 Mirror production exactly

Same server configuration, same plugin and dependency versions, same content wherever it's possible to match it.

02 Test the real device and browser matrix

The one that matches actual site traffic — not just whatever browser happens to be open on the developer's desk.

03 Submit every form for real

Including error states, and confirm that notification and confirmation emails actually arrive in an inbox.

04 Run a full accessibility pass

Keyboard-only navigation of every page, plus a spot check with a screen reader such as VoiceOver or NVDA.

05 Get a second pair of eyes

Have someone who didn't build the site click through every navigation path — builders stop seeing their own dead ends.

The Launch Checklist

Work through this in the week before launch. None of it should be a surprise if Sections 02–07 were followed — consider this confirmation, not discovery.

01 Content & SEO

- ☐ All content proofread and migrated — no missing pages.
- ☐ XML sitemap regenerated and submitted to Search Console and Bing.
- ☐ Structured data validated for every key page type.
- ☐ Old URLs bulk-tested for redirect chains and loops.
- ☐ 301 redirects mapped for every old URL with a live equivalent.
- ☐ Meta titles and descriptions written for every template and page.
- ☐ Canonical tags correctly set on every page.

02 Performance & Technical

- ☐ LCP under 2.5s on mobile for key templates.
- ☐ CLS under 0.1 — no shift from ads, fonts, or late images.
- ☐ Caching and a CDN configured for static assets.
- ☐ 404 page functional; site-wide broken-link scan complete.
- ☐ INP under 200ms across primary interactive elements.
- ☐ Images compressed, sized correctly, served as WebP/AVIF.
- ☐ robots.txt reviewed — staging blocks removed.

03 Design & UX

- ☐ Responsive behavior tested at every key breakpoint.
- ☐ Forms validate and send notifications/confirmations correctly.
- ☐ Typography and color contrast checked against brand and WCAG.
- ☐ Print or PDF export checked, if relevant to the business.
- ☐ Primary conversion paths tested end-to-end.
- ☐ Favicon, app icons, and social share images all in place.
- ☐ Hover, focus, active, and disabled states styled consistently.

04 Security & Compliance

- ☐ SSL certificate installed and HTTPS enforced site-wide.
- ☐ Privacy policy, terms, and accessibility statement current and linked.
- ☐ Backups configured and a restore point taken pre-launch.
- ☐ Third-party scripts and plugins audited and updated.
- ☐ Cookie consent banner configured per applicable regulation.
- ☐ Admin areas secured with strong passwords, 2FA, and rate limiting.
- ☐ WCAG 2.2 AA spot-check run — keyboard, screen reader, alt text.

05 Analytics & Tracking

- ☐ Analytics installed and verified with real-time data.
- ☐ Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools verified on the new site.
- ☐ UTM parameters audited on any campaigns pointing to the new site.
- ☐ A rollback plan documented in case launch reveals a critical issue.
- ☐ Conversion goals and events configured and tested.
- ☐ Marketing pixels migrated and confirmed firing correctly.
- ☐ Site search, if present, tested and returning relevant results.

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That's the full list — five categories, seven checks each. Print this page and physically check each box; teams consistently catch more this way than working from a shared document alone.

The First 90 Days

Launch day is the midpoint of a redesign, not the finish line. The first ninety days are when the business finds out whether it actually worked.

Week 1 Watch Search Console daily for crawl errors and 404 spikes. Watch analytics for traffic anomalies. Keep the redirect map close and patch gaps immediately.

Day 30 Compare real-user Core Web Vitals field data against the pre-launch baseline captured in Section 02. Review keyword position changes for top pages.

Day 60 Revisit conversion funnels with a full month of real user data. Run a second round of usability testing on any flow underperforming expectations.

Day 90 Hold a full retrospective against the goals set in Section 03. Decide, in writing, what the next iteration addresses.

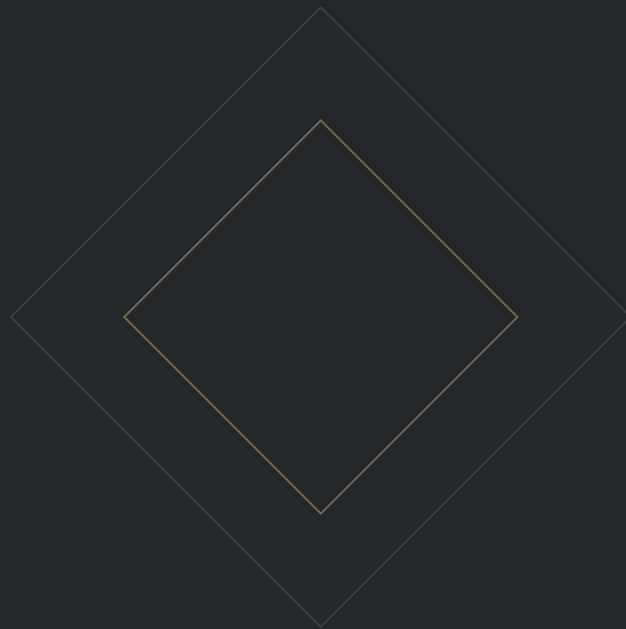
PRO TIP

Block these four check-ins on the calendar before launch day, not after. The teams that skip this step are the ones that discover a ranking drop in month four instead of week one.

The Work Isn't Done at Launch

A redesign is never really finished — it's handed off to whoever maintains it next, including a future version of your own team. Everything in this guide exists to make that handoff a smooth one, instead of an archaeological dig.

If a redesign is on the horizon and a second set of eyes on where to start would help, that's exactly the conversation we like to have.



PlatformDevelopment designs, builds, and ships websites for teams who take them seriously — from the first audit in Section 02 through the ninetieth day after launch.

[LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR REDESIGN](#)

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