10 Step Checklist for Success

CREATE A WEBSITE THAT GETS RESULTS

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About Andi

Andi is the founder, CEO and Managing Partner at Big Sea, a digital marketing agency that helps mid-sized businesses launch, grow and succeed. Her research and work in web design, social media and strategic communication have been published in numerous books and articles, and she's regularly seen on stage at events around the country. She's responsible for teaching Big Sea clients how to blend strategic goal-setting, solution-oriented content, and great design to create effective online marketing strategies. Follow her @andigrahambsd or drop her a line at andi@bigsea.co.

Introduction

Every now and then your website needs a refresh. There are many good reasons for a website redesign, whether it's a rebranding, moving onto a new Content Management System (CMS), the site is getting lackluster results or it looks like it was built in 1999 (eek).

Eventually, there comes a time when you've gathered all the low-hanging fruit possible. That's when you need a bigger change. Radical redesigns are a great way to transform your site into a beautiful new butterfly.

A redesign can be a huge success – or it could fail terribly. After all, it's a long and tedious process. That's where checklists can make your job a whole lot easier. Whether you're working with an agency (ahem) or redesigning in-house, this checklist will save you from some headaches.

But, I will admit, this is not your average checklist. While many detailed and tactical checklists are available online, the one thing commonly overlooked – that can make or break your redesign – is **how the redesign will support (and improve) your overall marketing efforts.** Your website isn't a silo. And it's not just about design. Your website affects your social media, email marketing, lead generation, brand awareness and sales strategies.

That's what this checklist solves for: **turning your website into an inbound marketing machine for long-term success.**

1. BENCHMARK YOUR CURRENT METRICS

Before you start thinking about anything, document your current performance metrics.

Start by analyzing your existing site over its history, including:

‣ Number of visits/visitors/unique visitors

‣ Bounce rate

‣ Time on site

‣ Current SEO rankings for important keywords

‣ Domain authority

‣ Most popular pages/content

‣ Most popular visitor sources

‣ Number of new leads/form submissions per day, month, year

‣ Total amount of sales generated from those leads/form submissions

If you don't have access to this information, then I absolutely recommend adding a tool like Google Analytics or HubSpot's closed-loop analytics for better tracking and visibility into site performance.

2. DETERMINE YOUR GOALS

If you're considering a redesign, there needs to be a good reason for it. Many times we hear "because it's been a while since we've done one," or "I want it to be more modern." These are not good reasons for a redesign. It's not just about how your site looks, but how it works.
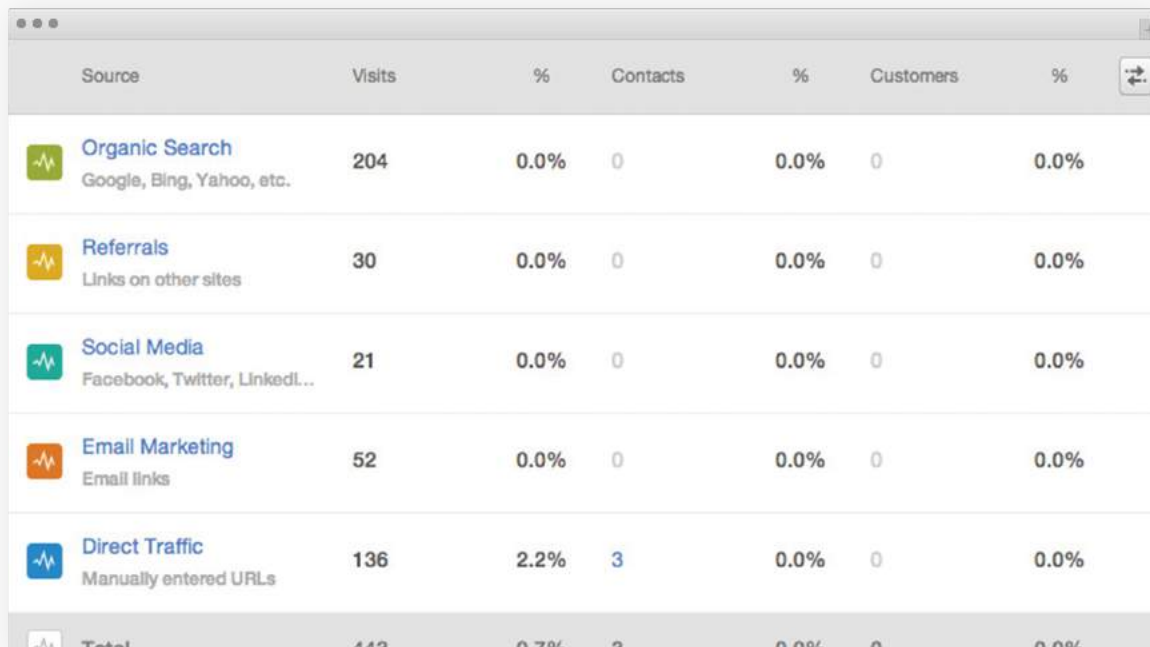
Be really clear about why you're doing the redesign in the first place and tie it to measurable results. Consider the following objectives for your own website:

▸ Number of visits and visitors

▸ Bounce rate or time on site

▸ Number of new leads and form submissions

▸ Total sales generated

▸ Current SEO rankings for important keywords

▸ Increased brand awareness

▸ Increased and enhanced credibility and visitor trust

Many of these goals are dependent on each other. For example, in order to get more conversions, you need to increase traffic while decreasing the bounce rate, so it's common to have many of these objectives. Some may be more important than others for your business. Once you determine this list, tie those objectives to a specific success metric e.g., "to increase site traffic by 50% in the next six months."

Use analytics to determine what works.

Do you know which of your marketing channels are bringing in the most customers? Tools like HubSpot let you see your top performing channels – in terms of visits, leads and customer acquisition – so you can make your marketing investments smarter.

Source	Visits	%	Contacts	%	Customers	%
Organic Search Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.	204	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Referrals Links on other sites	30	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Social Media Facebook, Twitter, LinkedI...	21	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Email Marketing Email links	52	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Direct Traffic Manually entered URLs	136	2.2%	3	0.0%	0	0.0%
Total	443	0.7%	3	0.0%	0	0.0%

▸ Social Media Measurement: Understand how social media is driving leads.

▸ Organic vs. Paid: See how much of your search traffic can be attributed to search engine optimization, and how much you're paying for.

▸ Buyers vs. Browsers: See which activities brought in serious leads versus website visitors who just came to look around.

3. INVENTORY YOUR ASSETS

While a redesign is a great way to improve results, there are countless ways it can hurt you. Your existing website contains a lot of assets that you have built up, and losing those during a redesign can damage your marketing. For instance, such assets might include:

▸ Most shared or viewed content

▸ Most trafficked pages

▸ Best performing keywords you rank for and associated pages

▸ Number of inbound links to individual pages

For example, if you remove a page that has a higher number of inbound links, you could lose a lot of SEO credit, which could decrease keyword rankings. You will need to use 301 redirects to tell Google that you've moved the page.

Keep in mind that many web designers don't consider this step because they are not marketers. Be sure your web team is ready and able with a competent 301-redirect plan for launch.
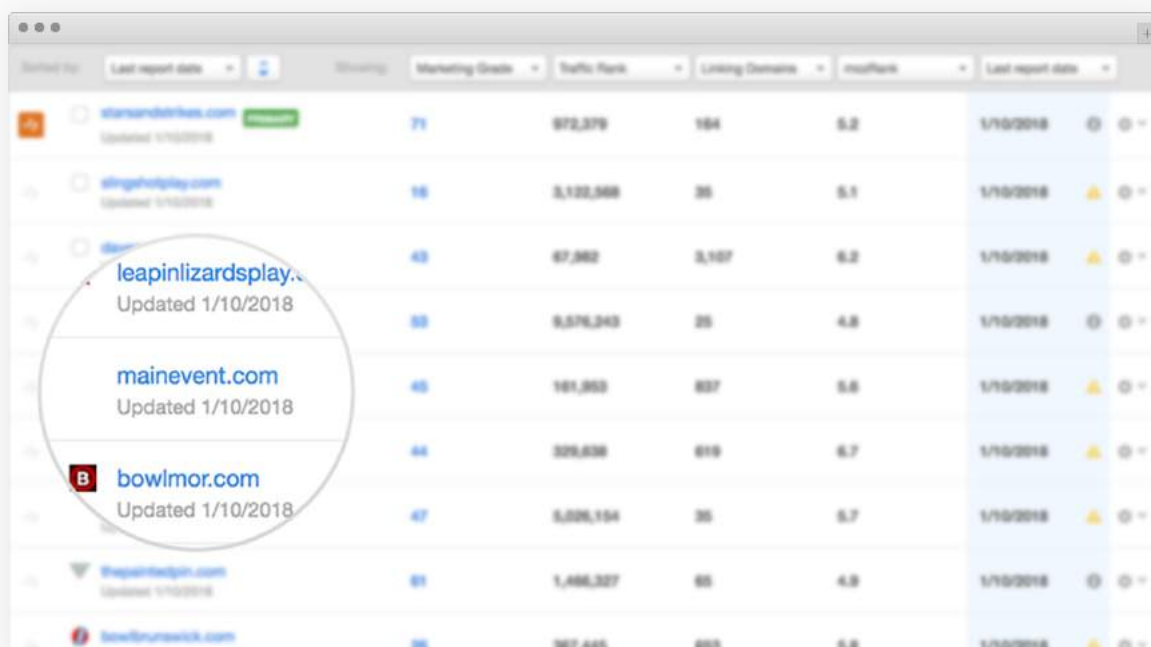
4. ANALYZE THE COMPETITION

While we don't recommend obsessing over your competitors, it helps to know how you compare.

1. Run your website through Marketing Grader (http://marketing.grader.com) to get a report card of how your site and marketing are performing today.

2. Next, run your competitors' sites through Marketing Grader so you are aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

3. Now, take a look at their websites and note what you like and what you don't – and how you can apply what they're doing well to your own site.

Once you run the analysis, put together an action list of what areas you can improve and what you can do differently (and better!) than your competitors.

Keep your friends close – and your enemies closer.

Wondering how your marketing stacks up against your competition -- or other companies your size? HubSpot makes it easy to set goals and see where you stand on traffic, inbound links, conversion rates, lead generation and other important metrics.

- ▸ See how your competitors are faring in search, social media and lead generation.

- ▸ After you look at the overview, get a detailed report on any individual competitor to delve deeper into their strengths and weaknesses.

- ▸ Compare your lead and sales conversion rates with other companies in your industry.

5. IDENTIFY YOUR UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

Before you begin crafting your content, be clear about you Unique Value Proposition (UVP) so that it is consistent across your entire website. If you attract a high number of unique visitors, or you're a new business, your visitors might not be very familiar with you and what you do. You need to immediately answer if what you do is right for them, and why they should buy/convert/stay on your website and not flee to your competitors.

When crafting your UVP, make sure you sound human. Do not use rhetoric or meaningless buzzwords — you know, words like "synergy," "ideate," and "thought-leader."

This is no time for jargon, my friends. Force yourself to be authentic; to use real, friendly language. Words that you'd actually use. Here is Big Sea's:

Big Sea is a smart digital marketing agency with a focus on results. Our agile, creative teams help modern companies connect with their target audiences through strategic marketing programs and transformative digital experiences that marry storytelling, design and function — optimized for conversions.

This step defines how the world communicates with your website. It can dramatically affect your bounce and conversion rates. Don't skip this step!

6. DESIGN YOUR SITE AROUND PERSONAS

Your website is not just about you. Your visitors need to know that you understand and can solve their problems. Speak to them in their language by designing content around buyer personas.

A buyer persona is a fictional representation of your ideal customer, based on real data about customer demographics and online behavior, along with educated speculation about their personal histories, motivations, and concerns. You may have three or 10 buyer personas, depending on your business and industry.

For instance, if you are a marketing manager at a hotel who is looking to bring in new business, you might target five buyer personas: an independent business traveler, a corporate travel manager, an event planner, a vacationing family, and a couple planning their wedding reception.

Consider the following when building your buyer personas.

▸ **SEGMENT BY DEMOGRAPHICS**

Start developing personas by researching your existing customer base to identify the most common buyers of your products and services. You may have several different types of buyers, so give each one a detailed description, including a name, job title or role, industry or company info, and demographic info.

▸ **IDENTIFY THEIR NEEDS**

What are the biggest problems they are trying to solve? What do they need most? What information are they typically searching for? What trends are influencing their business or personal success?

▸ **DEVELOP BEHAVIOR-BASED PROFILES**

What do they do online? Are they active on Twitter, Facebook, or other social networks? What kind of search terms do they use? What kind of information do they tend to consume online? Which of your products do they spend the most time researching? How do they use those products?

Your website is a great way to match your messaging to the needs of different buyer personas. Build your pages into categories to fit these personas, or offer content in a way that your prospects can easily find what's relevant for them.

7. PLAN FOR SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION

Getting found online is essential to improving the rest of your site metrics. If no one is coming to your site, how can you increase leads, downloads, or sales?

Here are some tips to plan for search engine optimization (SEO) on your new site:

▸ **DOCUMENT YOUR MOST SEARCH-VALUED PAGES**

As mentioned in step three, know what pages have the strongest SEO juice, the most traffic, inbound links, and keywords rankings. If you plan to move highly ranked pages, create proper 301 redirects so you don't lose any of that value.
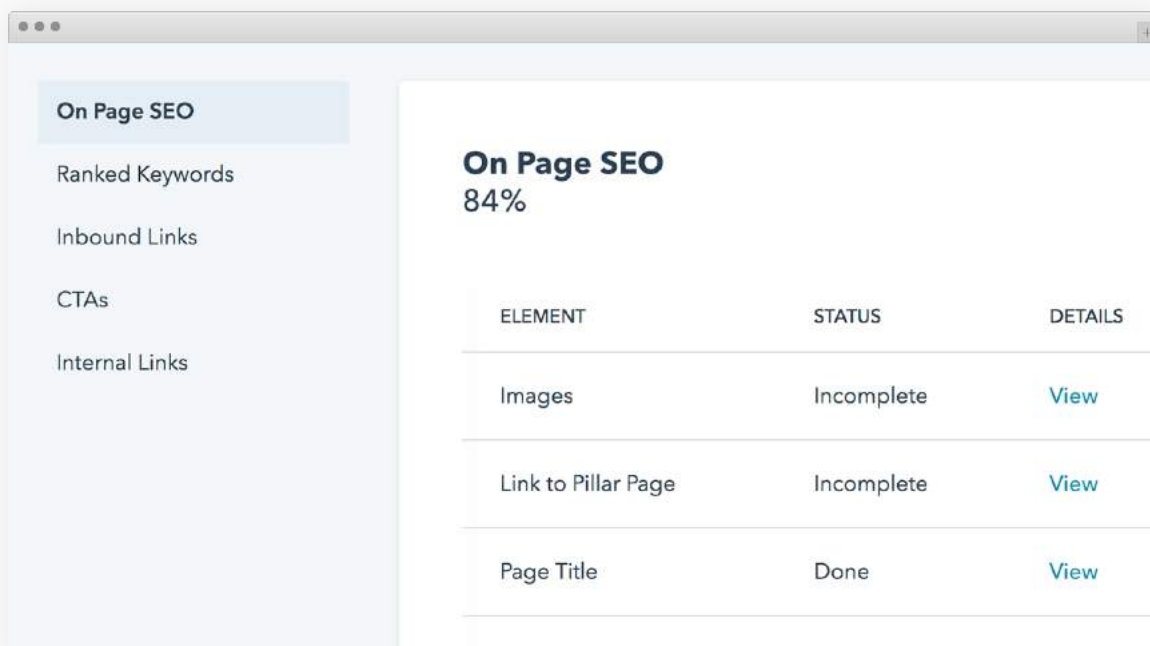
▸ **CREATE A 301 REDIRECT STRATEGY**

This may be THE most important step in terms of retaining traffic and rankings. Simply create a spreadsheet to record and map out your 301 redirects.

▸ **DO YOUR KEYWORD RESEARCH**

For every page, pick one to two keywords that the page will focus on. Once you determine the keyword(s), use on-page SEO tactics, such as internal link building and optimizing your header tags (H1, H2, H3, etc.)

See where you get your best traffic and leads.

HubSpot's built-in search engine optimization makes it easy to pick the right keywords and find link-building opportunities that increase your website's search rank.

On Page SEO
Ranked Keywords
Inbound Links
CTAs
Internal Links

On Page SEO
84%

ELEMENT	STATUS	DETAILS
Images	Incomplete	View
Link to Pillar Page	Incomplete	View
Page Title	Done	View

▸ Keyword Analysis: Find and track your most effective keywords.

▸ Link Tracking: Track inbound links and the leads they're generating.

▸ Page-Level SEO: Diagnose and fix poorly ranking sites.

8. IDENTIFY YOUR CTAs

Calls-to-action (CTAs) are the elements on your website that drive visitors to take an action, whether it's a whitepaper download, contacting sales, or product purchase. Your website shouldn't be a static brochure but should prompt your visitors to do something that further engages them and answers, "What next?"

When you're planning for the redesign, think about all the potential opportunities for conversion. For example:

▸ Ebooks and whitepapers

▸ Contests and promotions

▸ Product purchases

▸ Email newsletter subscription

▸ Free trial

▸ Contact us / consultation / demonstration / etc.

While how your website looks is important, what it says is even more so. Make sure there are plenty of calls-to-action so you don't lose visitors.

9. CREATE A CONTENT STRATEGY

More content on your website means more traffic from search and social – but not just any content. Quality is vital, as is maintaining your brand voice. Build a strategy to continue to add more and more content to your website over time.

▸ **START A BLOG**

This is one of the best ways to have an ongoing flow of great content. In fact, companies that blog have 55% more website visitors and 88% more leads than those who do not. Create an editorial calendar that helps you stay on topic and task.

▸ **INCLUDE SOME PR**

Post press releases and updates, but don't rely on this alone.

▸ **CASE STUDIES AND PROMOTIONS**

Post press releases and updates, but don't rely on this alone.

▸ **OUTSOURCE WHEN NECESSARY**

Lack time or resources for content? Out of ideas? Big Sea can help!

10. DON'T FORGET THE EXTRAS!

You've got a solid information architecture, a beautiful on-brand design and some pretty kickass functionality that highlights your services or products. Don't forget these basics before launching!

▸ **EMAIL SUBSCRIPTION & NEWSLETTERS**

Add a simple way for your visitors to join your email list without submitting any more of their personal information. Just their email address.

▸ **ADD RSS SUBSCRIPTION**

RSS allows some content from your website to be automatically pushed out to other websites and people, increasing the reach of your content.

▸ **SHAREABILITY**

Add social media sharing buttons/links to all your pages. You can use tools like ShareThis or AddThis.

▸ **ANALYTICS**

It's critical you are measuring the performance of your website from the start. Insight is everything for a marketer.

Conclusion

A successful website redesign starts even before the site is being "designed." Often, people get caught up in how the website looks and this focus overshadows how well it is working. A great agency should be able to walk you through the process with your goals and a solid strategy in mind.

Remember, a website is not a brochure. It is an active salesperson that should be working 24/7 on lead generation. This is your chance to turn your website into an inbound marketing hub.

Follow this checklist and you'll be well prepared for any website redesign.

Thanks for reading.

About Big Sea

Big Sea is a smart digital marketing agency. Since 2005, we've been partnering with successful businesses and organizations to provide branding, strategy, design, development, and marketing. We plug in where you need a boost, and hone and amplify what you're already doing.

Our clients include universities and family entertainment centers all over the country. Aromatherapy educators and eCommerce retailers. Local multi-unit medical practitioners and national accessibility providers. Genetic testing experts to international reef restoration specialists.

Our niche is smart organizations with complex problems to solve, and we excel.

Want to find out how we can grow your business?
REACH OUT: HELLO@BIGSEA.CO