



January MasterMind Special Training with Beth Kahlich  
"How the Pros Redesign Their Site Without Killing Their Rankings"  
Thursday, January 21, 2016

**Crystal Cook:** Welcome to our special MasterMind training with Beth Kahlich; How the Pros Redesign Their Site Without Killing Their Rankings. Please type your questions here in the Q&A Box.

**Participant:** The old URLs are what's driving traffic re visibility. How do you maintain that with a new site?

**Beth Kahlich:**

The old URLs need to be 301-redirectioned to the new URLs. Basically, that's going to happen at the time of the launch of the new site. Then when people try to visit the old URLs, they will be redirectioned, re-pointed to the new content on the new website. I do not recommend that you point all of the old content just to the home page...301-redirection everything to the home page. You should be 301-redirectioning it to the exact new page on the site that has the same information.

**Casey Markee:**

Right and this process is called URL Mapping. When we want to do a site migration, we want to do a detailed content audit and we do have resources on that at SearchEngineNews. With the URL map, you're going to do a full inventory of your site so that you can do as many page-by-page redirections. As Beth mentioned, it used to be an accepted practice years ago that if you weren't sure you had a related piece of content, you would maybe just 301-redirection that to your home page. And yet, Google actually came out a little while ago and said that's a terrible practice because it's terrible for users... you want to go ahead and redirection that to something related or just have a tested 404-page... so very good point there.

**Participant:** I would like to hear Beth's thoughts on changing the domain name. Example... have an old domain but it has a hyphen the name "-", and removing the hyphen, now you have a brand new domain. Is this advisable?

**Beth Kahlich:**

Since I'm getting ready to do this myself, I've been thinking about this a lot. And really, it's definitely true that if you move to a new domain name, that you're going to lose a little bit of ...SEO Authority if you move it to a new domain name; no doubt. If you do your good URL Mapping and you've still got great content and a great website that you're going to continue to grow over time, in the long run you'll be fine. But you do need to do all those things we were talking about earlier, which are: making sure that you map the content from one to the other. You can have some of the same challenges if you're just moving to an HTTPS site. What I've found is that, when I started my training business my URL was SEOTrainingDallas... and that was great; I had really great results with that in 2012, with ranking and relevancy.

Well now Google doesn't really go for URLs that are keyword based, they go for URLs that are more about building the brand of your business. And so I'm doing pretty much the exact same thing in early 2016, I'm moving from SEOTrainingDallas.com to SearchEngineAcademyTexas, which is even a longer URL. But the SearchEngineAcademy has a brand, Texas has a brand attached to it, and as long as you're still working with doing all the other things that you're supposed to be doing with your digital marketing plan... you're social, you're blogging, you're providing great content; then in the long run (within a couple of months) you should be able to keep that website traffic very relevant and possibly even find some new opportunities.



**Casey Markee:**

Very good point Beth. One of the things we want people to understand with redirects, be it when you're moving a site or individual URLs, is how Google treats the value and the authority... and we won't use the term "link juice"... I'm certainly with you on that one, Beth... about how they consolidate those in a move. And this is a topic of debate; for many years, Matt Cutts would say that 301s didn't redirect full authority. There's still some conjecture on that topic, most SEOs will agree that about 90-99% of your authority will go through a 301-redirect.

But they are changed a little bit when they do. But they are changed, it's just a little bit different when you're doing actual full redirects to a domain; if you're going www to a non-www... or even recently Google came out and said, if you're going to be moving from HTTP to HTTPS, we're going to give you full authority; that's going to be passed over. And that's been publicly stated... Gary Illyes reiterated this at State of Search; it's also something John Mueller has said from Google Switzerland. So it is something for those of you on the call to think about, people are moving sites every day.

Google, especially with regards to HTTPS, they want to make this as easy to embrace as possible. So it bears repeating, that you are going to get full 100% authority moved over from HTTP to HTTPS URLs. Now they are saying - don't even bother to do the redirects; if we recognize that there's a certificate on your server, we're just going to show HTTPS URLs in the index. That's a very vocal way of saying, "Don't worry about it, we're going to do the heavy lifting and you're going to get the full authority." So something to think about if you're hesitant to change a URL or especially if you're doing a full site migration move is - most of that authority really is going to play over.

**Participant:** In step 3 - shortening the URLs. Doesn't shortening the URL to make it a more SEO friendly URL - doesn't Google consider that a brand new URL? Google has indexed the longer URLs and has a SERP history-- having a new URL starts all over in Google SERPS? How do you avoid?

**Beth Kahlich:**

Well I think the big thing here is, the longer URLs are the ones Google is really paying attention to. They realize that the shorteners are simply there for convenience. So in all the years I've been doing SEO, I have never seen those shortened URLs be the ones that are in Google's index. Casey I don't know if you have had that either, but I've never seen that. They're just strictly there for convenience.

**Casey Markee:**

No not really, and I think she's also saying, again Beth, that what if you shortened the URL? For example: I have a blog and I'm going to be removing the dates from the URL, so that's going to shorten the URL and make it a little more SEO-friendly. Again I'm of the belief that it's definitely good for users, when we're talking about evergreen content, we want to make the content as evergreen as possible... so taking the dates out.

So if this is what you're kind of talking about, it isn't something you need avoid. It's something that... you always want to think about the user first. For example: we have a resource coming out for the February issue of SearchEngineNews which talks specifically about using the plugins that Beth mentioned (redirection), another one is Simple 301 Redirects... which allows you to refine and shorten URLs in a blog to remove dates, so it's definitely something you will read a little bit more about this... very good question.

**Beth Kahlich:**

That's terrific and that is a very good question, and that is definitely good to point out about evergreen content too. That would be one of the reasons you would want to consider doing a site migration is, how are you changing your content to be evergreen.



**Casey Markee:**

Exactly, I see this a ton in the recipe niche, where people will psychologically do a search for a banana cream pie recipe and they might notice that the recipe was published in 2012 or 2013. So they maybe unconsciously will think that this recipe isn't as current or as accurate as it could be, and then they'll just go back and choose a new result that either doesn't have a date in the URL or is maybe more recent. So it's certainly something that those on the call need to be aware of.

**Participant:** I've always wondered if I should set up the 301s after I actually move the site or just before moving the site.

**Beth Kahlich:**

Well, that's a good question; I would do it after you move the site. You wouldn't want to do it just before, because you wouldn't want there to be any mistakes; the search engine robots work awfully quickly. So I would move the site, and then as quickly as you can implement the 301s. If it's a day or two, it's probably not going to be a horrible thing, or I've even seen it go a week. But I wouldn't wait any longer than that to do your 301s, but it would be post moving your site.

**Casey Markee:**

Now you covered sitemaps in your presentation, so let's go over again how people should approach the sitemaps; letting Google know I've moved the site. Should we be advising people that we need to put the old URLs as well and kind of submit a sitemap that way, so Google knows to crawl the old URLs and find the new URLs? You submit both sitemaps? How would you approach that?

**Beth Kahlich:**

You know that's a really good question. Basically I would just submit the new sitemap because I would want them to start recognizing the new URLs. And then, I would do the 301-redirects to give them the information that they needed. They're obviously going to be coming back and looking at the site because they're going to see that something happened. But I like the idea of that technique of going - HEY, here's something new. But to me, if you are submitting a new sitemap at the same time you're going live with the site, then that's going to also alert them to that.

**Casey Markee:**

Very good point, especially with domain names; it makes sense that if you just refresh your old sitemap and all of those URLs are going to be 301-redirected, Google's going to be able to process those a little bit faster. Definitely something to think about.

**Participant:** Added info to the domain name change, it would be done in conjunction with making the site fully secure and responsive.

**Beth Kahlich:**

Yes, absolutely; that's 100% true. It makes sense to do just do everything at one time rather than piecemeal. Because again, depending on the size of your site, we could go back to that example from that article about that large e-commerce site; you redirect things too many times, too close to each other and you run the risk of losing some of that page authority.

**Casey Markee:**

Very true, chained redirects should be avoided or minimized whenever possible.



**Participant:** follow-up to redirects. Where possible we try to keep the exact same URLs on the new site that were on the old. Where possible. MY feeling is a redirect can cost you some visibility even if done properly? Is that correct?

**Beth Kahlich:**

In the short term possibly, but not in the long term because Google is just getting smarter and smarter; so they're able to see that you've moved it. Going back to Casey's point about Google wants to make it easy for us as possible, so I wouldn't really... when you do the site move is the smartest time to edit the URLs because you might have some more SEO-friendly opportunities at that time. In some cases, you'd want to leave it the same because it's already that way. But in other cases, you may go - hmmm, this doesn't really tell the search engines very much information... the URL's not as descriptive. So it really just depends on the situation, and if you want to change it. But if you do change it, I don't think you're going to see a big long-term change in traffic from that.

**Casey Markee:**

Exactly and again, Google... folks on the call, people are changing URLs and redirecting to new domains right now, as we speak. It's happening all the time, every day. So Google's pretty good about figuring some of this stuff out, even if you miss a step along the way. I mean that's why they have a full section under Google Webmaster Guidelines about migrating a site. They have a nice little step there: What if you're moving a site with URL changes? What if you're moving a site without URL changes? Definitely check that information out.

**Participant:** Wherein the yoast plugin do you find the place to tell yoast which canonical tag to use?

**Beth Kahlich:**

Well they just recently updated the plugin, but I believe it's definitely not on the page-by-page one. It pulls that information from the name of your page at the top of WordPress. But if there's anything else, it would be in the general settings of Yoast. Am I remembering that correctly, Casey?

**Casey Markee:**

This is a good question. The good thing about the Yoast plugin is it does a lot of the heavy lifting for you, including enabling canonicals, as you want. Now if you wanted to specify maybe a different canonical, there used to be right below the post (which is now rich snippet preview), you could just click a button and pop down would be these advanced SEO settings; where you could just actually specify a unique canonical or you could actually put a robot directive, whatever you want.

I don't believe that's changed, I think that's still there. Pretty easy to use, but honestly for most of you on the call, you're probably never going to use that stuff unless you have a reason to publish a post and then immediately block it. So just something to think about, but if you require more information on that, I know Yoast has a substantial user guide online that should have that information.

**Participant:** In regard to Crawl Stats ... can this be used if new site has replaced Google Analytics with Adobe Omniture stats? Will Google Search Console work without Google Analytics?

**Beth Kahlich:**

Yes Google Search Console will definitely work without Google Analytics, you'll just have to approve in it in a different way. For instance, if all of a sudden all of my clients changed away from Google Analytics and started using Omniture, I would probably have to go into many of them and change the way that I verify the site. Because most of the time I verify the site by saying - oh I have control the Google Analytics. But you can also use different methods to prove, which includes proving at the host



level. So there are things you can do through GoDaddy or whoever is hosting the site, that you can add some information so that you can have access to that.

**Casey Markee:**

Very good point, so the search query information that you see in Search Console is not going to change just because you stopped using analytics. Beth just nailed it completely; you'll just have to change how you verify the site going forward.

**Participant:** Would you please explain why the third name change for the bar stools reduced the ranking...should they have stayed with the more generic barstools?

**Beth Kahlich:**

That's a very good question. First of all, I would recommend that you go over to Moz and read that article, just because I think it's a very interesting article that has been passed down to me by people that didn't even know I was working on this presentation... I got like three emails today asking if I saw that article. But basically the reason is because they were changing the URL too frequently, on all of their products, it wasn't just the barstools... that was just an example.

So they have thousands of products on this website and they were trying to be better about naming their URLs, but when they 301-redirectioned and a few months they 301-redirectioned again on many, many products... then Google was a little bit confused. As we've been saying, they're pretty smart; but in this particular case, with it being so many products, Google was like - wait a minute, why do they keep redirectioning? And so they were not passing the full-page authority from one version of the webpage to the next.

**Casey Markee:**

What you just want to remember is we talked about chained redirects previously, and even though 301-redirects will pass most authority, if you go redirect to redirect to redirect; that's just less authority over time. So it makes sense that if you have to 301-redirected one URL to another URL and then if you have to redirect that one again, you're going to get loss of authority every time that you do that. So remember that's why we want to minimize redirects whenever possible.

**Participant:** I am torn on changing URLs, for example, I want to really go after a few high volume search terms and get an exact match with new URLs, so currently it is /fly-fishing, but want it do be /montana-fly-fishing. How do you determine if it makes sense to add another term in the URL to get an exact match for powerful keywords?

**Beth Kahlich:**

Well one of the things is, if the content of your website is talking about Montana pretty prevalently in it, obviously in a natural way; not so that it looks like it's keyword stuffing. Then I don't know that I'd chase through and change all of them, but I think it makes sense that if you're not going to be selling fly-fishing outside the state of Montana... to go ahead and add that to your URL.

Again it would be where I wouldn't experiment with it, I'd just make a decision to go ahead and do it. Because to me, if you have the URL be Montana-fly-fishing, that's very relevant from an SEO standpoint. And I would just weight that against the other SEO factors that you have on your page, and then also how many incoming links you have on that page, and all the things you look at when you audit your site. It might make a lot of sense to make that change, but you need to look at how authoritative that page is overall before you flip the switch.



**Casey Markee:**

Exactly, and I would provide this to my personal preference and I think John and others at SEN would agree - you should never be changing your URL just to get another keyword phrase in it. It's just not really a good practice, when you think about the long-term ramifications of that. I don't necessarily think that you're going to get any huge boost at all from changing fly fishing to Montana fly fishing; especially if you've done an excellent job with your page titles, your H1 tags, and modifying geographic specific content on the page itself. Again redirects are okay, but we want to try to minimize redirects whenever possible. So this seems like something that would be aesthetic at best, so just something to think about.

**Participant:** How do you move a portion of the site from example [store.domain.com](http://store.domain.com) to [www.domain.com](http://www.domain.com)? One 301-redirect or do you redirect each individual page?

**Beth Kahlich:**

Well it would depend of course, at lot of it just has to do with effort at a certain level. But I would definitely prefer to see you do it, page-by-page if it's feasible. If you've got thousands of products, then that may not be feasible; then I would just go to your www. Because as we talked about earlier, Google will figure it out and follow it. But always, you want to try and go for page-to-page redirects as opposed to the whole domain.

**Participant:** In your experience Beth, how long does it take Google to update the new page in the search results?

**Beth Kahlich:**

I'm going to say 30 days, but I've usually seen it happen a lot faster than that. But I think to set expectations, particularly if you're working with clients, 30 days is reasonable. I've seen it happen probably within 2 weeks, but I would hate to promise that to anyone, just in case there was an issue.

**Participant:** Where can we see the new mobile specs & how they compare to what Webmaster tools is currently using for evaluation? (We were about to start a redesign but sounds like we need to revisit)

**Beth Kahlich:**

If you will do a Google search for Accelerated Mobile Pages project (they're calling it AMP), you'll see lots of information on that right now and it'll be able to answer a lot of your questions. For all the people in this MasterMind group, this is an amazing opportunity. You know early adopters usually kind of get ahead of the game. If you have the opportunity to implement something like that, this would be the time to strike while the iron's hot.

**Casey Markee:**

Very good point, and we did cover that in the current issue of SearchEngineNews and I've provided a link to the update. So make sure that you review that and just like anything else... John and I were both kind of hesitant about a lot of people embracing this very quickly, because there are always bumps in the road. It's just like how everyone decided that they had to make the change to SSL immediately, and here it is 1.5 years later, and honestly there hasn't been a ton of adoption.

For example: in certain niches, the recipe niche is a great example, if they made the change to SSL, a lot of them would be screwed because most of the ad networks don't support SSL ads; other than AdSense and Amazon, basically none of the other big ad networks have made that leap. So you move



to SSL and boom, you can't serve your ads; so that's not a great choice. And this AMP thing, right now as John has correctly noted in the article, there's only one WordPress plugin that even remotely does this. There's only one plugin and it's very poor so far, according to John (who's still getting info). Just wait and see; we'll see what happens.

<https://www.searchengineneeds.com/se-news/update/C629/#6354>

**Participant:** question about evergreen content - we have great blog posts that are top landing pages that were written as far back as 2010. The URLs don't have dates, but the posts themselves do show the date. Is there any gain of authority to leave some content as older? Or is it better to refresh and rerun overall?

**Beth Kahlich:**

That is a very good question. One of the things that I also think is interesting is when Google shows dates in their search results for content that's not a post, but a page; that one always blows my mind. I would say that the posts themselves, if they go back as far as 2010, I think personally you're probably better off not having the date on them. Because things move so quickly in the online world, that having content from 2010... if I pulled it up and saw that date, I would see it as not being relevant, and I think most people would feel the same way.

**Casey Markee:**

I couldn't agree more. Basically when we're talking about content, the whole value of evergreen content is that what you published in 2010 is as relevant today, and I find it hard to believe that most of that content would be as relevant now as it would be when you published it. If you could go in and maybe there are ways for you to improve the page speed of the page, maybe there are ways for you to optimize/update the graphics, or make sure all of the links actually work.

Then if the URL isn't going to change, it's just a matter of you hitting republish on the page and boom, you generated new freshness into your site, that Google can then come back and crawl the site a bit, maybe they'll crawl the linked content. I'm all for that, I always tell people they need to do content house cleaning every year and really go back... and it's not even a matter of you publishing more content these days, it's just making sure the content you have on your site is relevant. So starting a content inventory that looks backward is going to be very beneficial for you in the long run.

**Participant:** All URLs have changed with new site and developer is using tool within their CMS (not WordPress) to redirect nearly 300 pages and posts. Is this going to cause problems after the launch?

**Beth Kahlich:**

As long as you don't try and do 301-redirects in multiple places, if you've got the one place where you're doing it all; then, no I don't think so. That kind of goes back to [another participant's] comment, which I like and find really true... if the URL changes are lined with good SEO, which I hope is the case, then no I wouldn't have a problem with that at all. I've done a site like that, with hundreds of pages, and it did not cause any problems. We tested things after it launched, and the site (as I showed on the presentation) had a little dip and then it... because the URLs were more relevant, along with everything else on the site, then it had a raise in organic traffic after that point.



**Participant:** I redesigned a site about a year ago making it responsive. However, I did not implement the SSL certificate at the time. Since I recently had to do a lot of redirects, should I wait to make it secure so I don't suffer any ranking issues? I understand changing to SSL should be a priority this year.

**Beth Kahlich:**

I would totally say wait, and the reason is that the whole SSL thing (like Casey was just talking about)... I wouldn't rush to do it if you just made your site responsive and everything else about your site, you feel really confident about. You've got so many priorities, when it comes to doing digital marketing for your site, I would work on something else for the rest of 2016. Then take another look at that point, in early 2017, about changing. There's no use in making another change at this time, and I think going back to the example of the site that made too many changes, you wouldn't want to risk that. So I would just put your energy into improving other things about your site.

**Participant:** Can you post a link to the checklist?

**Kristi Hagen - SEN:**

<https://www.searchengineneeds.com/se-news/content/seo-tips-for-website-redesign>

**Beth Kahlich:** @BethKahlich

**Beth Kahlich:** Thanks guys!!

**Participant:** >In my experience if the URL changes are required for best SEO, I change them and the results have been great. if that helps folks.

**Participant:** Thank you!

**Participant:** Thank you!!!!

**Participant:** Thanks Beth and Casey!!

**Participant:** YAY!!!!!!

**Participant:** !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Participant:** Thank you Beth!

**Participant:** Thanks!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

**Participant:** Thumbs up!

**Participant:** thanks guys!

**Participant:** Thank you! It was great!

**Participant:** Thanks! Joined the call late but what I heard was excellent!! AAAA !!!!!!!!!!!

**Participant:** Great job...Thank you So much! I really appreciate in these special guest sessions!

**Participant:** Just caught the end. Very interesting. Thank you Beth!

**Participant:** thank you Beth

**Participant:** THANKS!!!

**Participant:** Thanks a bunch.