

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE · WW-019

Diagnose and refresh a page that is losing search traffic

Confirm a real traffic decline in Search Console, find whether rankings, clicks or demand changed, then update the page so it is more useful than when it last ranked well.

SEO

VERSION 1.0	EFFECTIVE 5 October 2026
NEXT REVIEW 5 April 2027	TIME 2 to 3 hours per page
DIFFICULTY Intermediate	RELATED WW-006 · WW-007 · WW-018
AUDIENCE SEO specialists and content managers maintaining existing pages	
TOOLS Google Search Console · Google Analytics 4 · Google Trends	

Purpose

Pages that once ranked well slowly lose clicks as competitors improve, facts age and search results change. Rewriting blindly can make things worse. This procedure confirms the decline is real, finds what changed and makes targeted improvements while keeping the URL. It is finished when the refreshed page is live, Google has been asked to recrawl it, and a follow-up date is set to measure the result.

Scope

In scope

- Comparing Search Console data across periods to confirm and explain a decline
- Updating content, on-page SEO and internal links on the existing URL
- Requesting recrawl and measuring the outcome

Out of scope

- Site-wide traffic drops caused by technical faults, manual actions or migrations
- Changing the page's URL (see WW-008 if this is unavoidable)
- Writing a new page from scratch (see WW-018)

Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
SEO specialist	Analyses the decline, plans the changes and measures the result.
Writer	Makes the content updates.
Business owner	Confirms facts, prices and services are current.

Prerequisites

- Full access to the Search Console property and GA4 for the site.
- At least six months of Search Console data for the page.
- Edit access to the page in the content management system.

Procedure

Confirm the decline is real

Rule out seasonality and site-wide problems first.

1. In Search Console, open **Performance**, then **Search results**. Add a **Page** filter for the exact URL.
2. Click **Date**, choose **Compare**, and compare the last three months with the same three months a year earlier.

3. Repeat with no page filter. If the whole site dropped by a similar amount, stop and investigate site-wide causes instead.
4. Check the main query in Google Trends for the same periods. If interest fell by a similar amount, the decline is demand, not performance.

[!NOTE] A drop in clicks with stable impressions and position usually means the results page changed (for example a new map pack or AI overview), not that the page got worse.

Find what changed

Identify which queries lost clicks and why.

1. With the page filter and comparison still set, open the **Queries** tab and sort by the difference in clicks.
2. For the five queries that lost the most clicks, record the change in impressions, click-through rate and average position.
3. Search each query in a private window and note which pages now rank above yours and what they offer that your page does not: newer information, better answers, clearer structure or stronger proof.

Plan the refresh

Decide the smallest set of changes that makes the page clearly better.

1. List outdated facts, prices, dates, screenshots and broken links on the page.
2. List questions the higher-ranking pages answer that yours does not.
3. Note on-page issues using the checks in WW-006, such as a weak title tag or missing headings.
4. Agree the plan with the business owner and confirm all facts.

Update the page

Improve the page on the same URL.

1. Make the content updates, adding new sections where needed and removing out-of-date material.
2. Update the title tag and meta description if the click-through rate fell while position held.
3. Add two or three internal links to the page from related, well-performing pages.
4. If the page shows a "last updated" date, change it only if the content changed substantially.

[!WARNING] Keep the URL the same. Changing it throws away the page's history and links unless a redirect is set up correctly.

Recrawl and measure

Ask Google to look again, then check the result.

1. In Search Console, run the URL through **URL Inspection**, click **Test live URL**, then **Request indexing**.
2. Set a reminder for eight weeks later. Compare the eight weeks after the refresh with the eight weeks before for clicks, impressions and position.
3. Record the result and any next steps in the content log.

Quality checks

- ☐ The decline was confirmed against the same period a year earlier.
- ☐ Site-wide drops and falling demand were ruled out.
- ☐ Every outdated fact on the page was updated and confirmed.
- ☐ The URL did not change.
- ☐ Indexing was requested and a measurement date is set.

Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely cause	Fix
No change after eight weeks	Changes too small, or intent shifted	Re-read the current results and consider a bigger rewrite.
Position improved but clicks did not	Results page now has more features above organic listings	Improve the title and description, and target related queries.
Page dropped after refresh	Key content or headings were removed	Restore removed sections that matched the main queries.
Request indexing unavailable	Daily quota reached	Try again the next day; the page will still be recrawled naturally.

Records

- Log the page, the dates of the comparison periods, the changes made and the eight-week result in the content log.
- Keep a copy of the page content before the refresh for at least 12 months.

References

- [Debug Google Search traffic drops \(Google Search Central\)](#)
- [Performance report \(Search Console Help\)](#)
- [URL Inspection tool \(Search Console Help\)](#)
- [Add a byline date to Google Search results \(Google Search Central\)](#)

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