

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE · WW-022

Run a pre-launch and launch-day technical SEO check

Check a new or rebuilt website on staging and again on launch day so search engines can crawl it, existing rankings are protected and tracking works from the first visit.

TECHNICAL SEO

VERSION 1.0	EFFECTIVE 5 October 2026
NEXT REVIEW 5 April 2027	TIME 3 hours on staging, 1 hour on launch day
DIFFICULTY Intermediate	RELATED WW-001 · WW-004 · WW-008 · WW-009
AUDIENCE Project managers, developers and SEO specialists launching websites	
TOOLS Google Search Console · Google Tag Manager · A website crawler · PageSpeed Insights	

Purpose

Most search traffic lost during a website launch is caused by a small number of avoidable mistakes: a forgotten noindex tag, missing redirects, broken tracking or a staging robots.txt pushed live. This procedure checks for each of them on staging before launch and again on the live site within an hour of going live. It is finished when every launch-day check passes and the post-launch monitoring dates are booked.

Scope

In scope

- Staging checks for crawlability, metadata, redirects, structured data, speed and tracking
- Launch-day checks on the live domain
- Post-launch monitoring for four weeks

Out of scope

- Writing the redirect map (see WW-008)
- Content creation and design sign-off
- Changing domain name (follow Google's site move guidance as well as this procedure)

Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Technical SEO specialist	Runs the checks, records results and signs off the launch.
Developer	Fixes issues and switches staging protections off at launch.
Project manager	Schedules launch at a low-traffic time and books the monitoring checks.

Prerequisites

- A staging site protected from search engines by a password or noindex.
- A crawl of the old site saved before work started, if this is a rebuild.
- An approved redirect map for every changed URL (WW-008).
- Access to Search Console (WW-004), GTM (WW-001) and the hosting control panel.

Procedure

Check staging

Fix problems while they are cheap.

1. Crawl the staging site with a website crawler and export the list of URLs, status codes, titles, meta descriptions, H1s and canonicals.
2. Fix any internal link that returns a `404` or redirects, so every internal link points straight to a `200` page.
3. Check every indexable page has a unique title tag, meta description and one H1.
4. Check canonical tags point to the final live domain, not the staging domain.
5. Confirm the XML sitemap is generated, lists only indexable pages and uses the live domain.
6. Confirm the custom `404` page returns a real `404` status code.
7. Test the main templates with PageSpeed Insights and the mobile layout on a real phone (WW-009).
8. In GTM preview on staging, confirm page views and lead events fire (WW-003).

Check redirects

Protect the old site's rankings.

1. Load the redirect map into the server or redirect manager on staging.
2. Test every old URL in the map and confirm each returns one `301` straight to a live `200` page, with no chains.

[!IMPORTANT] Redirects are the most important part of a rebuild. Do not launch until every old URL with traffic or links has a tested redirect.

Launch day

Switch protections off and check the live site within the first hour.

1. Remove the staging password and any site-wide `noindex` setting.
2. Open `/robots.txt` on the live domain and confirm it does not contain `Disallow: /` and that it lists the sitemap URL.
3. View the source of three key pages and confirm there is no `noindex` robots meta tag.
4. Confirm the site loads only on the preferred address: `http` and the non-preferred `www` or bare domain both `301` to it.
5. Spot-check 20 old URLs from the redirect map on the live domain.
6. Check GTM is on the live site and that GA4 **Realtime** shows your visit.

[!WARNING] A staging `Disallow: /` or `noindex` left live can remove the whole site from Google within days. Check it first, before anything else.

Tell Google

Help Google find the new site quickly.

1. In Search Console, open **Sitemaps** and submit the live sitemap URL.
2. Run the home page and two key service pages through **URL Inspection**, click **Test live URL**, then **Request indexing**.

Monitor for four weeks

Catch problems that only show up after launch.

1. Book checks at one day, one week and four weeks after launch.
2. At each check, review **Pages** for spikes in **Not found (404)** or **Excluded by 'noindex' tag**, and add redirects or fixes as needed.
3. Compare clicks and impressions in **Performance** with the four weeks before launch, and investigate any page that lost most of its traffic.

Quality checks

- ☐ No internal links point to **404** pages or redirects.
- ☐ Canonicals and the sitemap use the live domain.
- ☐ Every mapped old URL returns a single **301** to a **200** page.
- ☐ The live robots.txt and key pages allow indexing.
- ☐ Only one version of the domain resolves; the others redirect.
- ☐ Tracking is confirmed on the live site.
- ☐ Monitoring checks are booked.

Troubleshooting

Symptom	Likely cause	Fix
Pages disappear from Google after launch	Noindex or robots.txt block left from staging	Remove the block, then request indexing for key pages.
Spike in 404 errors	Old URLs missing from the redirect map	Add redirects for the URLs with traffic or links.
Canonical points to staging	Domain hard-coded in templates or settings	Update the site URL setting and clear caches.
No GA4 data after launch	GTM snippet missing from live templates	Re-add the snippet and confirm in Realtime.

Records

- Save the staging crawl, the launch-day checklist with results and the monitoring notes with the project file.
- Keep the old site's crawl and redirect map for at least two years.

References

- [Site moves with URL changes \(Google Search Central\)](#)
- [Robots.txt introduction and guide \(Google Search Central\)](#)
- [Block search indexing with noindex \(Google Search Central\)](#)

- [Manage sitemaps with the Sitemaps report \(Search Console Help\)](#)
- [Page indexing report \(Search Console Help\)](#)

WRIGHT WEBSITES · WW-022 · V1.0 · COVERED BY THE RESOURCES LICENCE AT
WRIGHTWEBSITES.CO/LEGAL/RESOURCES-LICENCE