

## How to Reduce the Pain of Switching Domains

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Transferring traffic and popularity to a new domain is a painstaking process that no one on the web appears to be immune to, or so Topix.net has realized. Topix.net is a leading news aggregation resource that has been in the news lately because they are planning to move their site from Topix.net to Topix.com after purchasing the .com for a cool million from a Canadian animation company.

The Wall Street Journal [wrote this article](#) explaining how damaging a seemingly simple process of switching from .net to .com could be for Topix LLC. The author goes on to explain such a switch is usually fraught with ranking drops while the major search engines notice and respond to the changeover. The fact that switching addresses will cause problems is not news in the SEO world; however, I thought Topix.net's situation was a great opportunity to review what one might expect when switching domains.

### Switching Shingles

Switching a domain is tantamount to changing physical locations and it should be treated just as seriously. The following are the steps to take and consider when switching domains:

1. You must install a site wide 301 (permanent redirect) on your old domain to forward all human traffic to the new domain and inform search engine spiders that your website has permanently moved to a new location. For information on how to implement a 301 redirect here is a [great tutorial](#).
2. Google is the biggest player and likely the most significant driver of traffic to your website. Keeping that in mind you will want to notify Google of your switchover as soon as possible by registering the new website within Google Webmaster Central and then submitting a fresh XML sitemap. Google representatives are very clear the only way to minimize the impact of a domain changeover is to give Google's automated system as much warning as possible to limit downtime.
3. Find the most significant inbound links that point to the old domain and selectively contact the site owners requesting a link update to the new domain.

TIP: Discovering which sites to contact first can be done using a combination of top referrer statistics, and search engine backlink reports. I don't recommend taking this step unless you find a few sites that stand out as massive traffic drivers as this process can be frustrating due to lack of response; after all, changing a backlink to your site is likely low on a webmaster's priority list.

4. Send out a press release far and wide explaining the move to the new domain. Feature the domain prominently in the release to begin the task of re-branding.
5. All email addresses will need to be forwarded to their respective addresses on the new domain. Ensure that anyone emailing the old address is forwarded to the new one BUT they should also receive an automated notice to change their contact records to reflect the new email. Leave these email forwards active for a short time to catch the most important emails and then turn them off and delete the old address accounts to avoid encouraging spammers.



6. On the new domain don't forget to implement a 301 redirect for the "non-www" traffic so they get forwarded to the preferred "www" version of the domain. For more information and background on this topic please visit the following tutorial "[301 Redirect of Non-WWW to WWW URLs](#)".
7. If you expect a severe drop in traffic you can expect a drop in sales. In this regard you may want to ramp up or start a pay per click marketing to minimize the damage to your bottom line.

### How Long Does a Domain Transition Take?

Generally a popular website will experience the least amount of downtime because Google will take notice faster due to the many entry points (inbound links from news articles, etc.) this type of site usually has. It is also more to Google's benefit to ensure that a credible and well-trafficked website is kept high in Google's results to ensure users receive the best results possible. Using a popular website such as Topix.Net as an example, I would expect a 2-week to 1-month turn around at which time traffic would be back to approximately 85% of what it was.

Sites that are less popular will really need to do their homework and ensure they have informed Google in every way possible of the transition. The transition back to normal traffic for sites that carefully transition their website should be in the realm of 2 to 6 months.

### "What If?" The Worst Case Scenario

What should you do if your traffic drops dramatically and after a few weeks or months it still has not measurably restored itself? Google actually recommends you post your issue on their online user [support forum](#). Apparently Google engineers occasionally take pity and help out; maybe you will get lucky. I also recommend visiting the more authoritative search engine forums (such as [Search Engine Watch](#), [IHelpYou](#) etc.) and requesting help. There are a lot of incredibly talented SEOs on these forums that are happy to provide assistance.

### WARNING!

If you must conduct a domain transition be sure to plan it during a historically slow time of year to minimize damages. For example, it would be a mistake for a B2C to switch domains before the Holiday Season rush.

### In Conclusion

Do not switch your domain unless you have no other choice because no matter how popular your website is domain switchovers are far from enjoyable. After all, even losing a single week of significant traffic for a popular site could cost many thousands or even millions of dollars. On the flip side of the coin, less trafficked websites (i.e. Mom and Pop sites, small B2C websites, etc.) usually experience a longer wait time so they experience a different type of pain. Fortunately, you now know there are ways to mitigate the potential harm to your bottom line, just don't forget to follow the rules and your switchover will be a lot more effective and ultimately less painful.

