# Website Launch Checklist: 28 Things to Check Before you Launch Your Site


Launching a new website is always exciting — you've worked hard on that dazzling design, awesome content, and outstanding user interface. Obviously, you can't wait to share it with the whole world.

Why would you need to test your beautiful site before launching it? Because things like this can happen:
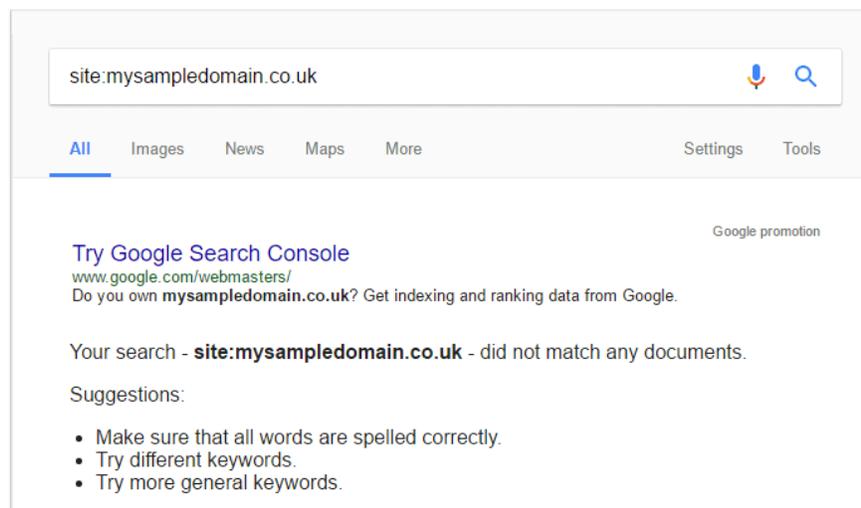
And this:
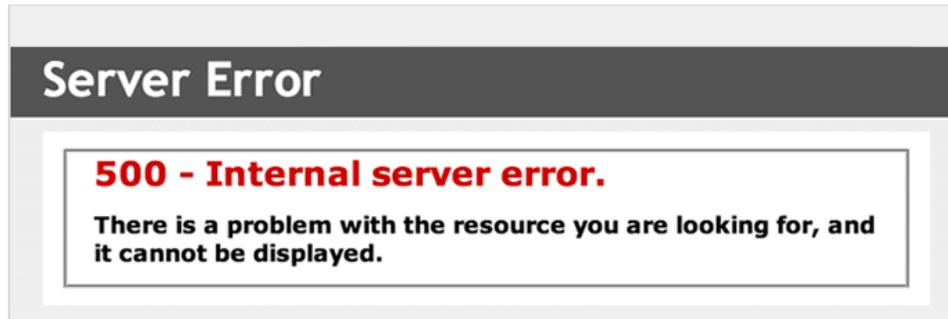
And even this:
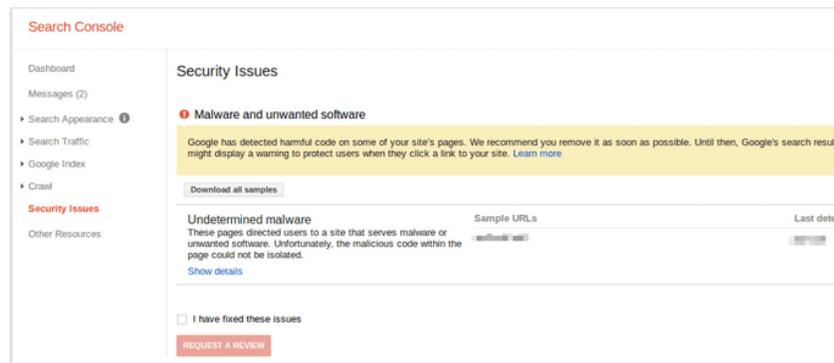
I hope I haven't scared you out of your wits! All those issues could easily be avoided if webmasters follow simple best practices when launching websites. Don't worry — I'll explain these core activities, and your site will be in perfect condition when you launch it.

Before we start, work out the launch schedule

Working without a schedule, but with a deadline is a dangerous thing. On the one hand, you get an illusion that everything will be completed by that marked date on your calendar. On the other, you often have to cope with more issues and tasks than you planned, so you feel stressed out right before the launch date — eventually, you get nervous, blind to details, and miss something really important.
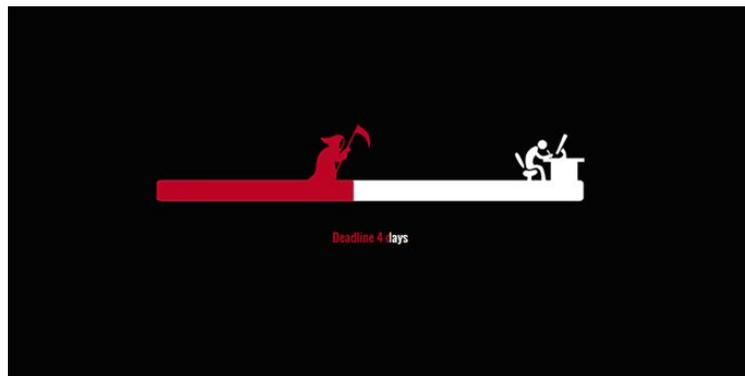
Besides, there are often many people working on a new website — developers, SEOs, testers, content writers, and product managers, each having their own tasks, goals, and deadlines. Your lifesaver will be a comprehensive management plan that defines roles and responsibilities of each team member.

Table of contents:

For convenience, I've decided to split all check-up tips into categories, depending on the team/specialist responsible for the task. So, you're free to scroll to the part that's of biggest interest to you, or read everything from cover to cover!

Chapter 1. What developers and web designers need to do for a new site launch

☐ 1.1 Make sure all the site's URLs are live and function properly

It's often the case that a website's built using a special staging platform, where things can be tested in multiple ways. After the functionality and content are finalized, it's time to move the site to production and change all the URLs. This often doesn't go smoothly though.

If you have a small corporate website or landing pages with just a few sections, you can check it out manually, entering live URLs one by one to make sure the links work alright. If, however, we're talking about larger websites, the URL check has to be automated.

How to test a site's URLs for issues

Fire up [WebSite Auditor](#), create a project for your website and let the tool collect the data; depending on the number of pages analyzed, the check can take from a minute to half an hour.

The tool will scan for multiple URL-related issues, including

- Resources with 4xx status codes
- Resources with 5xx status codes
- Pages with 302 redirects
- Broken links

Copy the URLs in question and then share the list with your dev team.

□ 1.2 Check site speed

You certainly know that page load speed is an official Google ranking factor. Back in 2018, when Google rolled out its first Page Speed Update, we held [an experiment](#)

[proving](#) that a page's average Page Speed Optimization Score had a significant correlation (0.97) to its position in SERPs. There's no excuse today for pages loading a minute or two, the site speed should be one of your top priorities.

How to check your site performance

There are lots of tools to check performance, you can either head to Google's [PageSpeed Insights](#) and check the pages there, or do a quick scan in WebSite Auditor. You'll find a list of your site's slower-loading pages (along with each page's size) right in the *Site Audit* dashboard under *Too big pages*.

For a more detailed analysis of page speed issues, go to the *Content Analysis* module, *Pages*, add or select a page you need to check, switch to *Technical factors* in the left section and scroll down to *Page speed* for both desktop and mobile devices.
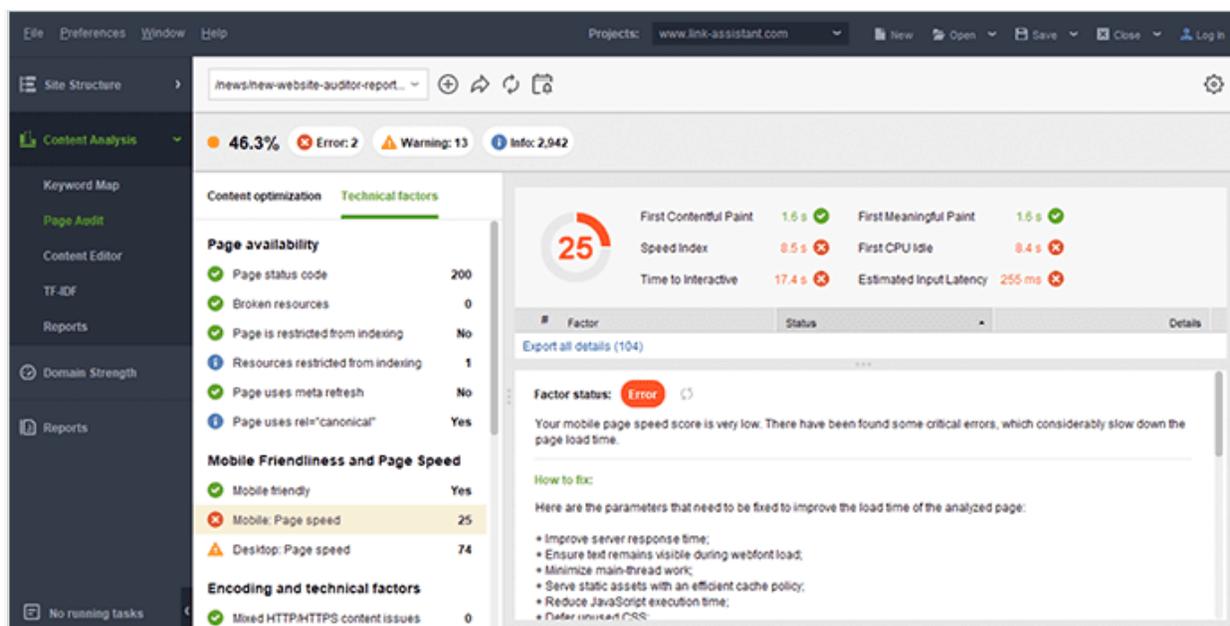
Here, you'll see a bunch of factors that Google uses to evaluate page speed — page size, server response time, the number of redirects, uncompressed images and resources, etc. Ideally, you should check that your website has all factors under this section marked with a green *Correct* sign.

A checklist to fix page load speed

It's important to look for page speed issues in as many places as possible. You can start with the following activities:

- 2. Use the PageSpeed Module to integrate with an Apache or Nginx web server and to automatically optimize your site, including resource minification.
- 3. Look for a faster hosting solution. Test multiple vendors, read reviews on unbiased forums and communities and pick the winner.
- 4. If you launch a WordPress-based website, make sure you've enabled a caching plugin, such as W3 Total Cache or WP Super Cache.
- 5. Add expires headers — that means you should add some code to tell browsers whether they should request a specific file from the server or whether they should grab it from the browser's cache.
- 6. Enable compression — you can zip large pages (using tools such as Gzip) to reduce the bandwidth.

- 7. Optimize images on your website. It's better to avoid BMP or TIFF images and stick to JPEGs and PNGs. Also, you should avoid empty image src code lines.
- 8. Reduce the number of pages with redirects (you should have collected such pages at Step 1.1), as they will also negatively impact the site's load time.

After you go through this optimization checklist, you may also check how fast your website loads from different countries and regions, especially if you target multiple locations.

☐ 1.3 Make sure the 404 page is set up correctly

Imagine a visitor comes to your website but doesn't really make it, because they've made a misprint in a page URL, or clicked on a bad link on someone else's website. The last thing you want this visitor to see is an ugly error warning.
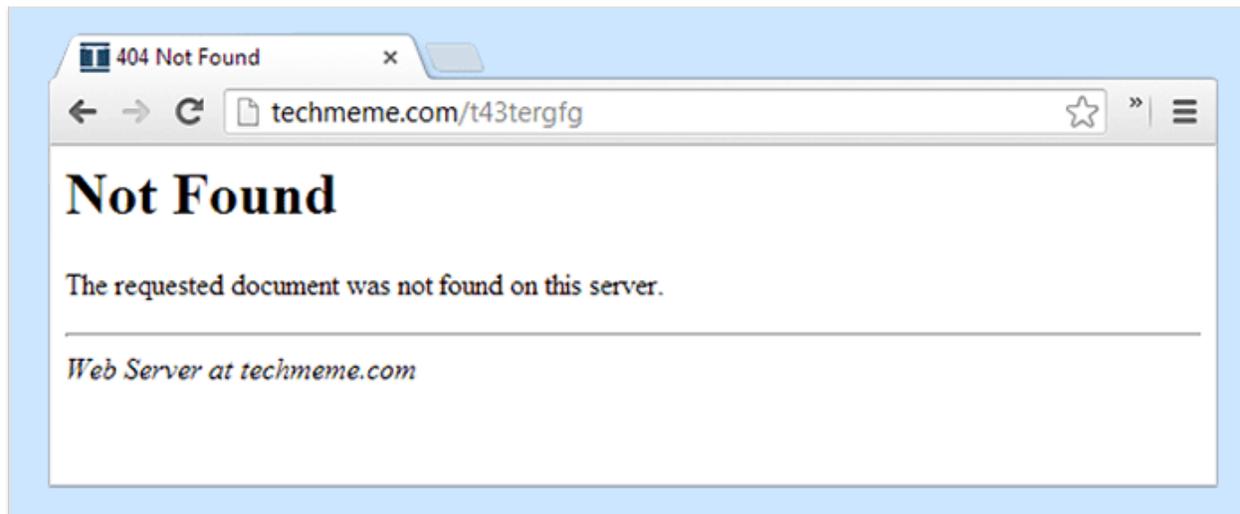
To prevent this, make sure you've set up a custom 404 page on your website. By the way, you'll be hunted by WebSite Auditor if you haven't:
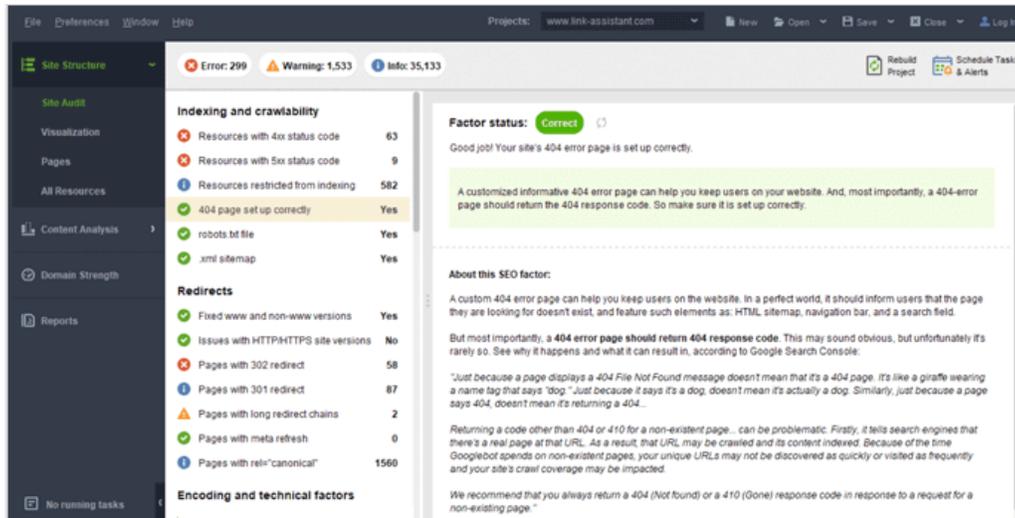
If you aren't familiar with PHP and HTML, it might be hard for you to modify the 404.php template or create the page from scratch. In that case, you'll have to assign this task to someone skilled.

Alternatively, you can use plugins to build a custom 404 page, using tools such as 404page (it'll work for WordPress-based websites only).

☐ 1.4 Ensure the site's mobile-friendly

You have to accept we're living in a mobile-first world, so you should definitely consider the mobile layouts for your new website.

You can check if your website's mobile-friendly or not in the *Page Audit* module in Website Auditor.

If you spot the problems, I'd recommend checking out Google's official guides for mobile optimization:

- Mobile-Friendly Websites
- Mobile Usability Report

Also, consider implementing AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages) to make your pages load super-fast on mobile devices. The official AMP Project [help pages](#) are the best starting point for those who want to try the technology.

However, you shouldn't stop at making your website responsive. You'd have much better results with your mobile traffic if you think in advance about the needs and wants of mobile users.

What does it take to make an order using the mobile version of your website? Do you really want your blog posts to occupy the larger part of the home page? Is it possible and convenient to send you a direct email right from your website? Marcus Miller has a great [mobile site optimization checklist](#) and mentions the following points:

- Keep calls-to-action front and center.
- Keep menus short and sweet.
- Streamline form menu.
- Don't make users pinch to zoom.
- Make product images expandable.

And even if you've already implemented all of the above, do not forget to test how well your mobile version is working — there's always something that could be improved.

☐ 1.5 Validate code and CSS

Although Google says some HTML/CSS errors won't harm your site's results, I'd still recommend checking how clean your code is. You can scan pages for errors using both online tools, such as [W3C Markup Validator](#) and [W3C CSS Validator](#),and desktop tools, such as WebSite Auditor.

For a list of pages with W3C errors, go to WebSite Auditor's Site Audit dashboard and click on Pages with W3C HTML errors and warnings and Pages with W3C CSS errors and warnings. You'll see the list of pages with the errors in the right-hand part of your screen.

All fixed? Great, now it's time to do some proper SEO and make sure the search engines will fall in love with your site at first crawl.

# Chapter 2. What SEOs need to do — along with an insightful website launch checklist


▢ 2.1 Check for possible indexation issues

If you could do only a single technical SEO task before launching your website, in my opinion, it should be this one — make sure that crawlers can easily access your site pages and content.

To see if there are any pages blocked from indexing, go to WebSite Auditor and follow these steps:

1. At Step 1 of project creation/rebuild, check the *Enable expert options box.*

2. At Step 2, uncheck the *Follow robots.txt* instructions box, and hit *Next*.
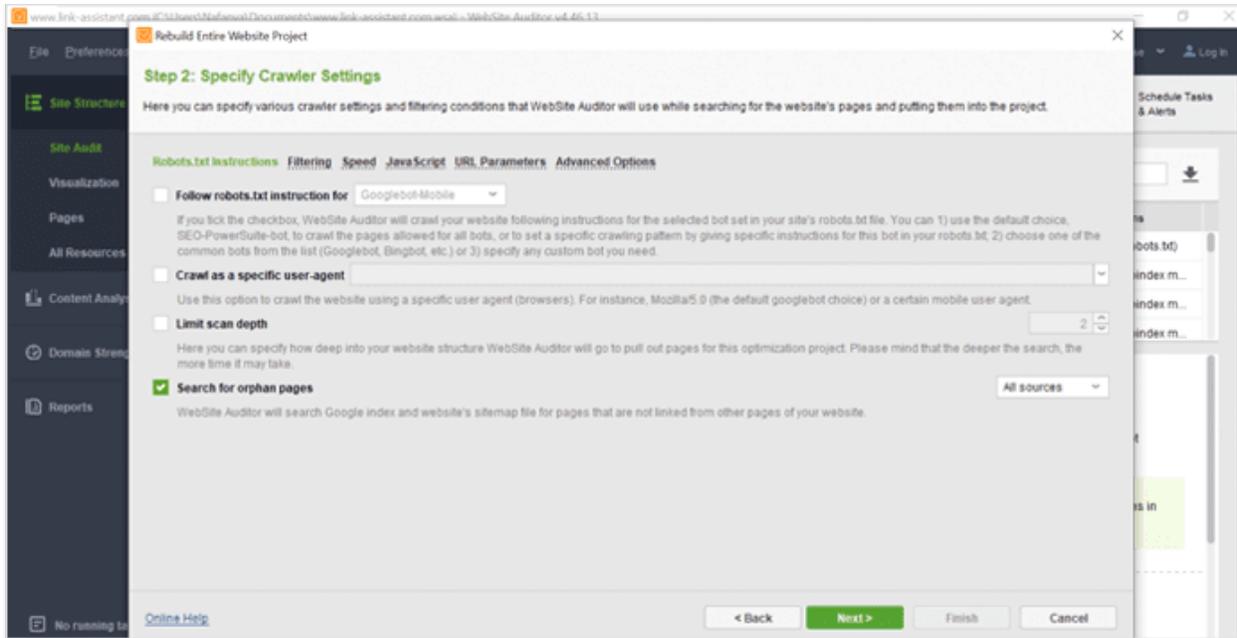
3. When the crawl is complete, click on *Resources restricted from indexing* to see which parts of your site can't be crawled by search engines. Make sure none of your site's important pages and resources (such as your CSS and JavaScript) are listed there.
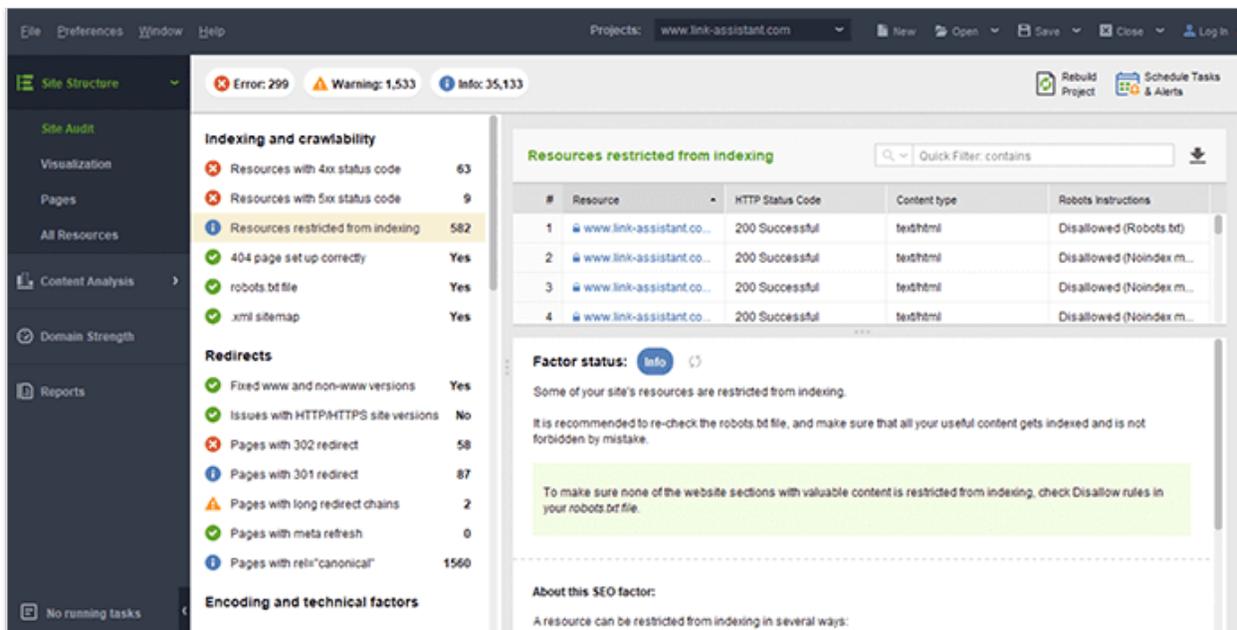
□ 2.2 Check for duplicate issues

Duplicate content is tricky and has [many faces](#). No matter what causes a duplication issue, your site might suffer from wasted crawl budget, link dilution, and lower rankings. Nobody wants to fall into that trap so let's see what you could do to better protect your new website.

1. Choose the preferred (www or non-www) version for your domain

If you haven't defined the preferred version for your website, search engines might crawl and index multiple URLs with identical content. In WebSite Auditor, you'll see if you have to fix this in *Site Audit, Fixed www and non-www versions*.

2. Avoid scraped content

Now, let me talk to ecommerce website owners first! I know how hard it is to create unique product descriptions for thousands of items and pages, but that's exactly what you should do. And even though some part of that content (technical parameters, size

data, etc.) will be identical on multiple websites, the larger part of your description must be unique.

And if you're eager to dive into more technical details of cleaning up an ecommerce website from duplicate issues, read [this awesome guide](#) by Dan Kern.

3. Avoid duplicate meta tags

Be careful with your CMS settings — make sure you're not using identical meta title tags and meta description tags for hundreds of pages.

You'll spot a page with duplicate meta tags in the *Site Audit* module, under *Duplicate titles* and *Duplicate meta descriptions*.

Whenever content on your website can be found at multiple URLs, it should be canonicalized for search engines — you can do that by either specifying the rel=canonical attribute or by using a 301 redirect.

☐ 2.3 Make sure the URLs are search-engine-friendly

Check if your site's URLs are clean-coded — you should avoid dynamic URLs and URLs that are too long. You can find these URL warnings in Site Audit, URLs.

Besides, the tool allows examining the site structure, investigating the click depth and connections of your pages, etc. In case you're planning to relaunch the website to fix URLs, you can add new pages and *Rebuild the Project*.
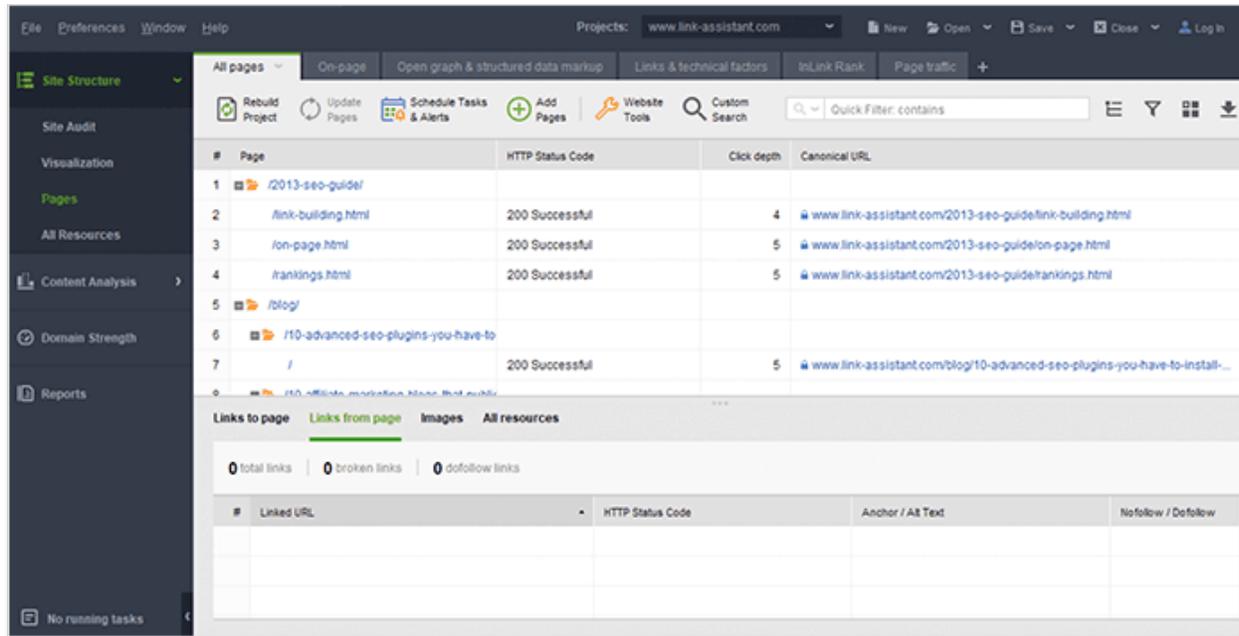
☐ 2.4 Install Google Analytics and create an account in Search Console

Set up Google Analytics tracking for your website before you go live — you shouldn't postpone this, as you may easily forget it later, and lots of data will be lost for good. Please note that adding the tracking code may vary depending on your CMS configuration.

I'd also suggest adding filters to exclude traffic from the IP(s) of your office.

1. Sign in to Google Analytics.

2. Click Admin, and choose All filters. Press + Add filter.

3. Specify the filtering criteria and click Save.

To link your Google Search console data with your Google Analytics account, sign into Google Analytics, go to *Admin, Property settings* and click the *Adjust Search Console* button.

Finally, configure goals for your conversions: log into your Google Analytics account, navigate to the *Conversions* module, choose *Goals*, and click the *Set up goals* button. After that, you'll fill in the data for your conversion pages.

□ 2.5 Do keyword mapping for your website

Keyword research is the backbone of all your further SEO activities, and you can spend hours and hours building and editing your keyword lists. What I suggest you should do at this step is create a keyword map for your top important pages, aka homepage and category pages.

So after you do some initial keyword research, look again at your site's structure and map your keywords to the site's landing pages.

You can manage this using a simple spreadsheet:

Or if you manage keywords in Rank Tracker, you can go to the Keyword map module (under *Target Keywords*) and map queries with landing pages right there.

Why do you need this keyword map?

1. It'll streamline your on-page optimization activities.

2. It'll make it easier to check performance of the pages organized around certain topics.

3. It'll help ensure all of the most important pages do target the necessary keywords.

4. It'll be useful for your content creators and editors.

☐ 2.6 Optimize meta tags and content

Optimizing titles and descriptions isn't the most entertaining activity you might have, but it surely pays off and luckily it's technically straightforward.

Luckily, tools and plugins can help you check the technical SEO quickly. To examine your site's titles, meta tags and alt tags, go to WebSite Auditor, *Site Audit* and look through the *On-page* section factors:

After that, you can switch to the *Page Audit* module and get a more detailed overview of how well a page's optimized for your target keywords.

I'd strongly recommend you take a peek at the *TF-IDF* dashboard in WebSite Auditor to discover the most important terms that are relevant to your topic and that have been collected from your top competitors.
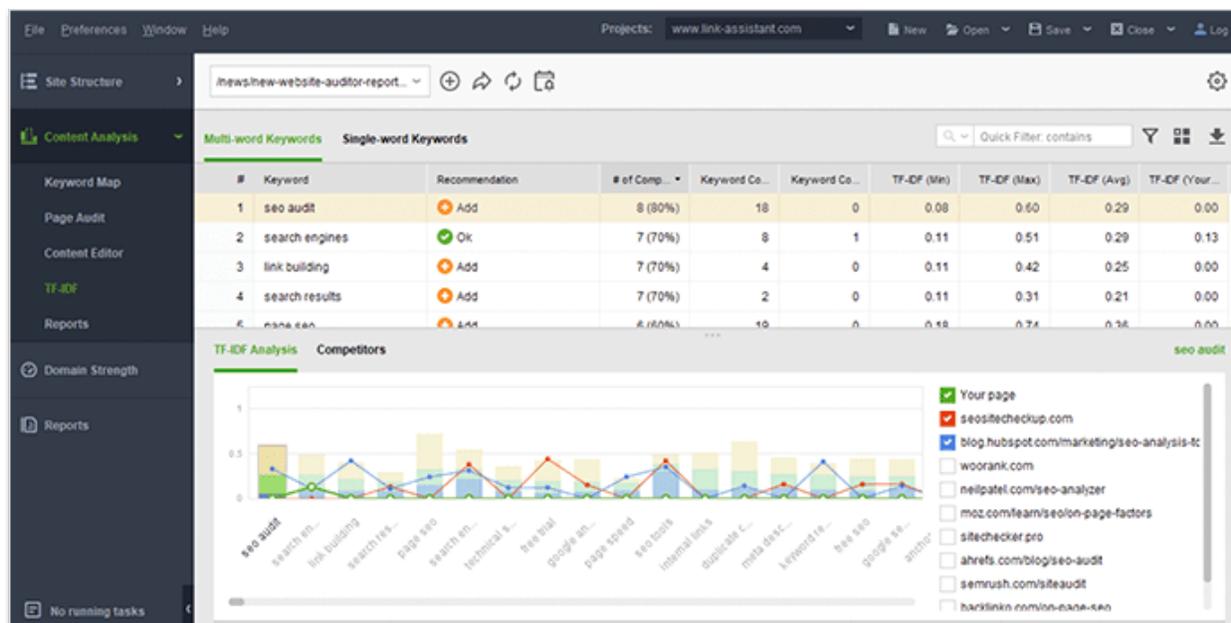
□ 2.7 Use schema to mark up the content

The purely technical SEO tip is to add schema markup. It tells the search engines what your data means and helps them represent it in a more user-friendly way. Using the special microdata language, you can tell search engines much more about your content. Just take a look at this example:

The first result uses schema markup and it definitely stands out from the rest. By the way, this website is actually listed twice on the first page of Google results, getting into the featured snippet as well:

To make vanilla **ice cream**, you'll need: 4 large egg yolks, 2/3 cup sugar, 1 1/2 cups whole milk, 1 vanilla bean (split and scraped of seeds), or 1 teaspoon vanilla extract, and 1 1/2 cups heavy cream - - If your **ice cream** machine has a bowl that needs to be frozen before churning, put it in the freezer the night before ... Jul 20, 2015

How To Make the Best Ice Cream at Home - Recipe | Kitchn
www.thekitchn.com/how-to-make-vanilla-ice-cream-221812

About this result   Feedback

And this works not only for recipe websites — you can use markup for articles, local businesses, restaurants, TV episodes and ratings, book reviews, movies, software apps, events, products, etc.

In WebSite Auditor, you can check if a site's page already has structured data and Open Graph markup:

And this works not only for recipe websites — you can use markup for articles, local businesses, restaurants, TV episodes and ratings, book reviews, movies, software apps, events, products, etc.

In WebSite Auditor, you can check page structured data and Open Graph markup, if it has been added before:
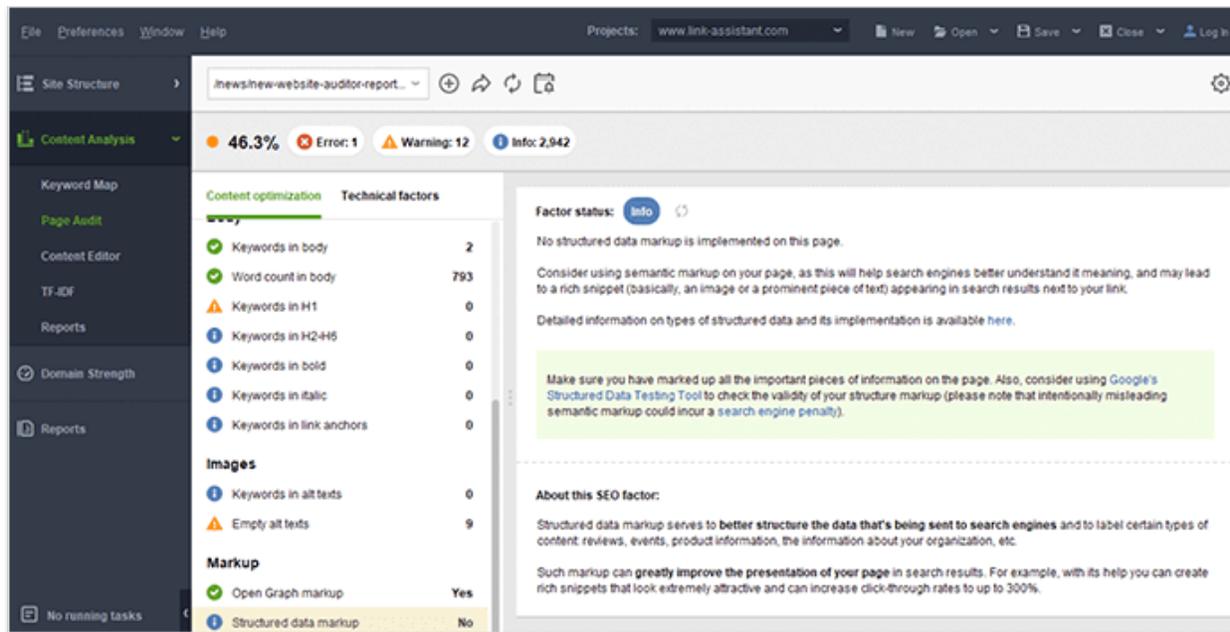
☐ 2.8 Check UX

This point is also on the search engine optimization checklist. Google cares a lot about user satisfaction, so it's logical to assume the search engine may collect some user experience data and then use it to deliver search results.

As you're just launching a website, you don't have any bounce rate or session time data to dwell on. Anyway, there are some other clues to check your site usability. Your web developer's job is to ensure the website loads fast and looks good on multiple devices — that's probably half of your UX success.

Don't forget link structure, no one likes the old bait-and-switch no matter where it happens.

You can also have some usability testing done via special services such as usertesting.com or do it yourself.

If you want to learn more on how user behavior relates to SEO, read our guide on optimizing user metrics for better rankings.

Chapter 3. What copywriters and editors need to do for a new site launch

Exceptional content is the backbone of your site's success. Your website may lack some trendy design elements, but it simply cannot live without valuable and relatable content. To put it short, produce high-quality content that serves user intent. And here is a checklist for your copywriters and editors before you spend a fortune on content promotion.

☐ 3.1 Make sure your content adds value

Before you launch your site, you have to consider your content. Pure self-promotion doesn't work really well. You should provide expert advice and actionable takeaways, share your unique views, interview industry leaders, etc.

The important point here is that you should already have some of this valuable content before you go live. Otherwise, people will come to your website to see the short "About" notice and a "Hello world!" blog post — do you think they'll subscribe to your updates? Nope, Internet surfers have too many distractions to keep waiting for the content you're only promising to create.

☐ 3.2 Proofread your content

Keeping your content free of grammar errors seems so obvious, but at the end of the day, it often gets ignored. Proofreading your site's content means you're showing respect to the site's visitors, that you actually care what they'll think about your company and product. To streamline the process, use proofreading apps, such as [Hemingway](#) and [Grammarly](#).

☐ 3.3 Use proper formatting

It's important your site's pages and articles don't look cluttered. Use headings, subheadings, lists, properly formatted and aligned images.

☐ 3.4 Ensure the content is factual

We live in the age of fake news — there's too much information available online and even Google had to introduce a fact-checking feature to serve not just the search results, but also the results proving authenticity. What do we get from that? Just backup your posts with research data, charts and check all the facts you mention.

☐ 3.5 Keep content style concise

The style of your content must be aligned with the brand's editorial guidelines. No, it doesn't mean you have to write the whole book of guidelines; companies often have these guidelines stored somewhere and completely ignored. What's really important is to identify the voice and style that are truly yours and keep to them when creating content, marketing materials, videos, etc.

For example, here's an excerpt from Don Perignon wine description:

HARMONY ACHIEVED

Dom Pérignon is vintage champagne only.

Each Vintage wine is created from the finest grapes grown in one single year. Reinventing itself by interpreting the unique character of the seasons. Daring not to release a Vintage if the harvest does not meet its ideal.

After at least eight years of elaboration in the cellars, the wine then embodies the perfect balance of Dom Pérignon, its greatest promise. This is Dom Pérignon Vintage, the Plénitude of harmony.

And now compare it to this "about us" text from Ovo's website:

We are OVO Energy

OVO started as an idea around the kitchen table. A couple of friends listing what they wanted from their energy supplier, but weren't getting.

Things like fair pricing. Great service. Clear and simple information. Technology to make managing your energy easier.

And above all, honesty and openness.

I bet you've spotted the difference in the voice of these two copies. Bear in mind there's no single ideal type of tone for your content. If you're not sure whether you need to be formal or easy-going, stick to neutrality and develop your brand voice as you learn more about your target audience.

☐ 3.6 Create a content map

We don't create content for the sake of content, do we? Every page you're working on answers important questions and satisfies someone's need for this particular info. Content mapping will help you organize users' needs, company's goals, and your content plans.

Content mapping is similar to mind mapping techniques. Here's how it may look like:

[Image credit: sixrevisions.com]

A content map helps prioritize content creation activities and shows the gaps that need to be filled.

Marketing specialists, editors, and even C-level managers should all be involved in this process since it determines how the website will develop in the future. What's more, it also implies what kind of business goals have to be met in the first place.

☐ 3.7 Create social media accounts for your brand

Fast becoming a cornerstone of search engine optimization is social media. Why? Because people tend to spend most of their online time on social media websites, and

they also expect a reputable company to have a proper social media presence. Actually, social media are the first place to announce your new website launch.

For a starting project, social media management can be the responsibility of your copywriters (and the whole team, why not?) Copywriters will create unique bios, short and concise descriptions, designers will prepare visuals for cover and logo images, add photos and videos, etc. This way, when your site gets launched, the social media pages won't have a sad and abandoned look.

Chapter 4. What marketing managers need to do for a new website launch

A marketing team doesn't merely work on launching a new website, they work on launching a product or a number of services and on presenting them to potential customers. Here's what they may be working on while the site's offline.

☐ 4.1 Formulate unique selling propositions

Marketing starts long before the website launch when the team defines its unique selling (or value) proposition. USP is a statement, which includes the description of your product benefits and explains how it solves your customers' needs. In other words, it helps people understand what distinguishes you from the similar companies.

When you're working on USPs, consider the following steps:

- Analyze your target audience — who's likely to buy your products and order your services?
- Write down the list of all the needs that your products could meet — these are basically the draft versions of your USPs.
- Now do some competition research and study the USPs already used. Look through the list you've written and cross out the propositions that are being well used by the competition.
- Look for gaps — study niche forums and Q&A websites to look for some unique "needs" of your potential customers.
- Finalize the USPs using all the information you've collected and let other people on your team take a look and say if they are persuasive enough. If possible, ask someone who's never heard of your product but may belong to your target audience.
- Keep monitoring the trends and competition to identify new opportunities — you can get automatic email alerts for the necessary key phrases using a social media monitoring tool, such as Awario.
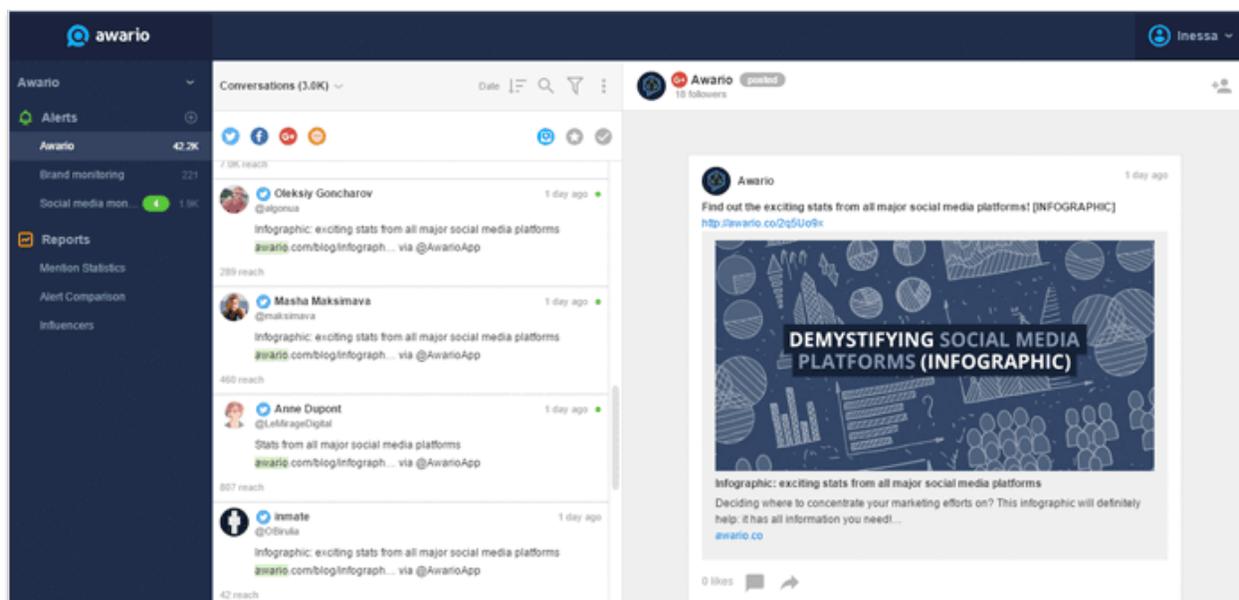
That's a universal and simplified approach to creating your USPs. If you want to get some more ideas and inspiration, check out these [7 value proposition templates](#) by Tor Grønsund.

☐ 4.2 Plan outreach and advertising

Think about all types of people who might spread the word about your launch. These could be your colleagues, partners, friends, relatives, etc. You can ask people to follow your Facebook page and Twitter profile and share some links for instance.

Additionally, research social media influencers and bloggers and reach out to them before you launch. If you have a unique and interesting product to offer, people might be interested in covering it first. You can organize pre-launch interviews, let some people sign up and test the product. So when you go live, there will be some posts and reviews published for users to check out.

Finally, plan your advertising budget. Are you going to use pay-per-click campaigns? Banners? Paid reviews? You should check out the options and choose the ones you'll get started with.

☐ 4.3 Set up your marketing tools

The big launch date has come, but you're busy looking for the best email marketing solution? Imagine people have started visiting your website and signing up, but they are not getting any response because you completely forgot about it! Here are the things I'd recommend setting up before the launch:

- Enable conversion tracking in Google Analytics.
- Pick your email marketing tool.
- Choose a [social listening tool](#) to stay informed about real-time reviews and comments related to your product/company, so that you could respond as soon as possible.

- Think of a CRM tool to manage and process customers' orders.

Additionally, make sure you know how to contact software providers — by phone, email, Twitter, etc. — in case some tools stop working and you need urgent assistance.

Chapter 5. What system admins need to check before launch

Last, but not least on our website launch checklist: your site must be managed, secured and updated on a regular basis. This is usually the responsibility of a system administrator, who focuses on the activities described below.

☐ 5.1 Create and manage site backups

Losing your business due to the lack of site backups is nightmarish. Especially, when there are a bunch of strategies to safeguard your website data:

- Manual backups. As simple as that, you can manually FTP the files to your hard drive, but as a downside, you'll have to do that on a regular basis, otherwise, the backups will quickly become outdated and you'll risk losing lots of content.

- Automatic backups. You can schedule the full site backup using plugins and tools, such as [BackWPup](#) (for a WordPress website) or [Akeeba backup](#) (for a Joomla website).

Whatever the solution you choose, make sure you're always using the most up-to-date version which functions properly.

☐ 5.2 Monitor site uptime

Your website's like a living creature — it needs care and support on a regular basis, it may also get sick from time to time and you'd better stay aware of what's going on. Using a site monitor app or a plugin will help you stay updated on any type of trouble that happens to your website.

Basically, these apps check pages regularly to make sure the content is available for site's visitors. If the checked page doesn't respond in the right way, the app will send you an email/SMS alert. You can try using the [UptimeRobot](#) app to set up this kind of site monitoring.

Later on, when your site goes live and starts getting traffic and conversions, you may need more profound checks — for your most important landing pages. So it'll be a good idea to ask your system administrator and web developer to set up form completion tracking. If some of the web forms stop working, you'll learn that before you lose dozens of sales.

☐ 5.3 Get ready for the big crowds

You never know if that new project will get a million hits on the first day of launch! Sounds unlikely, but you still have to check that your website is ready for the heavy traffic scenario. Ask your system administrator to carry out load tests beforehand. The good news is there are both [free open-source](#) and [paid](#) solutions to choose from.

▢ 5.4 Think security first

The number of hacked websites increased by 32% in 2016, which means webmasters are often too relaxed when it comes to web security issues. Surely, it's much better to secure your website before the launch date than deal with the aftermath of a hacker attack. Here's how you can make your website less vulnerable:

- Make sure the admin's computer (or anyone's with admin access) is free of malware. Install and run several reputable virus scanners and let them check the system regularly. A hacker might install special spyware to hijack your login passwords and other sensitive data.
- Avoid weak passwords and never reuse the same password for multiple apps. If you suspect that somebody tried to crack your server, check the logs and you'll spot those suspicious commands. By the way, this will also help you identify which backup files are still clean and safe to use.
- Always use the most up-to-date versions of the software used to run your web infrastructure. Today you ignore an update alert of your CMS, tomorrow you get thousands of outgoing links of the unknown origin.

Finally, if you're launching an ecommerce website, it's an absolute must for you to use the HTTPS protocol, otherwise, you'll have to migrate your website in the future, which may pose risk to site's traffic and rankings.

The online version of this checklist is available at the following address:
https://www.link-assistant.com/news/website-launch-checklist.html#chapter-05