Utilizing SEO throughout the Website Redesign Process:

You have finally decided on redesigning your website and can't wait for everyone to see the end result. The web development firm has been chosen and you have come up with great ideas after researching competitors and other websites that you like. Now all you have to do is work with the web development team, tell them your ideas and wait for the finished product, Right? WRONG, there is one important step that has been left out and is left out more often than not when a website is being redesigned. This is working with an SEO expert during the whole redesign process from the beginning to after launch of your new website.

Waiting until after the website has been redesigned and launched before getting an SEO expert involved can lead to expensive site design changes that could have been easily implemented during the design process. Sometimes it becomes very difficult or even impossible to correct issues after the new website is launched and this could lead to the rebuilding of the site. Most importantly if the redesign process does not follow SEO best practices there is a high chance that organic traffic from Search Engines can be severely reduced after the redesigned website is launched.

What SEO steps to take during the redesign process and why:

After hiring the web development firm and choosing an SEO expert you have to make sure that everyone works together. This is the first step because if everyone is not on the same page then, things will not get done properly and you will be left with a website that is redesigned but not optimized correctly.

Hidden Development Environment:

Make sure that the redesigned website is being worked on in an environment that is hidden from Search Engines. The last thing that you want to happen is for a spider to access the unfinished product and start indexing it for Search Engines. Using the Robots.txt file as well as the *noindex* tag to be extra cautious should do the trick.

301 Redirects and Optimized Page Names:

One of the beginning steps an SEO expert will take is to conduct keyword research to see what keywords and phrases should be targeted. During a redesign there is a very unique opportunity to create and optimize page names for the entire website. Having page names that are keyword rich and utilizing SEO best practices is very important when it comes to ranking and driving qualified traffic to your website. Once the page names have been created, the SEO expert should create a list of all the old pages that should redirect to the new pages using 301

redirects. Also, any pages that will not be used on the new website should be redirected to the Index page or to a specific interior page that is a better fit.

Basic SEO Implementation:

Before the redesigned website is launched it is very important to make sure that all of the pages have optimized Title Tags, Meta Descriptions, H1 Header Tags, Image Alt Tags and Footer Links. By doing this before the launch, you are solidifying that the Search Engines will index the new website with all of the optimizations you have implemented and the redesigned website will be indexed to bring in quality traffic that you are targeting with the keywords.

HTML and XML Sitemaps:

HTML and XML Sitemaps are a must for any website and are a road map for Search Engine Spiders when crawling a website. Without Sitemaps, many of the new pages can easily not get indexed with the Search Engines. During the redesign process the SEO expert will work with the web development team to create an optimized HTML sitemap that includes links and descriptions to every page on the website. Also, an XML sitemap will be created and uploaded when the redesigned website is launched. The XML Sitemap lists the importance of every page, the frequency of how often it is updated and how often it should be crawled.

Analytics and Webmaster Tools:

Analytics must be installed on the redesigned website and should be ready to start collecting data as soon as the website is launched. It is very important to monitor the type of traffic that the website is receiving as well as where the traffic is coming from. Also, if Analytics is not installed you will miss out on valuable information for website launches such as website exits and bounce rates. By having access to Analytics a problem can be found and fixed very quickly. Webmaster Tools accounts should be set up for Google, Yahoo and Bing and should be verified as soon as the website is launched. The Webmaster Tools accounts have very important information for Webmasters including crawl errors, diagnostics, area to upload XML sitemaps and much much more.

Custom 404 Error Page:

Be sure that when the redesign is occurring there is also a custom 404 error page that is created. This is extremely important for the following reasons. If there was a redirect that was missed the visitor will land on the error page that is clear and explains what to do next. The error page should have the look and feel of the website, a clear message that explains the error and many avenues including navigation and a site search for the visitor to find what they are

looking for. Otherwise you will be losing quality traffic if the visitor has no idea what to do once they reach an error.

The SEO steps highlighted above are by no means the only things that an SEO expert would do while working with a web development team on a website redesign. However, if these steps are not followed you will be left with a great looking website that will not provide you with the quality traffic you need to be successful.