



SEO Best Practice Series

Best Practices for Multiple Web Properties and SEO: When to Create a New Site and When to Consolidate



Propecta
Digital Marketing Results

Creating multiple, stand-alone web properties can be a great way to attract new business, launch new campaigns, and dedicate marketing efforts to specific products. Additionally, with so much focus on the importance of link-building in SEO—and the difficulty of scoring organic, authentic, high-quality links—some marketers think building a second site could be an easy way to create links for SEO value.

On the other hand, any distinct web property takes just as much investment as other web endeavors. All of the same rules apply, and that means duplicate content, low-quality backlinks, and keyword misuse can all *harm* your SEO efforts. Search engines may see these methods as manipulative tricks to create inorganic traffic.

It's important to weigh the benefits of a consolidated web presence against the potential benefits of multiple web properties. Make sure you understand the implications your decision could make on your search rankings and long-term efforts.

What's Your Take?

We've found this to be one of the more divisive and opinionated topics that we have addressed in the [SEO best practice series](#). What's your take? Do you agree, disagree, or have a new perspective? Let us know! Hit us up [@propecta](#) or email opinions@propecta.com.

The Difficulties of Multiple Web Properties

Many marketing teams and marketing executives consider building multiple web properties for the wrong reasons. It may be easier and/or cheaper to build new initiatives as separate properties; however the long-term implications rarely justify the short-term savings.

Building, maintaining, and optimizing multiple web properties can stretch resources, attention, and authority thin. Additionally, building multiple sites can create significant SEO challenges:

- The SEO value of a new domain **essentially starts at "0."** Content, authentic links, a great UX, and technical SEO will all need to be worked on for it to earn rankings.
- Google Search Console generally shows **slow growth of impressions (and, thus, clicks) for new URLs**, as Google introduces it more and more over time.
- Links pointing from your new site to your main site **will have minimal effect on your core website's growth** until the new domain gains enough importance and domain authority in and of itself.

I too often see companies try to launch microsites or secondary sites when they can hardly keep up with the development, optimization, social sharing, etc. for their primary site. A year later those secondary sites are abandoned.—Dave Rohrer, Founder, NorthSide Metrics

Keep in mind that while you may see an initial reduction in rankings, properly implemented new domains should begin exceeding the session loss from the primary domain, and building their own lives, after a buffer of around three months.

Benefits of a Consolidated Web Presence

Although it might take more effort and coordination to build and integrate new initiatives into a company's primary domain, the benefits of consolidation are clear.

Definitions

For the purpose of this document, a "distinct web property" is any one that requires it's own maintenance and/or creates a user experience which is significantly distinct from other aspects of a company's digital presence. Brands might consider a variety of web properties, such as:

- A company's primary website
- A community or marketplace website
- Unique sites on multiple subdomains
- Unique site on the company's own domain
- Completely distinct sections of a website, such as an Events page with unique design and navigation
- Microsites
- Digital magazines or stand-alone content sites

By definition, one stand-alone campaign landing page would not be considered a distinct web property. However, for purpose of discussion, all of a company's unique landing pages can be considered one web property.

Consolidation is Best for SEO

Rand Fishkin asserts that keeping content on one domain is [the best way to maximize SEO benefits](#):

I'd really urge everyone to keep your content on one single sub and root domain, preferably in subfolders. That's how you're going to maximize your potential SEO benefit.—Rand Fishkin

The more quality content is consolidated under a single sub and root domain, the more attention that property earns from search engines.

In addition, as that content earns inbound links, it will earn more authority and traffic than if the same volume of inbound links were spread out among two or more properties.

Cross-selling Opportunities

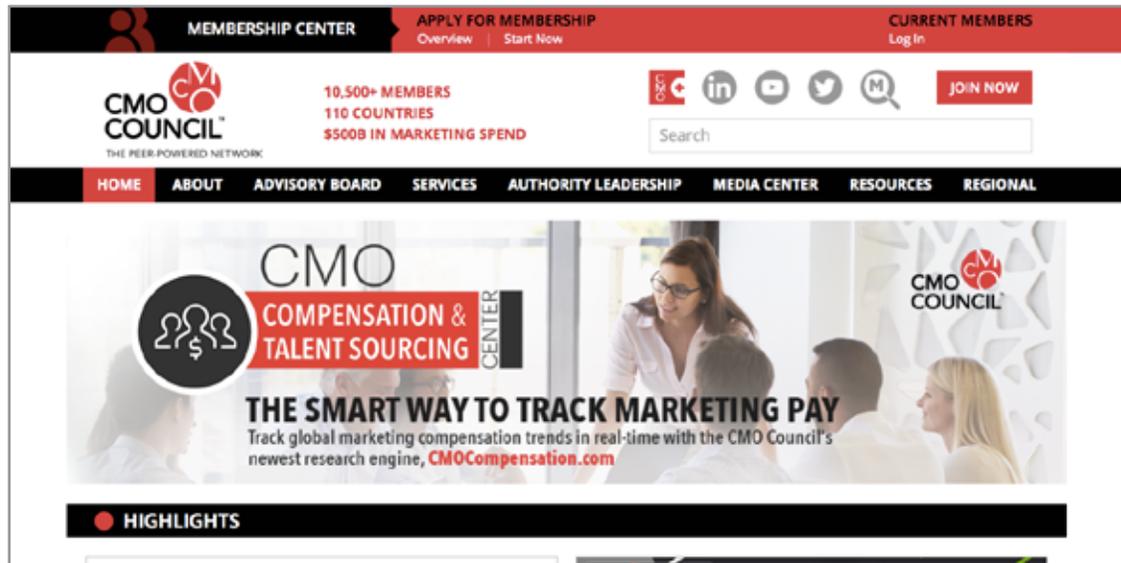
While spreading products across multiple websites can be a good way to target dramatically different audiences, one major advantage of consolidating web properties is that it can promote cross-selling opportunities.

Enhanced Presence

A consolidated site can show visitors the breadth of knowledge and expertise you have on your topic and increase perception of your business as an authority.

The CMO Council website does this well. A case could be made for creating a unique online space for something like the Advisory Board or their digital magazine, PeerSphere. The magazine, for example, is aimed at marketers in general, not just CMOs, and definitely provides enough value to stand on its own. Depending on your perspective, other aspects of the site might support an argument for separate web properties as well - the Advisory Board, for example.

However, combining all of their resources on one site creates a comprehensive view of the CMO Council and increases the brand's clout by allowing them to immediately communicate their authority to visitors. The site presents itself as a thorough, authoritative one-stop source for all of a CMO's marketing resource needs.



Whenever Possible, Unify Your Digital Presence

As often as possible, a unified digital presence will serve a brand best.

General Characteristics of Multiple Web Properties

- ✗ Extra resources are needed to build, maintain, market, and optimize.
- ✗ Design and creation start at Square 1.
- ✗ Links to the main site have little or no SEO value.
- ✗ Deciding where to publish great link-bait and blog posts becomes ambiguous.
- ✗ Creates poor user experience when people don't know which domain to click for a branded term.
- ✗ Potential loss of leads/revenue when lower-converting domain outranks the higher-converting domain.
- ✗ Google Analytics tracking issues across multiple domain/subdomains without specific (and at times, costly) setup and maintenance.
- ✓ Could, eventually, rank two sites on Page 1 for target keywords.

General Characteristics of a Consolidated Web Presence

- ✓ There is only one site to build, maintain, market, and optimize.
- ✓ More users, links, content, etc. create stronger SEO value.
- ✓ Creates cross-sell opportunities.
- ✓ Enhances a brand's digital presence.

Many businesses would do well to launch new campaigns, products, services, events, etc. under the umbrella and existing web domain of the brand. Expanding to multiple web properties should only, then, be considered if the unified presence is somehow holding back one of the business ventures.

Every business strategy is different, and some are, of course, more complex than most. Multiple web properties are not always bad, but, in our experience, business leaders too quickly consider multiple properties when a consolidated presence will prove more impactful over time.

When Creating Multiple Web Properties Makes Sense

There are, however, a few good reasons to create additional websites:

- 1. You want to separate a specific product from your company's other offerings.** For example, an agency offers SEO, content, and web development services, and they also sell a mobile app that's designed for use in corporate events. Since the mobile app is loosely related to the agency's other offerings, they could benefit from creating a separate website dedicated to promoting the app.
- 2. You're launching a new, separate brand** that has a very distinct value proposition and/or target demographic than your main brand. For example, if your primary website is geared to the working mom demographic and your new brand targets teenagers, you probably need to create a separate site for the new brand.
- 3. You have a distinct, targeted campaign** for your existing brand that must be somewhat separated from your current brand and will significantly benefit from being displayed independently. This can be especially effective if your campaign is targeting a new market.

Personalized landing pages and annual events generally don't qualify as distinct campaigns deserving their own web properties. These pages can easily be attached to a business' main website and promoted/linked to only when appropriate. If the goal is to offer a domain name that is easy to remember, consider purchasing the desired domain name and redirecting it to a landing page hosted on your main site.

SEO Best Practices when Creating Multiple Web Properties

If you do decide that creating multiple web properties is necessary (and you have the budget to create and maintain it), it's important to follow SEO best practices to avoid causing harm to your website ranking:

- 1. Be careful about duplicate content.** New sites should be unique; any content that is not unique should be properly attributed syndicated content. If you're going to use content from your main site, make sure to use a canonical link on individual content pieces or a robots.txt for the entire site. Additionally, if the two sites sell similar products, but to different audiences, make sure to customize the information and content for the intended site/demographic.
- 2. Make sure your extra site serves a specific purpose.** A new, targeted marketing campaign is good. Creating a second web property for [link building](#) alone is bad. Building web properties for the sole purpose of improving rankings by crosslinking can damage search rankings on all of your web properties.
- 3. Don't be sneaky about it.** Send the search engines clear signals that the new web property is connected to your primary site. One way to do this is to create a second site using a subdomain of your primary URL (for example, [newproperty.yourdomain.com](#)), or by including your main site in a new site's navigation.

- 4. Follow general SEO best practices.** All of the rules of SEO apply to any new site you create. In order for a new site to rank in search engine results, [it needs quality content and incoming links from high-authority domains](#). Be prepared to devote as much attention to SEO on new properties as you do on your main site.

A well-done, justifiable, and fully supported secondary site does offer some SEO benefits. If you run an effective campaign on your new website, it's possible to land both the #1 and #2 SERP spots for a specific keyword search. This isn't a simple or quick task, however, because it's an SEO campaign in and of itself to build a new site's rankings.

Domains vs. Subdomains

One big question remains after making the decision to create multiple web properties: should new web properties have individual domains, or should they appear as subdomains of your main site? The answer to this question really comes down to whether or not you want your ancillary web properties associated with your main brand:

- **Individual domains** allow for complete separation of branding between sites, which can be effective if you don't want to associate a new campaign or product with your main business.
- **Subdomains** are directly related to your main brand but allow for elevating content which would otherwise be buried within the current site's infrastructure, offering immediate access for a niche audience.

According to Google's [Matt Cutts](#) and [John Mueller](#), it doesn't really matter which option you choose. They assert that their algorithms are equipped to properly distribute potency across the entities. But [Rand Fishkin disagrees](#). He ran several tests on Moz.org, and when moving content from a subdomain into the primary domain, he found that there was a sudden increase in rankings. However, when he moved content from a subfolder of the main site into a subdomain, he saw an immediate decrease in rankings.

SEO Best Practices for Website Consolidation

If at any time you decide to consolidate multiple web properties into one, it's important to follow SEO best practices in order to benefit from the consolidation and avoid ranking penalties:

- **Use 301 redirects.** 301 redirects allow incoming link authority to pass from the sites you're sunsetting to your consolidated site. Implementing 301 redirects also ensures that you won't be penalized for duplicating content across multiple sites.
- **Submit the sitemap for your consolidated site to search engines.** This encourages search engine spiders to crawl all pages of your site and may result in an immediate increase in site ranking and traffic.
- Fill out a change of address form in Google and Bing Webmaster Tools. The change of address form notifies the respective search engine that your domain has changed and minimizes negative impacts to your search rankings. Do this for both [Google](#) and [Bing](#).
- Give serious consideration to your information architecture. The subjects of pages structured closer to the root of your site are given more importance by search engines when determining the overall subject matter of your site. A poorly structured site can confuse search engines (as well as users) and damage rankings.

Don't forget to notify any webmasters who are linking to the content being redirected, or mentioning the domain, so they can update their links or references. This reduces any potential loss of PageRank caused by longer redirect chains.—Steve Wiideman, President, Wiideman Consulting Group

Make sure to do a lot of testing beforehand to ensure all of your redirects and changes are properly implemented, and keep an eye out for crawl errors and unwanted 404s once your site is in production.

Multiple Properties or Consolidation?

Consolidated web properties require less effort, are easier to maintain, and offer more SEO benefits. Unless your company has a compelling, long-term reason for splitting content across multiple sites, you'll be better off in the long run finding ways to incorporate content into your existing site structure.

Additional Resources:

[SEO and Domain Considerations for Your Next Microsite](#)

[Whiteboard Friday: The Microsite Mistake](#)

[Your Guide to Link Building for SEO in 2016](#)

[Improving SEO: The Only Work That Really Matters](#)

[How Leading Brands Earn High SEO Rankings](#)

Special thanks to:

Stephanie Miller ([@StephanieSAM](#))

Dave Rohrer ([@DaveR](#))

Robert Rose ([@Robert_Rose](#))

Steve Wiideman ([@SEOSteve](#))

