

WEBSITE GUIDE

The Franchise Website Migration Guide

What franchise leaders need to know before they switch website platforms.

53%

Abandon slow sites
After 3+ seconds of load time

523

Days to recover
From a botched website migration

40%+

Organic traffic lift
Avg. gain from a successful migration

A Note from Our CEO

Dear franchise leaders,

I recently heard a franchise executive say:

We're delaying the website rebuild to focus on more urgent priorities.

I get it, but delay is not a strategy.

Unless your website is literally down, there will always be something that seems more urgent. There will always be fires to put out.

Fixing your website helps solve the underlying issues holding back growth: lead gen, SEO and AI visibility, vendor flexibility, scalability, speed, and franchisee buy-in.

You may not even realize it, but your website sits at the center of them.

Don't put it off another year. It's later than you think.

Sincerely,

-MM

Mark Michael

CEO & Co-Founder
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Contents

- 01** The SEO Question, Answered Honestly
- 02** It's a Foundation Decision, Not a Marketing Project
- 03** The Cost of Staying Put
- 04** A Clear Migration Process
- 05** Who Needs to Be at the Table
- 06** Migration Readiness Matrix
- 07** Red Flags in Vendor Migration Proposals
- 08** Conclusion

SECTION 01

The SEO Question, Answered Honestly

SEO is the biggest risk among franchisors and franchisees during a migration. The fear can hold brands back from taking action for years. Let's look at it honestly.

How to Preserve SEO During Migration

This is the question that keeps most franchisors frozen. Getting it wrong can cost you dearly in lost leads, revenue, and trust.

Many agencies will tell you that SEO loss is inevitable during a migration and you should give it time.

The truth: while brief fluctuations in the days after launch are normal, you can achieve virtually zero SEO loss when migration is done correctly.

Here's what "done correctly" requires:

<p>01</p> <p>URL audit & inventory</p> <p>Before migration starts.</p>	<p>02</p> <p>Complete redirect mapping</p> <p>Reviewed and approved before any DNS change.</p>
<p>03</p> <p>Metadata & schema preserved</p> <p>Or enhanced where the new platform allows.</p>	<p>04</p> <p>Internal linking carried over</p> <p>Page authority distribution stays intact.</p>
<p>05</p> <p>Performance benchmarked</p> <p>Before and after launch.</p>	<p>06</p> <p>Search Console & sitemap</p> <p>Verified and resubmitted on day one.</p>

With the right website partner, brands often see rankings improve within 30 to 60 days of launch, both in search engines and in AI. The new site is faster and better structured. Migration becomes an SEO investment, not just a preservation exercise.

The Best Way to Structure Domains

This question dates back to the early days of franchise websites. It's partly about SEO, but it's also about having a useful and scalable URL structure.

Three common approaches. One is the right answer for almost every franchise system.

BAD Unique domains per location	BETTER Subdomains per location	BEST Subfolders per location
What it looks like: bostonbrand.com chicagobrand.com	What it looks like: boston.brand.com chicago.brand.com	What it looks like: brand.com/locations/boston brand.com/locations/chicago
Why brands do it: Inherited legacy setups, or franchisees who want their own site	Why brands do it: Location separation under the root brand. Setup is centralized.	Why brands do it: Simplicity, scalability, and maximizing SEO value
Why it's bad: Fragmented SEO. Hard to manage at scale. Hard to chase down if a franchisee leaves.	Why it's not just okay: Google says subdomains can rank fine, but at scale they tend to fragment authority instead of consolidating it.	Why it's best: Subfolders carry the full domain authority of the root brand. Every location inherits the brand's SEO strength.

For franchisees with established domains of their own, vanity redirects keep their existing URLs working without breaking anyone's identity.

How Do We Win at AI?

Winning at AI visibility doesn't start with a service or a strategy. It starts with the right technology. Choose the right CMS, and then layer on strategy and services.

Moving into a structured CMS that consolidates legacy SEO into a structure AI models discover and surface can unlock years of failed content creation.

AI QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE CHOOSING YOUR NEXT WEBSITE CMS

- Can it make your website the source of truth for AI search?
- Does it support structured local content that LLMs can understand, surface, and cite?
- Can it natively display the information AI looks for, like services, locations, hours, schedules, pricing, reviews, and FAQs?
- Does it keep up with changes in search and AI standards automatically, or will every update require developers or version updates?

SECTION 02

It's a Foundation Decision, Not a Marketing Project

Most franchise systems treat a website migration as a marketing project. A redesign. A vendor upgrade. Something that lives in the CMO's budget.

But a franchise website isn't a marketing asset. It's a technology foundation. It touches everything.



The visible part of a franchise website is what the customer sees. Pages, forms, design. That's maybe 20% of what the platform does. The other 80% is the technology underneath.

When the website is a marketing asset, the question is *does it convert*.

When it's a technology foundation, the question is *can our business grow on this for the long term*.

The first question gets answered by a redesign. The second only gets answered by technology.

A technology foundation decision needs more than a marketing team.

SECTION 03

The Cost of Staying Put

Everyone focuses on the cost of moving a website. Discovery, design, development, internal hours. But few look at the compounding cost of *not* moving.

The visible costs

These are the line items you can see. They're often distributed across multiple vendors and budgets, which makes the total invisible until someone adds it up.

The ranges below reflect typical mid-market franchise brands with 50 to 200 locations operating across multiple vendors and agency relationships.

Cost category	Annual range
Agency retainers for website work	\$20,000 to \$100,000
Platform fees, hosting, plugins, themes	\$10,000 to \$40,000
Manual content updates (internal staff hours), new location launches, landing pages for paid	\$15,000 to \$35,000
Fragmented analytics, reporting, and tag management	\$5,000 to \$15,000
Total annual cost of operational friction	\$85,000 to \$190,000+

The invisible costs

The visible numbers are only part of the story. The bigger costs hide in places no one is measuring.

- **Marketing team velocity.** Updates that should take hours take days or weeks. The team's hours go to managing the website instead of running campaigns through it.
- **Slow location launches.** Franchise systems live or die on how fast new units can ramp. A location sold should already be primed on your current website infrastructure.

- **Lead routing failures.** Franchise marketing stacks often have lead routing held together with workarounds. When something breaks, leads disappear and franchisees lose trust.
- **Performance decay and conversion loss.** Most sites fast at launch are slow by year three. A one-second delay drops conversions by 7%. Across hundreds of location pages, that compounds.
- **Local SEO erosion.** Location pages without proper schema or structure slide down rankings slowly. By the time someone notices, competitors have moved up.

The strategic costs

The biggest costs of staying put aren't operational. They're strategic.

- **AI readiness.** Visibility in AI-driven search depends on structured data, schema, and speed your platform can deliver. Outdated sites can't.
- **Old SEO tactics.** More content pages doesn't mean better SEO anymore. The brands operating that way are losing ground.
- **Franchisee confidence.** Franchisees watching corporate's platform are asking whether corporate has a plan. A slow, outdated location page answers the question.
- **FranDev signal.** Prospective franchisees evaluate the brand by the website first. A dated site signals a dated system.
- **Competitive ground.** Local SEO is a moat that takes years to build and quarters to lose. The brands on modern platforms are pulling ahead.

SECTION 04

A Clear Migration Process

A clear migration process moves through five phases, each with defined deliverables.

Phase	Duration	What happens
1. Discovery & Planning	1-2 weeks	Kickoff interviews. Requirements documentation. KPI goals established.
2. Architecture & Design	2-3 weeks	Corporate and franchisee site maps. Design mockups. Content mapped from existing site to new design structure.
3. Build & Integration	8-12 weeks	Templates built. Hosting environment stood up. Integrations connected.
4. QA & UAT	2-3 weeks	QA testing. UAT rounds. Performance benchmarking.
5. Launch & Handoff	1-2 weeks	Go-live. Training documentation. Franchisor-to-franchisee enablement.

Website migrations typically range from 3 to 6 months depending on size and complexity.

Staying on Schedule

Plan on three to six months from kickoff to launch. An experienced partner with a proven migration process can hit three months on standard projects. Larger brands with hundreds of locations, complex microsites, and many integrations land closer to six.

Strong migration partners run toward deadlines. They establish ownership, milestones, and accountability early, before delays compound.

What Causes Delays

Most migration delays trace to predictable causes:

- Design approvals stall when too many stakeholders are looped in too late
- Content, imagery, or franchisee data isn't ready when migration begins
- Integrations and technical requirements surface mid-project
- Vendors overpromise on timelines to win the business
- Decision-making bottlenecks create stops and restarts

Removing Risk at Launch

- **Parallel environments.** The old site stays live until the new one is verified. Rollback path stays intact through cutover.
- **Redirect map signed off before DNS change.** Every URL mapped and approved by the client before any production change.
- **48-hour real-time monitoring.** Daily backups with 30-day retention. Immediate response if anything degrades.

GOOD MIGRATIONS ARE BORING

The site goes live. Leads are routing and flowing. Redirects all work. Integrations are firing. Franchisees are not hitting you up on Slack. Search engines barely notice.

That's the goal. The drama happens in the planning, not on launch day.

SECTION 05

Who Needs to Be at the Table

The biggest reason franchise website projects stall is that the right people aren't in the room. Here's who should be there.

Marketing

Usually the champion. They understand the brand, produce the content, and know what the website needs to do. The strongest marketing leaders treat the project as their responsibility to coordinate across functions, not as their project to own alone.

Technology / IT

Bring them in early. Nothing stalls a project faster than a platform getting greenlit by marketing and hitting a security or integration wall when IT finds out three months later. IT also brings perspective on integration architecture and data flows that marketing doesn't have.

Operations / COO

Operations needs to be looped in so franchisee support is informed and ahead of the conversation. They also own the timing question. When are franchisees in peak season? When is corporate running a major campaign? These operational realities should drive the timeline, not be discovered after it.

Finance / CFO

Website platforms are multi-year commitments. The CFO will have questions, and better they ask them during evaluation than after the contract is signed. The conversation to have is about total cost of ownership: platform fees, agency costs, staff hours, integration licensing.

Franchisee Advisory Council

Get FAC input early. What do franchisees need their local site to do better? Bring them in during design too, not just discovery. When franchisees feel heard during the process, adoption takes care of itself.

SECTION 06

Migration Readiness Matrix

Before evaluating vendors, evaluate your own readiness to migrate.

Dimension	Level 1: Not Ready	Level 2: Forming	Level 3: Structured	Level 4: Migration-Ready
Stakeholder alignment	Only marketing involved	Some functions aware	All relevant teams briefed	Cross-functional team with defined roles
Site inventory	No inventory	Partial documentation	Full URL and integration map	Comprehensive audit with SEO baselines
Success metrics	"Better website"	Some metrics named	Specific metrics agreed	Metrics tied to business outcomes
Franchisee communication	No plan	FAC told, no ongoing plan	Plan drafted, FAC involved	Active cadence, training plan
Vendor evaluation criteria	No formal criteria	Features and price only	Integration, scale, support	Comprehensive RFP with red-flag check

- If you're at Level 1 or 2 on most dimensions, the project isn't ready for vendor evaluation yet.
- If you're mostly at Level 3 or 4, the project is ready to engage vendors. The right partner will be excited to talk to a brand that has done the groundwork.

SECTION 07

Red Flags in Vendor Migration Proposals

When evaluating any partner for a franchise website migration, the language they use will tell you what you're actually getting. Here are the red flags worth treating as deal-breakers, along with what the right answer should sound like.

What they say	Why it's a red flag	What good sounds like
"We'll migrate everything automatically."	No QA, no structured process. Content breaks and problems show up post-launch.	"Automated migration for structured content. Manual QA for anything that affects brand or conversion."
"SEO loss is unavoidable, give it more time."	SEO loss is a process failure. A vendor framing it as normal is preparing you for theirs.	"We've migrated hundreds of brands with virtually zero SEO impact. Here's our process."
"We'll figure out the integrations as we go."	Integration scoping happens before development, not during. This means surprises in week 12 that delay launch.	"We scope every integration during discovery and build test plans before development starts."
"You can just submit a ticket for content updates."	Sometimes this means they don't support self-service, which will slow you down. Find out what it actually means before you sign.	"Corporate manages the system. Franchisees can self-serve. Here's the permissions matrix."
"We can build that custom for an additional fee."	Translation: it doesn't exist and you'll pay for it forever. Franchise capabilities should be native.	"That's a core platform capability. Here's how it works out of the box."
"We use WordPress with our own enhancements."	Plugin sprawl is inevitable. The enhancements break first when WordPress core updates ship.	"Our platform is purpose-built for franchise systems. Here's our architecture."

What they say	Why it's a red flag	What good sounds like
"Why use five vendors when you can use one?"	All-in-one means mediocre at most things. The website becomes a feature in a marketing services play. Lock-in is the business model.	"We're the website foundation. Connect your favorite vendors and tools."

