DIGITAL EDGEUCATION 2013

SEO CONSIDERATIONS WHEN RE-LAUNCHING A WEBSITE

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Executive Summary

At 4Ps Marketing's Digital EDGEucation at the IPA, Hannah Miller held a discussion on 'SEO Considerations When Re-Launching a Website'.

The one of the main objectives for SEO in planning a site launch are usually to prevent loss of traffic to your site and to maintain visibility. If your objective is to increase traffic during this time, you must ensure a robust/innovative strategy is implemented, allowing plenty of time for testing.

Without a re-launch strategy in place, website traffic loss could be quite drastic. A recent example of this is the Metro. During their site re-launch, it is reported they lost over 33% of their organic traffic. This would have had an impact on the costs and revenue of their site and, consequently, on their overall business.

It is anticipated that with the right preparation and the new platform you have built, traffic will increase during the months just after your website re-launch. A more SEO friendly website should lead to an improved user experience.

This report will go through the SEO impacts of a website re-launch in detail, covering the following areas:

1. **Why** a website re-launch is important
2. **What** a website launch actually is
3. **When** do you need to start thinking about it?
4. **How** do you actually go about doing it?

Contents

Why

You may be changing your website for a number of reasons. Some of these may be the look and feel of the site, the addition of new products or services, a re-brand, the chance to capture a new audience or to make use of new technology.

All of these can have repercussions on search, so it is crucial that these elements are considered during the planning stage.

* LOOK AND FEEL

* NEW PRODUCTS / NEW SERVICES

* COMPANY REBRANDING

* ATTRACT A NEW AUDIENCE

* EMBRACE NEW TECHNOLOGY

Taking new technology as an example, HTML5 offers many new features, some of which can overcome the limitations of Flash. HTML5 and CSS3 permit a responsive website design, which allows businesses to target visitors according to the device they are using.

Example of Website Evolution Over 13 Years:

The BBC

2000 → 2013
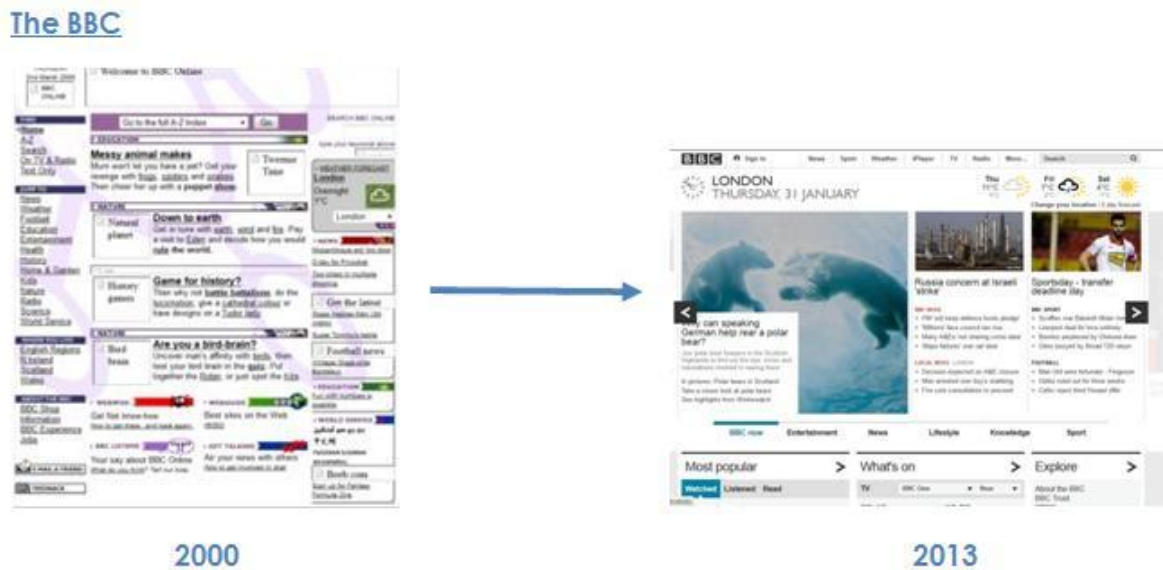
This demonstrates how websites can change and evolve over time. Many mainstream websites are likely to have had a re-design/re-launch of some kind during the past 5 years.

If you're interested in finding out how your website has evolved over time, you can use the Waybackmachine to do so.

Example of an Organic Site Launch Without a Previous Strategy:

* No Re-launch Strategy

* Harder to rectify afterwards

* This is a common trend

This graph shows the traffic of a client who came to 4Ps Marketing after they had already re-launched their website.

They decided to launch during a low season, which is represented by the grey arrow in the above diagram. The red arrows indicate the launch date.

As they had no strategy in place and therefore no 301 redirect plan, the two months after the launch saw them lose 80% of their organic traffic. Not only had they lost the momentum they had built, they also had to spend additional budget to restore their traffic to previous levels.

It is much harder to rectify such a loss in traffic after a re-launch.

What

WHAT

Below is a cloud map that shows the many different terminologies used in describing a 're-structure', 're-design', 'migration' or 'merge'. There is a substantial variation in terminology, but the consistent factor needs to be the strategy behind it.

Here, we wanted to highlight the differences between a re-structure and a re-design.

Re-structure

- Deleting pages/sections
- Moving pages/sections
- CMS changeover
- Deleting content
- Integrating international aspects

Technical

Re-design

- New images/logos
- New colour scheme
- Changing background colours
- Changing font types/sizes

Visual

A re-structure involves many technical changes such as deleting pages, moving sections, changing the CMS or adding/amending content structures. If you are integrating international aspects into the website, this can affect the overall website structure and will almost always have an impact on search. Without an SEO strategy that encapsulates international setups, this impact could be severe.

A re-design involves changing things such as images, the colour scheme and background colours. Changing only these elements will not have an impact on search. However 9times out of every 10 website launches 4Ps have worked on have incorporated a change which would have had an impact on search.

Retaining Visibility

From the image below, you can see that there are over 1 billion 5 hundred million results for the keyword 'sports news', which makes it a highly competitive term for the BBC to rank for.

If the BBC decided to change their sports URL without putting a redirect plan in place, they would risk losing that position and all of the site links that trail the snippet. These site links are entry points into other pages on the website, so losing them would cause a further reduction in traffic.
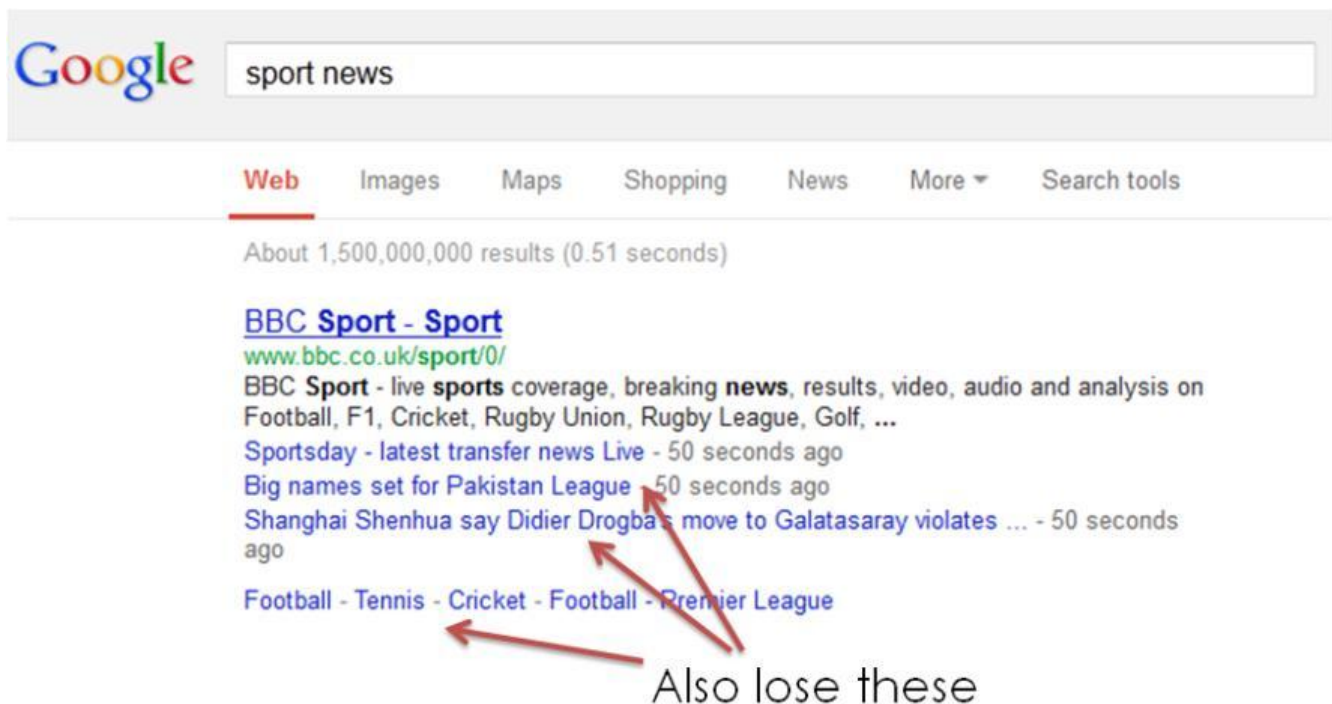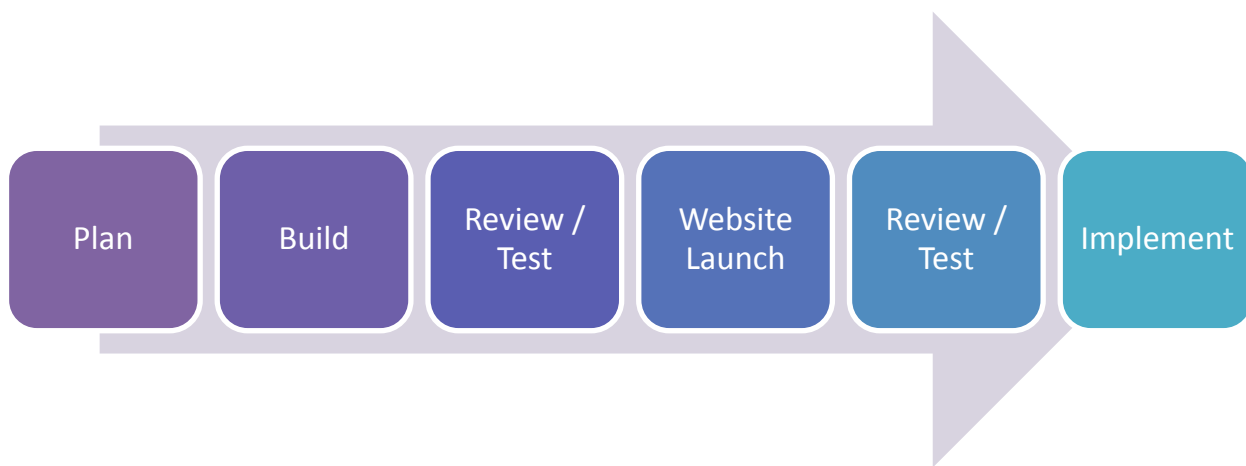
When: The Process

The key point in planning a re-launch is to make sure that you start planning early.

SEO shouldn't be left until the last minute. It should be considered as early as initial concept discussions and should certainly be a crucial part of the brief. This will not only ensure that no SEO factors are missed out but will also allow search to be fully integrated at every stage.

Plan → Build → Review / Test → Website Launch → Review / Test → Implement

It is important to request website/CMS features from developers early on in the process. Ask for everything you need at the beginning so that it can be added to the plan (and, in the case of external developers, so that cost can be accounted for). It's much harder to have things added afterwards; even requesting changes to wireframes can become challenging.

After the website is launched, it is important to allow yourself the time to review and test the live version. Although the website will have been reviewed in a test environment, our experience tells us that it is impossible to foresee everything. Technical errors, missed 301s and other issues can and will happen, so it's important to allow the time to address the unexpected.

How: Planning / Research / Objectives

These are some of the questions that businesses are advised to ask themselves when planning a site re-launch.

Brand

- What is our brand about?
- Who is our target audience?
- What are our long term objectives?

Commercial

- Where are our commercial opportunities?
- What are our competitors doing?

Positioning

- What content should we offer?
- What do customers currently come to the site for?
- Which sections of the site are currently successful?
- What can we offer that our competition doesn't?

Consider SEO throughout

There is always an objective in a website re-launch and the above aspects need to be considered in setting it. The key to this is to make sure that SEO is considered throughout all of them.

Look at what your competitors are doing and consider your commercial opportunities. Search integrates into all of these, as well as into content and social media.

Consider All In The Brief

The following diagram represents the key parties that must be involved during the brief development stages.
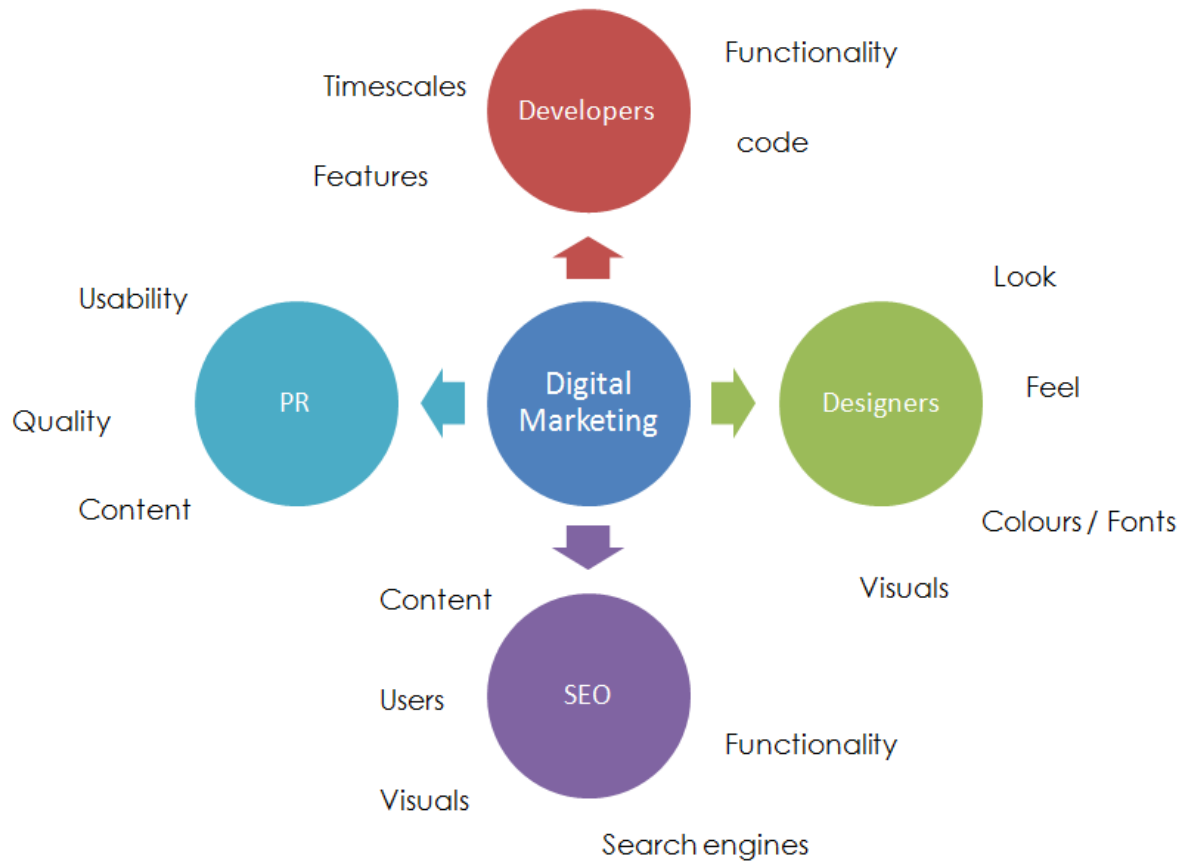
Although there are many other areas that each party may be concerned with, these are the prominent focuses from our experience. Considering search and content during the brief will also allow PR and SEO to bridge any potential gaps.

With search engines shifting their focus towards content and engagement, getting your PR and SEO departments working together with help your digital strategy succeed in 2013.

Planning a Website Re-Launch / Migration

It is recommended that you take the following steps during a re-launch:

Website Re-Launch/Migration

PLANNING → IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW → LAUNCH PERIOD → POST LAUNCH

This is a **snippet** of 4Ps Marketing's website re-launch and migration roadmap:

Website Re-Launch/Migration

PLANNING

#		Task	4Ps	DATE
1		Complete site scrape		
2		Onsite Structure Recommendations		
	2.1	Meta Data Migration		
	2.2	h1, h2, h3		
	2.3	Internal Linking		
	2.4	XML / HTML / Video / Image Sitemap		
	2.5	ALT Tags / Image data / Video		
	2.6	Microdata / Rich Snippets		
	2.7	404 Setup		
	2.8	Google Products (Places/Shopping/News)		
	2.9	Canonical Tags		
3		Review Wireframes		
		URL Structure Recommendations		
4		Content Planning		
	4.1	Content Best Practice Document		
	4.2	Content Removal Plan		
5		301 Re-Direct Strategy		

No two website launches are identical. Each launch will have bespoke elements that need to be considered separately, while some elements will not have to be considered at all. The process can vary quite a lot when considering:

- Ecommerce
- International setup
- Mobile and/or responsive
- CMS integration
- Technical SEO

This is just a fragment of the extensive planning process that is involved in a re-launch.

After the planning stage, implementation needs to be reviewed. SEO checks will then occur before and on the day of the website launch, closely followed by the post launch strategy.

The Site Structure

Here is an example of a site structure when planning a re-launch:
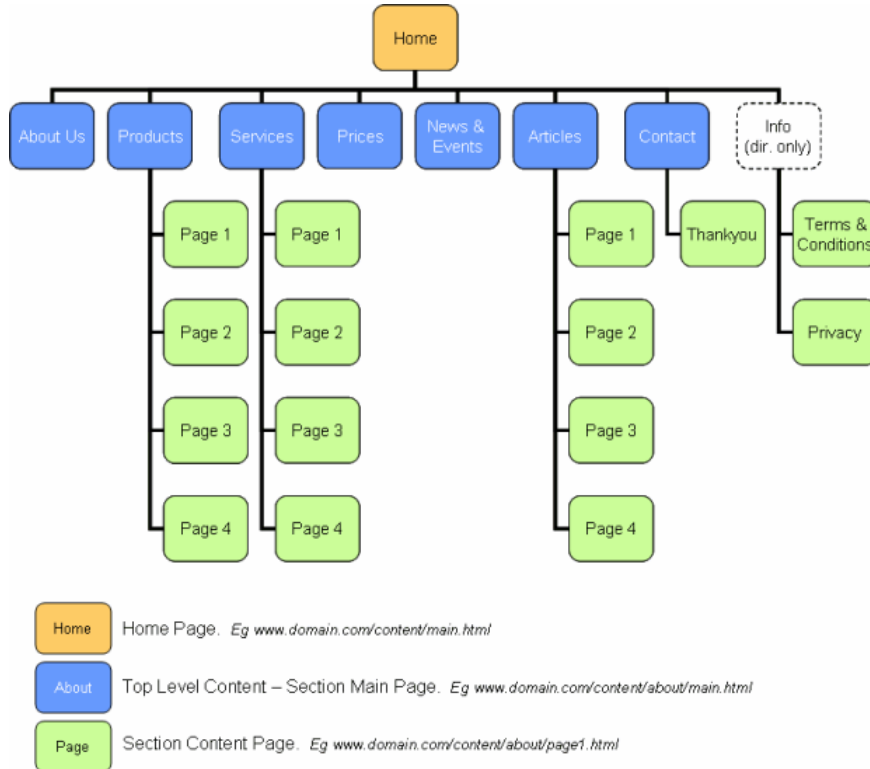
This helps marketers visualise the website structure before it is built and allows them to map out the hierarchy of each section. Doing this allows SEOs to identify any missing sections/pages and begin to build the URL structure.

Wireframes

Here are two examples of working wireframes:

A working wireframe will give designers visual concepts to work with. SEO and digital professionals will be able to advise on preffered coding structures, and usability considerations, while analytics professionals can begin begin to map out funnels and tracking concepts.

301 Redirect Plan

The 301 redirect image is used to show how a redirect plan is crucial to the success of a website re-launch.
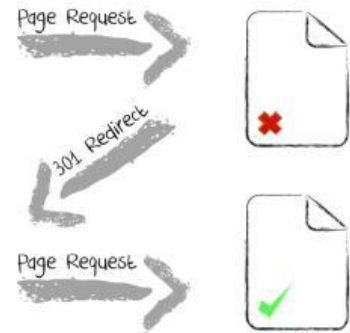
301 Moving House Analogy

A great analogy we use at 4Ps Marketing is:

"Imagine you are moving into a new house and you don't leave a forwarding address for your mail. You would no longer receive any mail that goes to your old address. Therefore, you must leave a forwarding address so that your mail can be re-directed to the new location."

It is exactly the same with search engines; we need to leave a forwarding address for each URL now that it has changed its location.

This is done with re-direction mapping. Here is an example:

404 - Page Not Found

In the event that any URLs are missed in the planning stage or that a 301 redirect plan is not in place, it is vital to ensure that you have a custom 404 - Page Not Found. This will redirect the user to a custom built page with internal links to other pages of interest. This means that the visitor is less likely to go elsewhere.

Here are two examples of 404 pages that have been customised to reflect the brand and steer the user to continue onto a conversion path:

www.jamieoliver.com
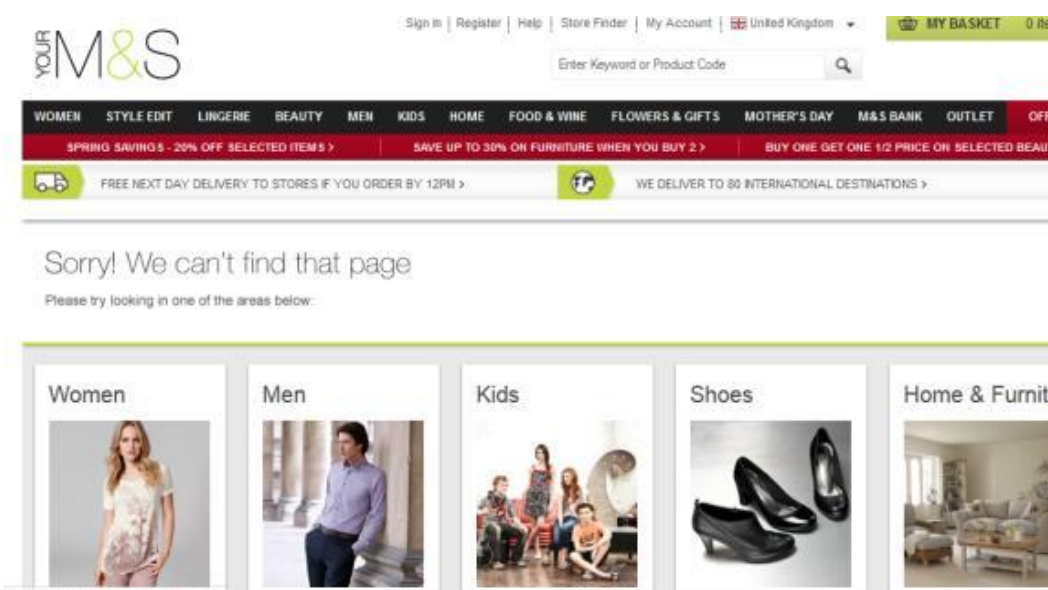
www.marksandspencer.com

A Case Study

⬆ 11.3%

ORGANIC TRAFFIC

This screenshot shows the organic traffic during the six-month website launch period of one of 4Ps Marketing's clients. As you can see, an 11.3% increase in organic traffic was gained in the months just after launch. This increase was the result of the client complying with 90% of the recommendations in the SEO roadmap.

Above all, it is important to remember that the aim of a re-launch strategy is to maintain as much traffic as possible and build a plaform for continued SEO growth in the months thereafter.

Other Considerations

Communication between all parties is key during a site launch. SEOs, developers, designers and the PR team will all have their own requirements and focuses, but it is essential that they are all working together, not against each other.

It is also important that internal training is provided for all of those who are involved with the maintainance of the ongoing site, such as:

- Developers
- CMS users
- Marketing
- PR
- Digital

Integration between these parties also results in an increased level of communication between departments. This is vital in ensuring that the launch goes as smoothly as possible; all those involved in the process will need to know what the aim of the relaunch is, when the various elements need to be completed by, and what the objectives are.

Summary

* START PLANNING EARLY

* TECHNICAL SEO IS PARAMOUNT

* COMMUNICATE WITH ALL

* PRIORITISE

Do not neglect the pre-launch activities; order them according to importance. This will enable a smoother process and ensure that the most important aspects of the launch are covered.

It is also important to hold discussions after the launch. What went well? What could have been improved? Asking these questions ensures that key learnings are taken away from the process.

If you would like to speak to Hannah or anyone else from the 4Ps Marketing team regarding your re-launch planning, please get in touch.

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