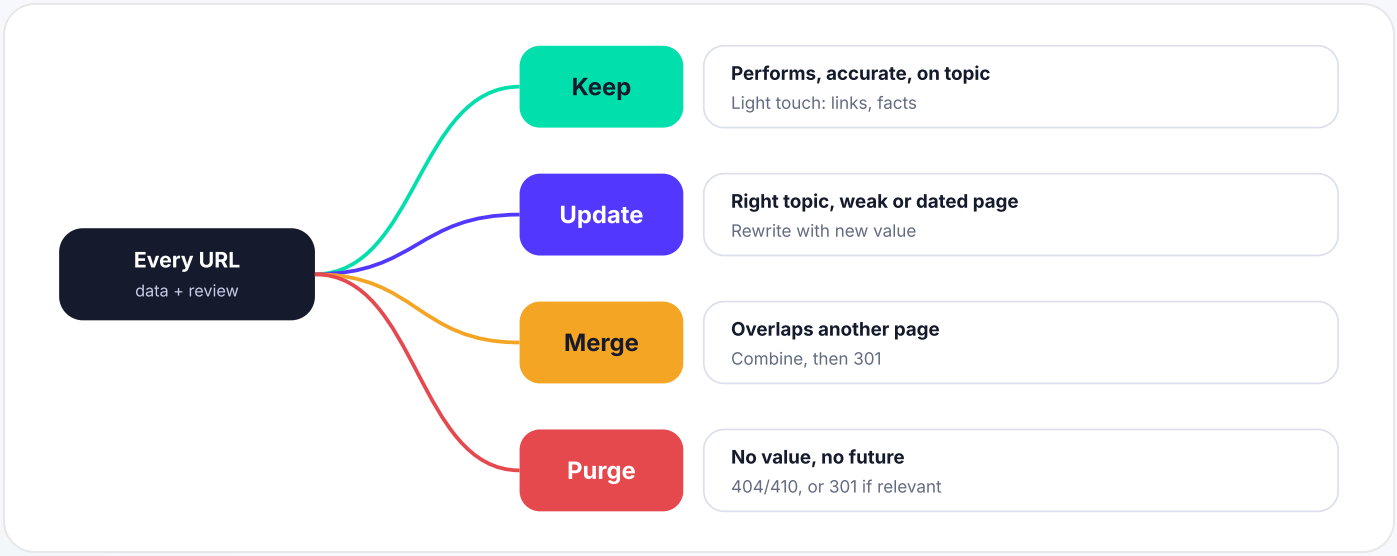
# Content Refresh Keep, Update, Merge, Purge

How to audit a content library page by page, decide what each URL deserves, and make changes that help readers, Google and AI systems, without throwing away traffic, links or trust.

Guide · Content strategy and SEO

FOUR DECISIONS FOR EVERY URL




| 4 | 6 | 5 |
|---|---|---|
| decisions for every URL | signals to score | step process |

**Ameneh Saeednia**
Senior SEO and Generative Search Strategist

Why it matters

# Old content is an asset or a drag. Rarely neutral

Most sites publish far more than they maintain. Over time, pages go **out of date, overlap each other and drift off topic**. A refresh fixes that. But Google is clear that it has to be done **for readers, not for a freshness trick**.

### What Google says

Changing page dates to look fresh when the content hasn't substantially changed is a warning sign. [1]

Adding or removing lots of content just to make a site **seem fresh** won't help rankings. Google's answer: **"No, it won't."** [1]

**Deleting content is a last resort**, for content that can't be salvaged. [2]

But if whole sections were **made for search engines first**, deleting that unhelpful content **can help the good content perform better**. [2]

### What Kopp's research adds

**Information gain**: a score for how much **new information** a document adds beyond what the user has already seen. Updates should add it. [5]

The API leak shows **siteFocusScore** and **siteRadius**: Google compares pages to the site as a whole to judge what is core. Off-topic pages blur that. [6]

**NavBoost** uses about **13 months** of click data. Pages that stopped satisfying users carry that history. [6]

Originality and **first-instance content** are among his E-E-A-T signals. [7]

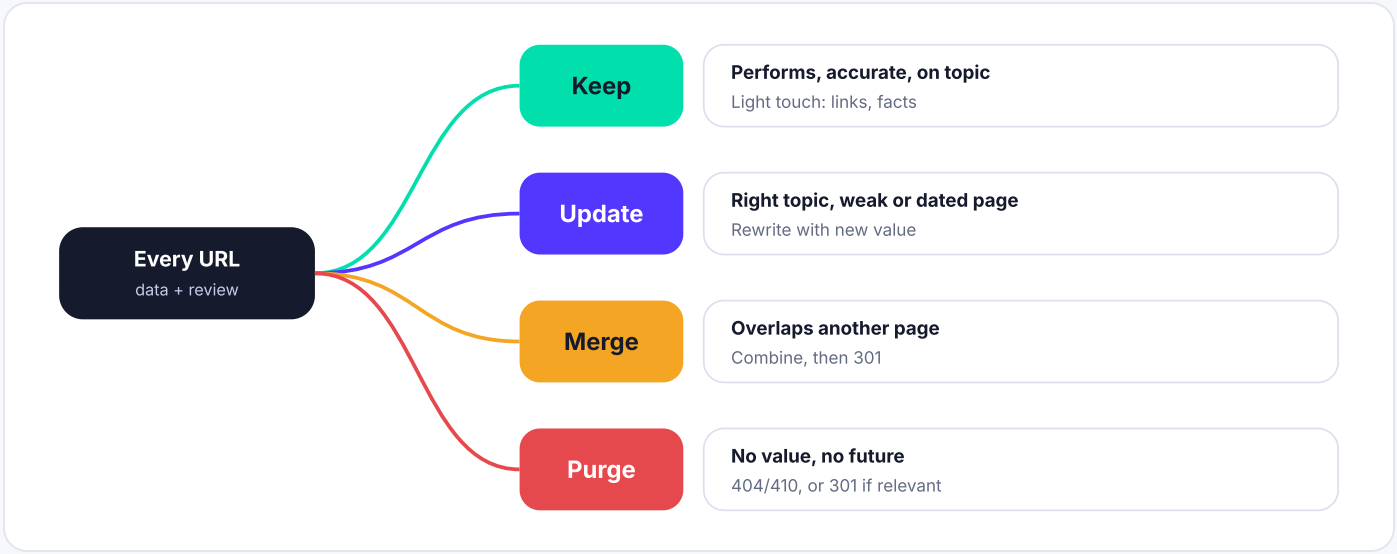
### The short version

Keep what works. Make weak pages **genuinely better**. Combine pages that compete. Remove only what has **no value and no future**, and redirect anything that still carries links or relevance.

The framework

# Four decisions for every URL

Every page in the audit gets **one decision**, based on data and a human review. The decision drives the action and the owner.




| Decision | What it means | Typical action | URL after |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Keep** | Performs, accurate, on topic | Check facts, add internal links, no date change unless content changes | Same |
| **Update** | Right topic and URL, but weak, thin or outdated | Substantial rewrite with new information, first-hand detail, better structure | Same |
| **Merge** | Two or more pages answer the same need | Combine the best parts into the strongest URL | 301 to the winner |
| **Purge** | No traffic, links, conversions or future | Remove. Redirect only to a **truly relevant** page | 404/410 or 301 |

### Two extra labels that help

**Move**: valuable but in the wrong place, for example company news in the blog. Move it to a News section.
**Noindex**: useful to users but not for search, for example thin tag pages or internal resources.

### Decide at topic level too

Before scoring single pages, list your **core topics**. A page that performs but sits **far outside** them may still be a Purge or Move. A weak page **inside** a core topic is usually an Update.

Step 1

# Build the inventory

You can't decide on pages you can't see. Pull **every indexable URL** into one sheet, then join the data.

| Data | Source | Why |
|---|---|---|
| **Every URL, status, title, word count, canonical, depth** | Crawler + XML sitemaps | The full list, including orphans |
| **Clicks, impressions, top queries (16 months)** | Search Console | Search demand and decline over time |
| **Sessions, engagement, conversions** | Analytics | Value beyond search |
| **Referring domains per URL** | Backlink tool + Search Console Links | Equity you must not lose |
| **Internal inlinks** | Crawler | How your own site values the page |
| **Publish and last-updated date** | CMS export | Age and freshness |
| **Topic / cluster and search intent** | Manual or AI-assisted tagging | Overlap and topic fit |
| **Indexing status** | Search Console URL Inspection / page indexing | Whether Google even keeps it |

### Tips from a real audit

**De-duplicate** the URL list first. Pasted lists and sitemaps often disagree.
Tag **content type**: guide, list, news, PR, event, review. Decisions differ by type.
Note which posts target the **same query as a commercial page**. That's where cannibalization hides.

### Don't skip

**Backlinks**. A page with no traffic but strong links should never be deleted without a redirect.
**Conversions and assisted conversions**. Some low-traffic pages close sales.
**Seasonality**. Compare 16 months, not 3, before calling a page dead.

Step 2

# Score and decide

Use the signals together. A clear pattern usually emerges. **Pages that don't fit a pattern get a human review.**

| Signal | Keep | Update | Merge | Purge |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Organic clicks (16 months)** | High | Some | Low | None |
| **Conversions / assisted** | Yes | Some | Rare | None |
| **Referring domains** | Many | Some | Few | None |
| **Topic fit with the site** | Core | Core | Overlaps a stronger page | Off-topic |
| **Accuracy today** | Current | Dated | Mixed | Obsolete |
| **Unique value (information gain)** | Clear | Thin | Duplicated elsewhere | None |

Typical pattern for each decision. No single column decides: a page with no traffic but strong backlinks is a **merge or redirect**, not a purge.

### Questions for the human review

Would we **publish this today**? If not, why is it live?
Does it say anything **another page on our site doesn't**? [5]
Is it **accurate** now? Prices, laws, opening hours, events.
Does it compete with a **commercial page** for the same query?
Who on the team **could make it great**, and is it worth their time?

### Use Google's own lens

Google's helpful content questions are a good review checklist: **original information, expertise, a satisfying experience**. [1]
Ask **Who, How and Why** of each page: who wrote it, how it was made, why it exists. [1]
A page that only exists to **target a keyword** is a Merge or Purge candidate.

### Keep the decision log

Record the **decision, reason and owner** for every URL. It protects you when someone asks why a page disappeared, and it's the basis of your redirect map.

Step 3a

# Update: what a real update looks like

An update is **new value**, not a new date. Kopp's information gain idea is the test: **what does this page now tell readers that they can't easily find elsewhere?** [5]

**Cosmetic:** change the year in the title, swap two sentences, update the date.

**Substantial:** new first-hand tips, current prices and hours, a new section answering questions people now ask, fresh photos.

**Google flags date changes without substantial change [1]**

**Generic:** *"Lisbon has many great food experiences for visitors."*

**Specific:** *"Most tascas in Alfama close between 3pm and 7pm. Book lunch before 1pm or go after 7:30."*

**Concrete, checkable, useful**

### Update checklist

Check and fix **every fact**, date and price.
Add **first-hand experience**: photos, quotes from experts or guides, data you own.
Answer **follow-up questions** from Search Console queries and AI prompts.
Clarify the **author** and add a visible "updated" note that explains what changed.
Add **internal links** to and from the cluster (see the Internal Linking guide).

### Keep what's working

Don't change the **URL** of a page that ranks.
Keep sections that already **earn clicks** for their queries.
Keep the **primary topic**. A rewrite that changes intent is a new page.
Update the date **only** when the content substantially changed. [1]

Step 3b

# Merge: when pages compete

If several pages answer the **same need**, they split clicks, links and signals. Merge them into **one stronger page**.

### How to spot overlap

Two or more URLs ranking for the **same queries** in Search Console.
Titles that differ by a word: *"Rome in 2 days"* and *"48 hours in Rome"*.
A **blog post** chasing the same broad query as a **commercial or destination page**.
Several posts on one event, updated year after year as new URLs.

### How to merge

Pick the **winner**: usually the URL with the most links, clicks and the clearest slug.
Move the **unique** parts of the others into it. Drop repetition.
**301 redirect** the losers to the winner. Permanent redirects tell Google the target is canonical. [3]
Update **internal links** to point straight to the winner.
If both must stay live, use a **canonical** to show the preferred URL. [8]

| Overlap | Better move |
|---|---|
| **Two near-identical blog posts** | Merge into one, 301 the other |
| **Broad blog post vs commercial page on the same query** | Re-scope the post to a narrower angle, or merge into the commercial page as a section |
| **Yearly event posts** | One evergreen URL, updated each year |
| **Many thin posts on one subtopic** | One complete guide that covers the subtopic properly |

### Lesson from a blog audit

Before rewriting a batch of posts, **audit the whole library first**. Some rewrite candidates turn out to be **duplicates** of other posts, or to compete with **commercial pages**. Merging or re-scoping them saves rewrites and protects the pages that sell.

Step 3c

# Purge: removing pages safely

Google calls deleting a **last resort**, but also says removing unhelpful sections made for search engines can help the rest of the site. [2] **Remove with a plan.**

| Situation | Action | Why |
|---|---|---|
| **No value, no links, no relevant replacement** | **404 or 410** | Google's indexing pipeline drops URLs that return 4xx codes [4] |
| **No traffic, but has backlinks** | **301** to the closest relevant page | Keeps link equity and sends users somewhere useful [3] |
| **Outdated, but a newer page covers it** | **301** to the newer page | The redirect target is shown in search [3] |
| **Useful to users, not for search** | **Noindex**, keep live | Stays available without competing in search |
| **Company news or PR in the blog** | **Move** to a News section, purge what's too old | Keeps the blog focused on reader topics |

### Don't

Redirect everything to the **homepage**. Send users to a page that matches what they wanted, or let it 404.

Delete hundreds of pages **in one go** without a redirect map and a backup.

Purge pages because they are **old**. Age isn't the problem. Uselessness is.

Remove a page and leave **internal links** pointing at it.

### Do

Export the page content **before** removing it.

Remove in **batches**, starting with the clearest cases.

Update **sitemaps** and internal links in the same release.

Watch Search Console for **404s with traffic or links** after each batch.

Step 4 and 5

# Run it safely, then measure

1

### Plan

Agree core topics, scoring rules and owners. Get **sign-off** on purges.

2

### Back up

Export content, URLs, links and data **before** any change.

3

### Map redirects

One row per removed or merged URL: **source, target, reason**.

4

### Ship in batches

Updates and merges first, purges last. Batches of **50 to 200** URLs.

5

### Clean up

Internal links, sitemaps, nav and hubs updated **in the same release**.

6

### Monitor

Clicks, indexing and 404s per batch for **8 to 12 weeks**.

| Metric | What good looks like |
|---|---|
| **Clicks and impressions of the section (not single pages)** | Stable or rising after the dip from removals settles |
| **Clicks to updated and merged winners** | Rising over 1 to 3 months |
| **Share of indexed pages in the section** | Higher, as weak URLs leave |
| **Conversions from content** | Stable or rising |
| **AI citations for priority prompts** | Updated pages start appearing |

### Expect time

Google says some changes show in **a few days**, but it can take **several months** for its systems to learn that a site has improved. [2] Judge the project by the **section trend**, not by single pages in week one.

Checklist and sources

# Content refresh checklist

### Audit

[ ] Full URL **inventory** from crawl and sitemaps
[ ] 16 months of **Search Console** data joined
[ ] Backlinks and **conversions** per URL
[ ] Topic, intent and **content type** tagged
[ ] Every URL scored: **Keep, Update, Merge, Purge**
[ ] Decision log with **reason and owner**

### Action

[ ] Updates add **real new value**, dates honest
[ ] Merges **301** to the winner
[ ] Purges with links **redirected** to relevant pages
[ ] No mass redirects to the **homepage**
[ ] Internal links and **sitemaps** cleaned
[ ] Batches **monitored** for 8 to 12 weeks

## Sources


01 **Creating helpful, reliable, people-first content. Google Search Central**
developers.google.com/search/docs/fundamentals/creating-helpful-content

02 **Google Search's core updates. Google Search Central**
developers.google.com/search/docs/appearance/core-updates

03 **Redirects and Google Search. Google Search Central**
developers.google.com/search/docs/crawling-indexing/301-redirects

04 **How HTTP status codes affect Google's crawlers. Google**
developers.google.com/crawling/docs/troubleshooting/http-status-codes

05 **Information gain score: how it is calculated? Olaf Kopp**
kopp-online-marketing.com/information-gain-how-it-is-calculated-which-factors-are-crucial

06 **What we can learn from DOJ trial and API Leak for SEO? Olaf Kopp**
kopp-online-marketing.com/what-we-can-learn-from-doj-trial-and-api-leak-for-seo

07 **How Google evaluates E-E-A-T? 80+ signals. Olaf Kopp**
kopp-online-marketing.com/how-google-evaluates-e-e-a-t-80-signals-for-e-e-a-t

08 **Consolidate duplicate URLs. Google Search Central**
developers.google.com/search/docs/crawling-indexing/consolidate-duplicate-urls


Guide by **Ameneh Saeednia**, seogirl.ca, drawing on published work by **Olaf Kopp** (Aufgesang), Google documentation and her own content audits, prepared with AI assistance. Examples are illustrative.