

MIGRATIONS ARE SCARY

But There's Light At The End Of The Tunnel



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Who is Patrick Stox?

- Technical SEO for IBM - Opinions expressed are my own and not those of IBM.
- I write, mainly for [Search Engine Land](#)
- I speak at some conferences like this one, Pubcon, TechSEO Boost
- Organizer for the Raleigh SEO Meetup (most successful in US)
- We also run a conference, the [Raleigh SEO Conference](#)
- Also the Beer & SEO Meetup (because beer)
- 2017 + 2018 US Search Awards Judge, 2017 + 2018 UK Search Awards Judge, 2018 + 2019 Interactive Marketing Awards Judge



The More You Do At Once, The More Likely Something Will Go Wrong



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And Something Will Go Wrong



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So Make A Plan



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Get All The Right People Involved



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Make Sure People Know What They Are Supposed To Do

- SEO
- Social
- Paid
- PR
- Analytics
- Apps and/or Platforms
- Email/automation
- Devs
- Infrastructure



Set Realistic Goals



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And Realistic Deadlines

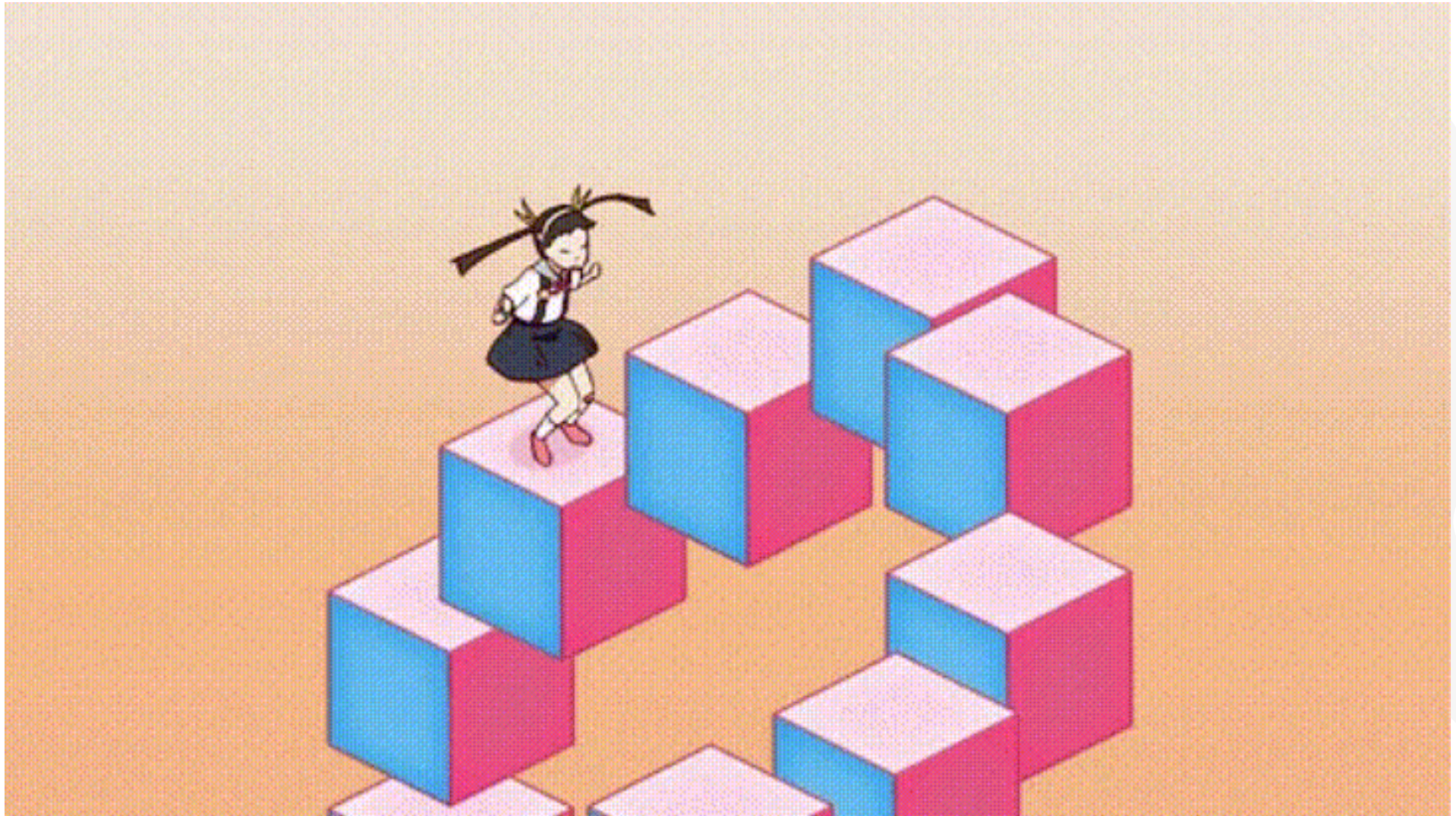


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Watch For Moving Targets



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Get Enough Resources (It Never Feels Like Enough)



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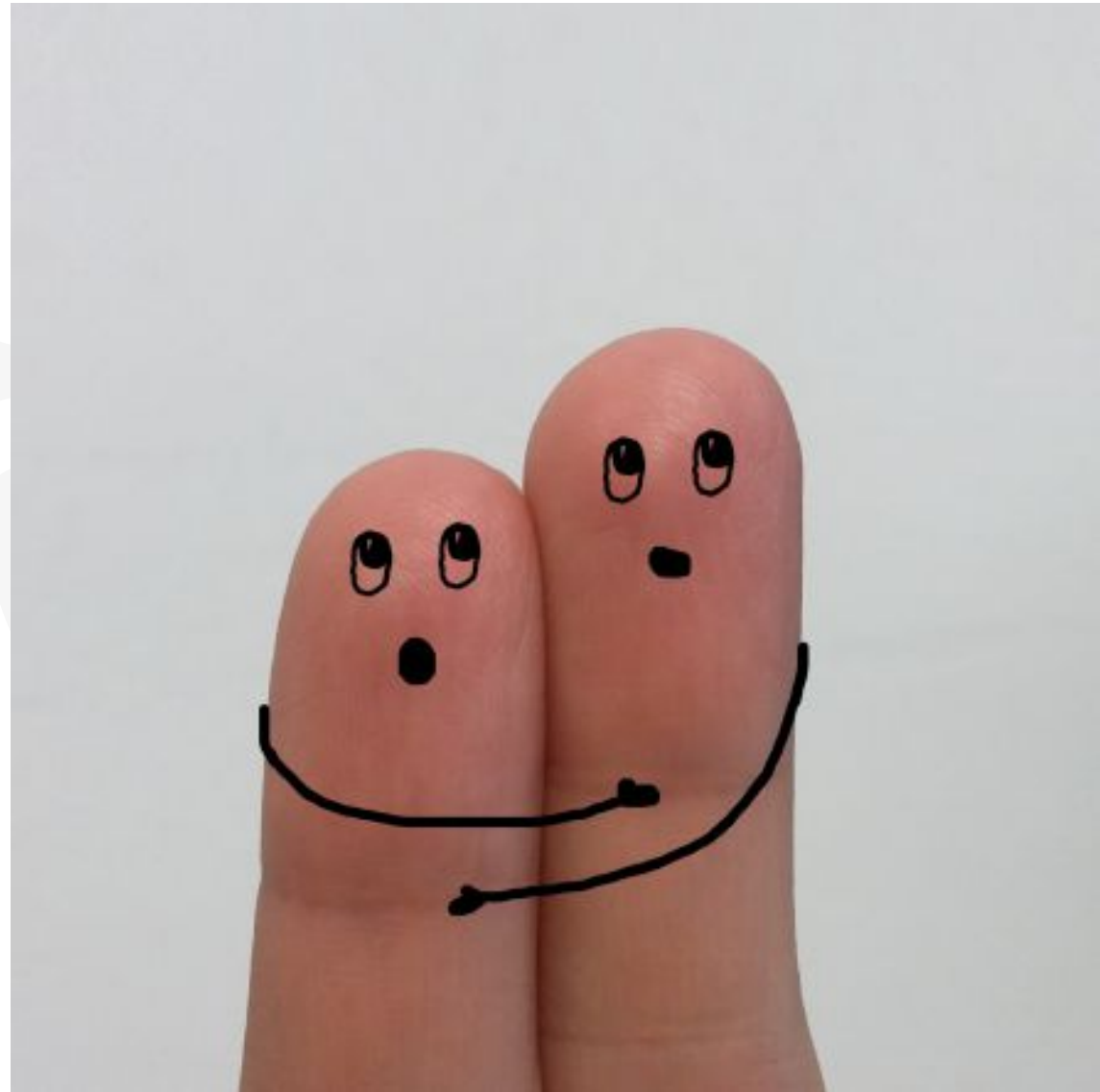
Let People Know Your Branding (For Acquisitions)

- Before: ABC, an XYZ company
- Before: ABC is becoming XYZ on dd/mm/yyyy
- During: ABC, now part of XYZ
- Maybe Later: DEF, formerly ABC (because someone will want to change the name...)



But Mainly Don't Panic

There's nothing you can mess up
that can't be fixed later.



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Not Everything Has To Be Perfect Before Launch

Sometimes things are rushed and missed because of deadlines, holidays, resources, etc.

Don't expect everything to be perfect or for you to be able to delay the process.



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The Most Likely Thing To Go Wrong Is Redirects
They're Really About Consolidation Of Signals

This = That



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How Redirects Work

There is no value lost, no decay of signals. They either consolidate, or they don't. That's true for 301, 302, JS redirects, however you do it.



Get Them Right

Map 1:1 as much as possible

- Don't redirect all to one page like an announcement or homepage
- Don't forget other formats like Images or PDFs (I wouldn't worry about jss, css, etc)
- You should maintain older redirects from previous versions of the site

Why Get Them Right?

If a page is 404 for long enough, signals are essentially lost. Note, they can build back up over time as links to the page are crawled.



Patrick Stox @patrickstox · 28 Dec 2017

Replying to @JohnMu @dawnieando

Hey John, you have said before that pages marked noindex can pass PageRank. When they get treated as nofollow, I guess that is no longer the case?



1



2



7



👉 **John** 👉🔵 @JohnMu · 28 Dec 2017

Nothing has changed there in a while (at least afaik); if we end up dropping a page from the index, we end up dropping everything from it. Noindex pages are sometimes soft-404s, which are like 404s.



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How Long Does It Take To Consolidate

It depends...

On a fairly stable site, consolidation will happen within a few weeks

Once that happens, signals at the original URL are dropped! So changing a redirect later can take time.



The Age Old Debate Of 301 vs 302

This is about where signals consolidate and which shows in search results. A 301 > B = B shows in index and signals consolidate to B

- A 302 > B = A stays indexed, B consolidates to A.
 - Eventually this may be treated as a 301 and consolidate to B.
- Other signals may come into play. A 302 > B, B canonical to A = A stays indexed and signals get consolidated there.



What If: I Redirect All To One Page

With redirects, whether they actually count for your or are ignored and treated as a soft 404 depends on how relevant the new page is to the old one.

- 1:1 = yes
- Home > Announcement or Product page = likely yes
- Home > Family/Company Home = maybe (depending on relevance)
- Subpages > Home, likely not, but again depends on relevance



What If: I Don't Keep Legacy Redirects

Eventually the links from those old pages will no longer consolidate to the newest one. Signals are checked at time of crawl.

I would keep redirects from pages that have links as until the day I die. As long as there are still links and Google is still checking, there is still value.



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What If: I Redirect Images To A Page

Users will be redirected, but the links aren't going to count.

The image index is a different index than the page index. Try doing `info:https://abc.com/xyz.jpg` in a search and you'll see there's no information. For redirected pages, this would show the new location and the links would also be reflected in Google Search Console as "via intermediate link (old page)" but this doesn't happen for images redirected to pages.

Where I See People Struggle With Redirects

Understanding where the redirects are happening:

- DNS
- CDN level (workers or redirect/page rules)
- Middleware (A/B Testing Platform, something between CDN and server)
- Server level (files like .htaccess or server config, HTTP header response)
- Language based (PHP, JS, meta refresh, etc)
- Plugin/Module/CMS

Where I See People Struggle With Redirects

- DNS does not have protocol, you can't use http/https at this level.
- If you route to the new site with DNS, you basically have to preserve the path and catch redirects on the new server.
 - `Abc.com/xyz > newabc.com/xyz`, then write a rule on the new server for xyz to go where it needs to.



Where I See People Struggle With Redirects

- Letting an old domain that's redirected expire is bad.
- If you put redirects in .htaccess on the old server and then remove the old server, what happens? Gone...
- If your site was HTTPS and you leave your old server up with redirects there, remember to renew the certificate. Or get a multi-domain cert and move everything to the new server. If the cert expires, Google still counts links but users aren't passed.

Looking For Redirect Opportunities

Ahrefs Pages > “Best by links” report

- 404 and has links = easy win
- 30x and has links but goes to a main page or homepage when there might be a better match where it wouldn't be treated as a soft 404.
- Crawl the pages to double check the current status codes.



Redirect Tips

- Check your header responses to identify where a redirect may have fired. Usually CDN, Server, and CMS have identifying characteristics in their headers.
- Move redirects to the edge if you can, it's faster.
- It's never too late, these are some of the easiest wins companies have are to create redirects for old pages where they were either not done or have been lost over the years.
- Setup monitoring for the old domain, security certificates, important pages, etc.

HTTPS Specific

- When using HSTS, the redirect usually shown is a 307. This is browser cached and there can be a 301 or a 302 behind this. Check without cache or in Google Search Console with fetch to see.
- Content Security Policy: upgrade-insecure-requests. Having mixed content issues? Enabling this will solve them and is fairly quick on the servers or some CDNs can do it with a click.
- Referrer Policy. Lots of options on how to pass the referral to sites that aren't secure but you also might be stripping out the referral to some parts of your site, so check this.

Crawling/Indexing

Don't block anything, don't noindex anything.

Use `info:https://example.com/path` in Google to see if pages are consolidating correctly and you should also see links in Google Search Console with Target URL (if different) as the old page

Common Scenario

People still see old pages indexed because they haven't all been crawled yet or they do a site: search on the old website and see the site and think they need to remove the pages. This is pretty much the worst thing they can do. Site: is going to return the old website, you're specifically asking for information about it.



Where It Goes Wrong On Old Site

- Blocking crawling in robots.txt on old site.
 - Spiders need to crawl the old site to consolidate to the new one.
- Using noindex on old site in head, http headers, or robots.txt.
 - If it's not indexed, it can't be consolidated. I've seen an entire domain not consolidated because of a noindex in robots.txt.
- Using the URL removal tool in Google Search Console.
 - Just don't.



Where It Goes Wrong On New Site

- Block crawling in robots.txt in new site.
 - Spiders need to crawl the new site in order to consolidate signals. This is typically blocked before launch and sometimes people forget about it.
- Use noindex on new site.
 - If the new pages aren't indexed, then signals can't be consolidated there. This is typically done before launch and sometimes people forget about it.



You Want Google To Crawl Through Everything

Keeping a sitemap with the old URLs (for a short period of time) can help get them crawled faster. For some there's a popular belief that you should only have URLs from the new site in the sitemap.

In the future, the indexing API may be used for fast re-indexing. David already tested this and it seems to work (for now)

<https://www.davidsottimano.com/playing-with-googles-new-indexing-api-and-getting-pages-crawled-immediately/>

Make Sure You're Looking At Your Analytics Tools The Right Way

I have a lot of examples where people “see” drops but it’s because they’re looking at a limited view like one property in Google Search Console instead of a property set or they aren’t passing the referrer correctly or just general issues with their analytics.

So many case studies show issues from migrations for http/https, subfolder/subdomain where they didn’t look at all the things consolidated or they have a problem with their analytics or they cut out content or internal links. Look at the whole picture!

Content

Cutting content or not transferring it has caused some of the biggest drops I have seen. Imagine taking successful pages and just killing them rather than bringing them over.



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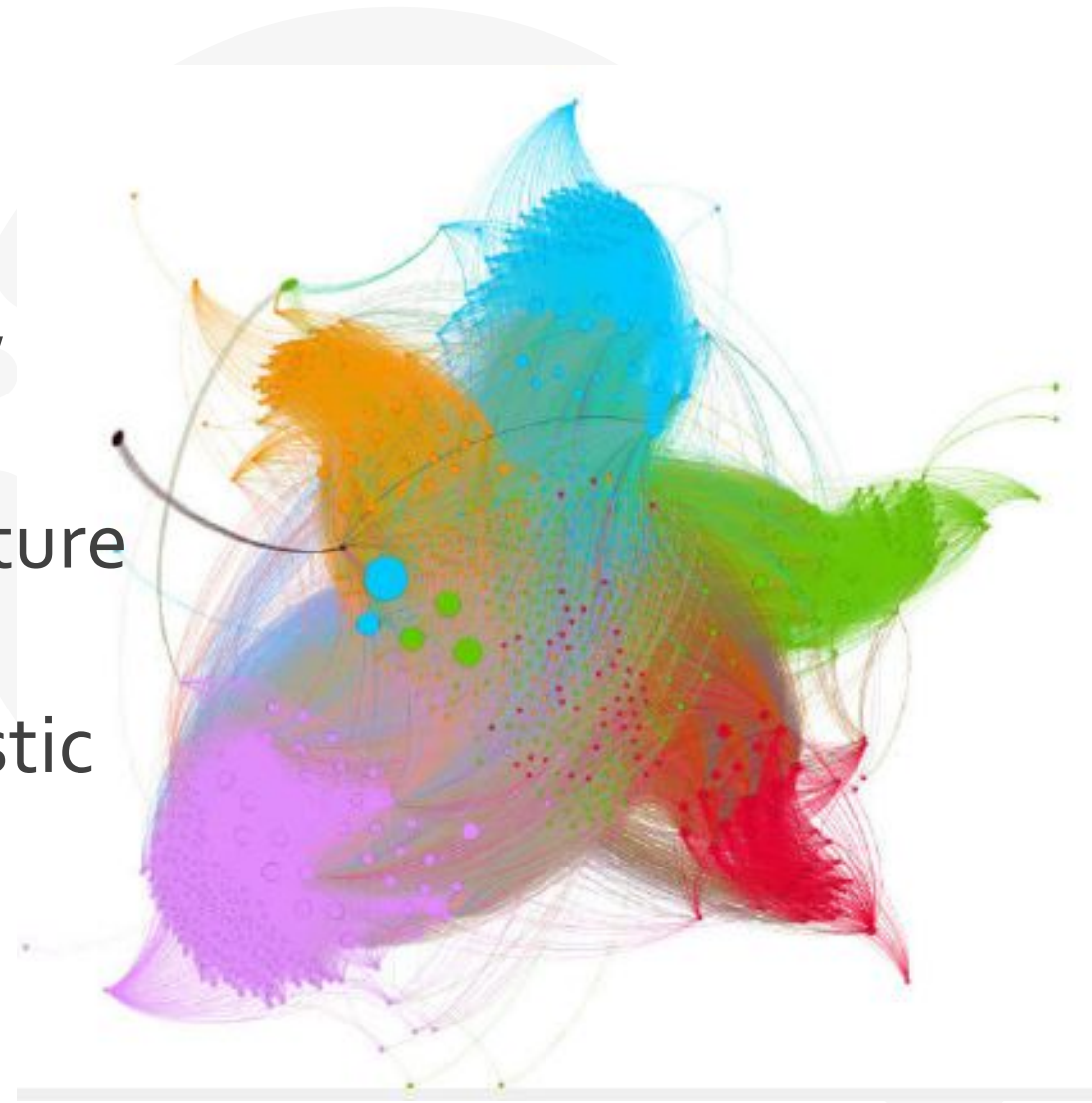
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Internal Links

Most conversations seem to happen around website structure or taxonomy, rather than internal links.

This is more important than your structure as it shows a real world picture of how things are connected and not an idealistic view of how things are structured.



What If I Was Brought In After The Fact?

Wayback Machine <https://web.archive.org/>

Tip: You can also see old versions of the robots.txt file which can show if something may have been blocked in the past.

Good Luck!



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THANK YOU!
SEE YOU AT THE NEXT #SMX

LEARN MORE: UPCOMING @SMX EVENTS



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