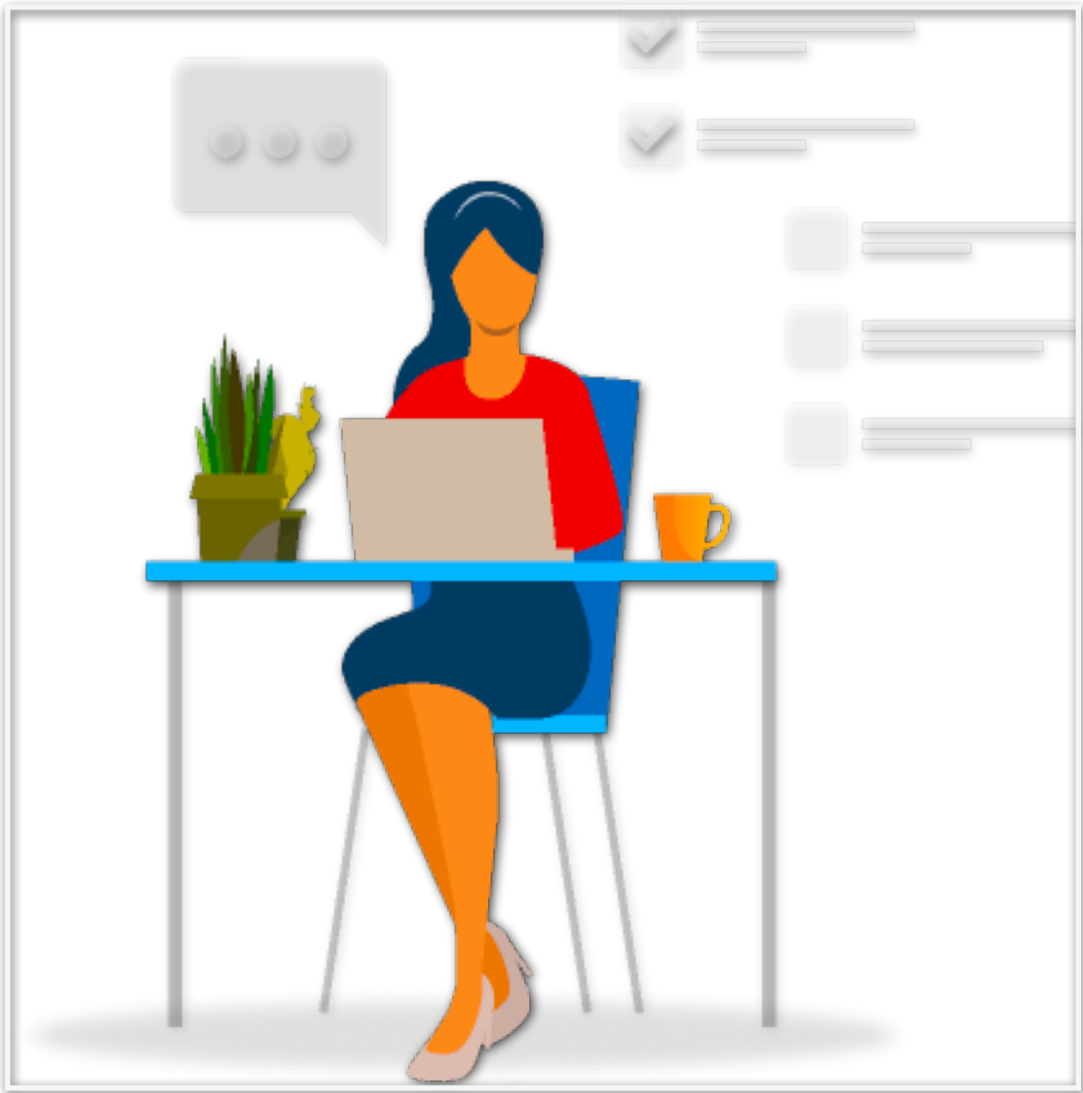


# Website Launch Checklist



Use this checklist to prepare your website



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# Website Checklist



**Step one is to make sure your content is all in line.**

## Check your typography and layout

The first step in our website launch checklist is to check through your typography and general layout. Ensure consistency by working through the sub-checklist below.

1. Check for incorrect punctuation marks, particularly apostrophes, quotation marks and hyphens/dashes
2. Check headings for where you could potentially use ligatures
3. Check for widow/orphan terms in important paragraphs

## Ensure spelling and grammar

### consistency

Much like the previous step, you next need to ensure that all spelling and grammar is consistent. As before, we have supplied a sub-checklist to help you through this process.

1. Capitalisation (especially of main headings)
2. Tense/Style of writing
3. Recurring/common phrases (e.g. 'More about X' links)
4. Variations in words (e.g. Websites vs Web Sites, or UK vs US spelling)
5. Treatment of bulleted lists (e.g. periods or commas at end of each item)

## Check context

Check through your pages whilst bearing in mind the context with which they will be seen. For example, when giving a critical eye to the pages within the site, ask:

1. Why would I visit this page?
2. Is the content ready for visitors?
3. Does the page address the audience?

## Ensure no test content is on the site

Now you should pick out any 'test content' which is still on the site and 'remove it'.

For example, it's not a great look when someone finds a post called, "Hello World" or a paragraph saying "Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua." **Find it. And BIN it.**

## Check all 'Hidden Copy'

The next step is to go through and check all pieces of 'Hidden Copy'.

If you do not know how to do this, [click here](#) to be shown how to find all pieces of 'Hidden Copy' (e.g. alt text, transcriptions, text in JavaScript functions).

## Check forms

If your site has any forms (be they sign-up or opt-in) you need to ensure that they are as good as they can possibly be.

Fill out the forms on the site and go through the following questions:

- Can the flow be improved?
- Do you get stuck?
- Are the instructions accurate?
- Does the completed form get sent to the right people or person?

Depending on your answers, adjust the forms as necessary.

## Proofread everything

Proofread everything again. Yes, we know you've probably been through the content before, but you need to check every nook and cranny! Record who has proofread the site. Even if you've already read it, read it again; get at least one other person to read it too. There's always something you'll pick up on and have to change.

See if you can reduce the amount of text by keeping it specific. Break up large text blocks into shorter paragraphs. Add clear headings throughout, and use lists so that users can scan easily. Don't forget about dynamic text too, such as alert boxes.

# Ensure legal pages are in place

If your site jurisdiction mandates that you have a privacy policy, or a “contact us” page, you need to ensure you have them in place.

## Design



## Get a favicon



Every site should have a favicon, so make sure that yours is working.

The ‘favicon’ appears to the left of the page title in the web browser, and your users will notice if your website doesn’t have one. They give your website credibility and help users navigate to your site when it’s open amongst their other tabs and bookmarks.

Ensuring that your website has a favicon is probably the most basic of any task known to humanity, and yet it’s so frequently overlooked.

## Ensure working responsive design

Next up in the design checks of the website launch checklist, you must check that your website supports responsive design.

Responsive web design (RWD) is a web design approach aimed at crafting sites to provide an optimal viewing experience - easy reading and navigation with a minimum of resizing, panning, and scrolling - across a wide range of devices (from mobile phones to desktop computer monitors).

Essentially, make sure your website works on different screen resolutions and all devices.

Use these tools to check your site on different resolutions:

- Responsinator
- Studio Press

Designing your site using the Bootstrap framework should solve many of these problems.

## Check your images

Now you need to check all of your images to ensure that everything is working smoothly.

Check image pixelation on different displays, specifically high resolution displays like Apple's Retina Display.

## Include 404 pages and defensive design

The final design element which needs to be checked is the presence of a 404 page and defensive design elements.

### **Site 404 Page**

The most commonly overlooked defensive design element is the 404 page. If a user requests a page that doesn't exist, your 404 page is displayed. This



may happen for a variety of reasons, including another website linking to a page that doesn't exist.

Get your users back on track by providing a useful 404 page that directs them to the home page or suggests links to other pages they may be interested in.

Another defensive design technique is checking your forms for validation. Try submitting unusual information in your form fields (e.g. lots of characters, letters in number fields, etc.) and make sure that if there is an error, the user is provided with enough feedback to be able to fix it.

- 404 Error Pages Reloaded

## Testing



### Conduct usability testing

This step is pretty self-explanatory; you need to kick off your tests with usability testing. Record the parties responsible for the tests (and their comments) with the form fields below.

- Usability Testers
- Usability Tester Comments

Have a usability testing done via [feedbackarmy.com](https://feedbackarmy.com) and [usertesting.com](https://usertesting.com) or, do it yourself.

This is important as customers drop unusable websites to go to competitors.

Even testing with 5 users can find 85% of the usability issues. These websites make usability testing simple and affordable.

## Check performance

Website performance is absolutely critical to overall user experience, especially given the prevalence of mobile and responsive websites. Hence, you need to conduct performance tests and record their results using the form fields below.

### Performance Test Results

This is another one of those things that you really should be doing as part of your development process (before and after launch), but it's never too late to put your website through its paces. Performance can often be optimised by making high value, low effort updates and changes.

Here are some tools that you will find helpful:

- [Google PageSpeed Insights](#)
- [Pingdom Website Speed Test](#)

## Ensure working responsive design

Ensure your responsive design is working and check all style types. Use (or expand) the sub-checklist below to track the progress of your tests.

1. Paragraph
2. Headings
3. Unordered Lists
4. Ordered Lists
5. Images
6. Videos

## Perform cross-browser checks

Next, you should check that your website works in multiple browsers. Record the browsers tested in the form field below.

### **Browsers Tested**

This is the sneaky kind of issue where, just when you think your design looks great, pixel perfect, you check it in IE and see that everything is broken. It's vitally important that your website works across browsers.

Bear in mind that not everything has to be pixel perfect, but everything should work, and the user shouldn't see any problems.

## Scour for broken links

It's one thing to proofread your content, but do yourself (and your users) a huge favour and check that the links in your website both work and go somewhere meaningful.

Again, W3C have come to the rescue with their W3 Link Checker or Xenu tool. This service crawls your website and looks for broken links. Pro-tip: enter your development URL and see what comes up (though the link checker may not work if your development site is locked down).

Now, it should be mentioned that while the link checker is super handy, nothing beats going through your site manually, and actually clicking on the links – especially if you've built some custom functionality.

Correct any broken or irrelevant links, then move on.

## Check on several mobile devices

We're almost done with the testing section of the website launch checklist - you must now check that your website works across several mobile devices.

As with the browser tests, record the devices you test out in the form field below.

## **Mobile Devices Tested**

You can use the responsive testing tools mentioned above to do initial mobile testing, but they are not perfect. To really see how your site looks on various mobile devices, you gotta load it up manually.

So use your families', friends' and co-workers' phones and tablets to see how your site looks. Take screenshots on their devices and email them to yourself if you see any errors.

## **How to Take a Screenshot on iOS or Android**

# Measure site speed

Site speed SIGNIFICANTLY affects your Google rankings and conversion rate of your visitors. Make sure it's snappy, no exceptions.

### **BONUS TIP:** Optimise your images

Up to 80% of your page's bandwidth is used up by images. Optimising it provides one of the best returns on your time. Smushit, can automate this.

# Marketing



## Set a launch date

Now that you've run your site through a fine comb and are happy with the results, you need to set a launch date for it.

As a tip, you'll want to give yourself more time than you think, unless you have done this before.

## Ensure lead capture is in place

Capturing leads is arguably the most important thing your website can do. Check you have lead capture in place, and all your forms are working.

**BONUS:** Check your emails are being delivered to all TLDs including Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo and AOL.

**Make sure your emails look good on mobile devices.**

## Consider SEO

This step is a big one - you now need to make sure that your site has been created with SEO (search engine optimisation) in mind. See below for a brief guide, or follow the links at this end of this task to go more in-depth.

## Keyword Research

Have you used Google's Keyword Research Tool? Be sure to consider searcher intent and difficulty, pick one keyword per page, and you'll generally want to start with lower-volume keywords first.

## Titles and Meta Data

Your page title is the most important element for SEO and is also important so that users know what's on the page. Make sure it changes on every page and relates to that page's content.

```
<title>10 Things To Consider When Choosing The Perfect CMS | How-To | Smashing Magazine</title>
```

Are all of your title tags ~65 characters or less? Title tags over this will be truncated in results.

Meta description and keyword tags aren't as important for SEO (at least for the major search engines anyway), but it's still a good idea to include them.

Change the description on each page to make it relate to that page's content, because this is often what Google displays in its search result description.

```
<meta name="description" content="By Paul Boag Choosing a content management system can be tricky. Without a clearly defined set of requirements, you will be seduced by fancy functionality that you will never use. What then should you look" />
```

Are all of your meta description tags ~155 characters or less? Meta description tags over this will be truncated in results.

## Internal Linking

Are you linking to your internal pages in an SEO-friendly way? Are you describing the page you're linking to in the anchor text, so that both users and search engines understand what it's about?

We recommend not using anchor text in your global navigation because it can look like over-optimisation. Stick to in-content links instead.

## Off Page Optimisation

Have you started off-page optimisation and began building links? This is the hardest, most important aspect of SEO! Check out the [ClickMinded Link Building Strategy Guide](#) to get started.

Have you looked at competitor link profiles?

This is the easiest way to get started with link building. This way, you can see what kind of anchor text they're using, as well as how and where they've been getting their links. Input competitor domains at [Link Diagnosis](#), [Open Site Explorer](#), [Ahrefs](#), [Majestic SEO](#) and [LipperHey](#)

SEO is a big topic, if you really want to get into the nitty gritty, check out these two guides:

- [Moz Beginners Guide to SEO](#)
- [Quicksprout Advanced Guide to SEO](#)

## Start blogging

Start blogging BEFORE you launch your website. This will get your site known by Google, and will give some content for readers to go over when they arrive during launch date.

See Also: [How to set up your company blog in 5 minutes](#)

You can take a look at our blog for some inspiration, or check out the below resources:

- [The Newbie Guide to Blogging](#)
- [The Ultimate Blogger Writing Guide](#)
- [The Complete Guide to Building your Blog Audience](#)

Make sure you continue blogging even after the site is launched, blogging is an ongoing process.

## Register social media properties

You should register all your social media properties and get them set up with profile images, cover pages, links back to your website and even a few posts.

If you want to bulk-search or register social media sites check out [Know Em](#). To speed up social media syndication, take a look at [syndication automation](#) below.

## Write a press release

If applicable, you now need to write a press release for the launch of your website. A press release can be useful when launching your website, but don't rely on it to get you picked up. Personal connections with journalists will get you much further.



If you are going to do a press release, good syndication is important to ensure you get some exposure. Below are a few services to help you get your name out:

- PR News Wire
- Marketing Signals
- PR Syndication

## Implement syndication automation

One of the best things you can do before launching a website is ensuring that your syndication is automatic. By this, we mean that when you publish a new blog post, your social media platforms automatically inform your audience.

Take a look at our **free ebook** on the topic to learn the best way to do this, along with other tips on how to automate the processes you hate in your business!

Alternatively, you can use IFTTT to syndicate your blog posts to your social media properties.

## Set up on social bookmarking sites

Now that you've taken care of the bulk of your marketing launch checks, you need to set yourself up on social bookmarking sites.

Social bookmarking sites like Reddit can get you huge waves of traffic if you get upvotes. Create an account with the below sites and become an active member of the community, then when you launch your site, ask for some feedback on the below sites.

- Reddit
- Ask Hacker News
- Digg
- StumbleUpon

## Submit your site to directories

To help people find your site you should submit it to various business directories. Although you should consider as many as possible, below are some options to get you started.

- Yahoo Directory
- DMOZ
- Business.com
- JoeAnt
- Best of the Web

## Add the website to your email signature

Put your new website URL and launch announcement in your email signature.

If you use a browser for emails, check out WiseStamp for Chrome and Firefox.

## Consider the sitemap file

Another key aspect of a good website launch checklist is to ensure that your website has both a sitemap file and measures to keep it updated.

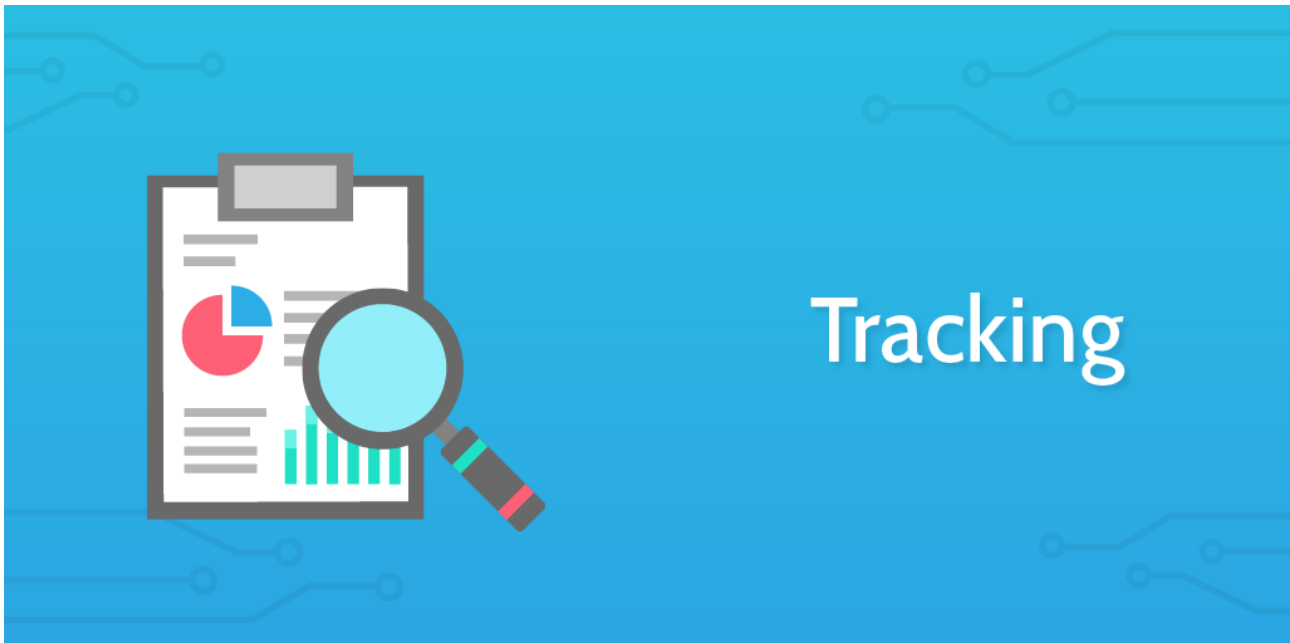
Adding a sitemap.xml file to your root directory allows the major search engines to easily index your website. The file points crawlers to all the pages on your website.

XML-Sitemaps automatically creates a sitemap.xml file for you. After creating the file, upload it to your root directory so that its location is `www.mydomain.com/sitemap.xml`.

If you use WordPress, install the Google XML Sitemaps plug-in, which automatically updates the sitemap when you write new posts. Also,

add your website and sitemap to Google Webmaster Tools. This tells Google that you have a sitemap, and the service provides useful statistics on how and when your website was last indexed.

## Tracking



### Ensure analytics tracking

Installing a web analytics tool (like Google Analytics) is critical for recording and measuring website performance and conversion rates.

Google Analytics even has a handy feature for setting up goals to track how much each conversion is worth for your business.

If you're in the process of building a replacement for an existing website, be sure not to pollute your data by installing the tracking code on your new website while it's under development. Equally, however, if you're clever enough to leave out the tracking code, then be clever enough to remember it when it's time to go live.

Here are a few analytics platforms that you might be interested in:

- Google Analytics
- Piwik
- KISSmetrics
- Statcounter

## Perform A/B testing

If you're planning on doing a big launch and spending money on marketing, you should be A/B testing (also known as 'split testing').

A/B testing is a simple randomised experiment with two variants, A and B, which are the control and treatment in the controlled experiment. It is a form of statistical hypothesis testing. Some things to consider testing first:

- Homepage Headline
- Homepage Video
- Price

You should also be testing elements in your site to make sure it's working the way you want it to.

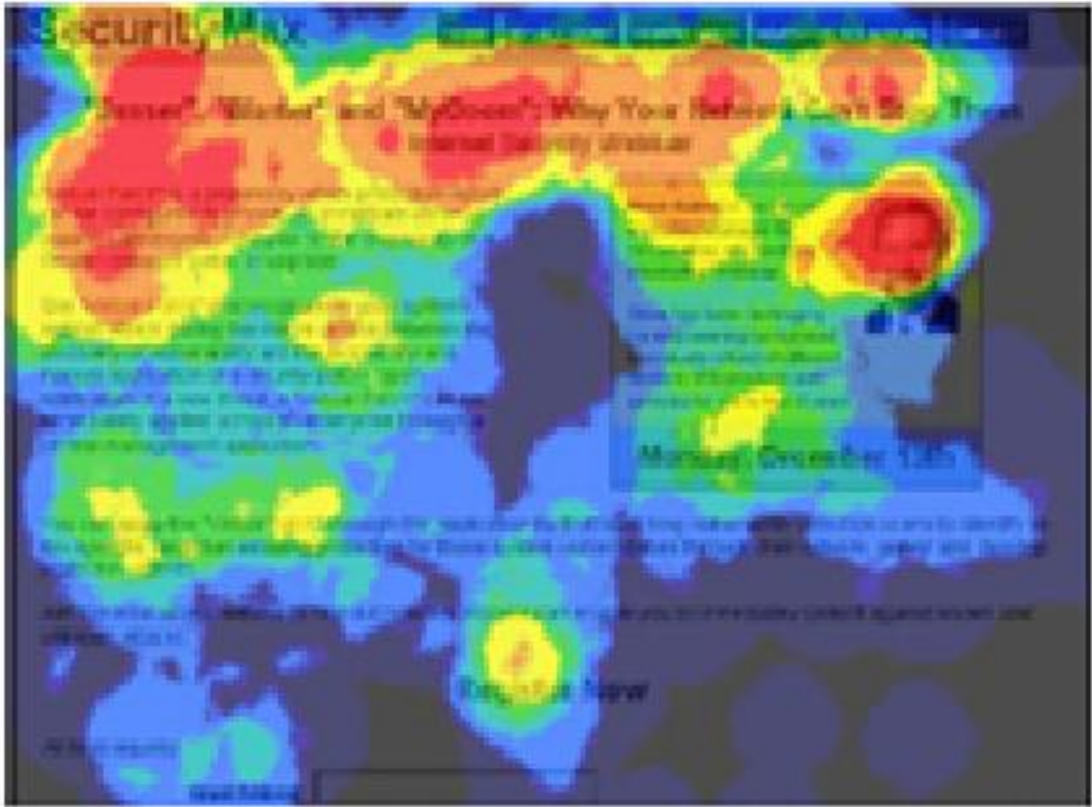
There are a number of tools out there to help you run an A/B test including:

- Google Experiments (part of Google Analytics)
- Optimizely
- Visual Website Optimizer

## Consider heatmap testing

Next, you should at least consider doing heatmap testing on your site.

This is one for the more traffic heavy sites, but if you want to really see what users are doing on your website, you can use a heatmap tracking tool like CrazyEgg.



## Add the site to Google Webmaster

If you add your site to Google Webmaster, they will provide you data such as what are common search terms they display your website for.

You can also install Bing Webmaster Tools, if you should so desire.

# Technical



## Validate your code

We're getting into the last few technical aspects of the website launch checklist now! Start off by validating your code.

This is something that you would hope to have worked into your development process, but hey, if you subscribe to Murphy's Law then this is probably something you should check before launch, and after each update. The W3 Validator is a free tool from The W3C that will help you make sure your code is up to scratch.

Free Formatter has a list of a few more validation tools for different technologies.

## Check page redirection

Although this step is mainly for when you are building a replacement website, you must now check that your URLs lead to the correct pages.

Ensure that all redirects are intentional and correct. If you're in the process of building a replacement website, it's likely that pages on the new website

don't exist on the old website – and perhaps even the other way around. Sometimes, however, it's just that the link structure is different. Whatever the case, it's important to be thorough. <http://example.com/about-us> is not the same as <http://example.com/about us>.

## **Step One: Indexing**

Open up this handy Google Spreadsheet (“Page Redirection Sheet“). This will help you index and compare old and new pages. On each row, give every page a name (for easy reference). Then, list out all of your old pages and try to group them by page category (as in the example). Once you're done, go through your new website and pair up the old pages with equivalent new pages.

If a page on the new website has a different URL to it's equivalent page on the old website, then highlight the row in yellow for easy reference.

## **Step Two: Redirecting**

Once you've finished indexing your site in the spreadsheet, open up the .htaccess file in the root directory of your website. Since you've already indexed your site using the spreadsheet, simply locate your highlighted rows and use one of the following redirection rules (one per line):

### **301 Redirects**

Use 301 redirects when you want to permanently redirect the old page to the new page. Example:

- Redirect 301 <http://www.example.com/about-us/>
- <http://www.example.com/about us/>

### **302 Redirects**

Use 302 redirects when you want to temporarily redirect the old page to the new page. Example:

- Redirect <http://www.example.com/about-us/>
- <http://www.example.com/about us/>

## Test your emails

Next up, test that your emails are coming through from your various contact and signup forms.

If they are going to spam, you probably need a transactional email service provider. Below are a few of the market leaders:

- Mandrill
- Sendgrid
- Postmark

## Check admins are emailed for site errors

As more of a proactive measure, you must now check that your website's admins are emailed when a site error occurs.

No matter how much you have tested, users are going to do unexpected things to your website, which can cause site errors. If you get an email informing about this, you can fix this proactively.

## Set up a monitoring service

Set up monitoring service with one of the below:

- SiteUptime
- Pingdom

No matter how good your infrastructure, sites crash. A site-monitoring service can inform you of a crash before your customers do.



## Back up your site

If your website runs off a database, you need a back-up strategy. Or else, the day will come when you regret not having one. If you use WordPress, install WordPress Database Backup, which you can set up to automatically email you backups.

**BONUS:** Test your backups!

Doing backups is useless if you never test them. Too many people miss this obvious step when they set up their backups.

## Ensure the site runs without JavaScript

Your website should work with JavaScript turned off. There's nothing more to it than that.

Users often have JavaScript turned off for security, so you should be prepared for this. You can easily turn off JavaScript in Firefox.

Test your forms to make sure they still perform server-side validation checks, and test any cool AJAX stuff you have going on.

How to turn off javascript

## Include an RSS link

If your website has a blog or newsreel, you should have an RSS feed that users can subscribe to. To this end, you need to ensure that a link to the feed (and to sign up to it) is easily accessible to a user.

Users should be able to easily find your RSS feed: the common convention is to put a small RSS icon in the browser's address bar.

How to Set up RSS