



# THE ULTIMATE PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST FOR WORDPRESS WEBSITES

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# PRE-LAUNCH PREP

Building and launching a WordPress website – whether for yourself or a client – is a lot of work. Many different parts have to come together to form a consistent whole and create a successful site.

With so many things in the air, it's easy to forget a few of them.

While mistakes are almost always fixable, launch day should be a day of celebration and success for you and your client and not one of disappointment and frantic scrambling for solutions.

***Having a pre-launch checklist helps you get things done and deliver results – and that can never be a bad thing.***

## *Your Roadmap*

To improve your chances of a positive outcome and, ultimately, success, it's a good idea to have a road map of everything that needs to be done before a website sees the light of day.

That's exactly what I want to give you with this pre-launch checklist for WordPress websites: A step-by-step template that makes sure you don't forget any crucial steps on the journey to launch and allows you to make your site an instant success.

Plus, I've broken everything into different categories; how neat is that?



# WHY HAVE A PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST AT ALL?

You might wonder: “Why do I even need a checklist?” You might think: “A good website designer/developer/implementer should know this stuff by heart, right? Are you really dependent on a crutch like a pre-launch list?”

Well, having a checklist puts you into good company: Pilots, astronauts, surgeons, and other professionals in high-stakes occupations rely on them to do their work and perform at the highest level.

## **If it’s good enough for them, why not you?**

Apart from that, having a checklist enables you to offload some of the mental effort involved in website creation onto a piece of paper (or a computer file in this case) and thus frees up some capacity for creativity, decision making, and other, more important things.

Less thinking and dithering results in more action and higher productivity. What’s not to love about that?

Furthermore, checklists help us break down a big task into smaller pieces, thereby making them less overwhelming and more organized. With a step-by-step list in place, it’s much harder to skip ahead or leave out something important.

Besides, nothing is more satisfying and motivating than checking off points on a to-do list, am I right? I don’t know about you, but that’s what gets me out of bed in the morning.

*If you work with WordPress professionally, chances are that you will repeatedly find yourself launching websites, and a checklist can make this process repeatable and smoother the next time around.*

It’s also important to note that a pre-launch checklist is never “finished” but an organic, living and breathing entity.

In a dynamic environment such as web design and WordPress, new technologies, challenges, and things to keep track of come up all the time and constantly need to be included in your workflow.

Therefore, a good pre-launch checklist will be your companion for a long time.



***Launch day  
should be a day of  
celebration.***

# HERE IT IS, THE ULTIMATE WORDPRESS PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST

As you might have already gleaned, checklists are somewhat personal. While I tried to be as thorough as possible with this list, you will find that not all of it applies to you or every project you are working on.

It's not a "one-size-fits-all" deal, nor does it aim to be.

However, hopefully the list will serve as an inspiration and basis for your own checklist. Take what applies to you, ignore what doesn't, and customize to your needs at will (to paraphrase Bruce Lee).

## *Let's get started.*



# CONTENT

Content is the heart of any website. It will let both users and search engines know what your site is about. It's important to get content right from the start. The following points will help you do so.



***“Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet.”***

***Bill Gates***  
1996

- REPLACE DUMMY CONTENT**  
Check your site for placeholder text (such as *Lorem ipsum*) and make sure the actual (client-approved) content is in place.
- PROOFREAD**  
Nothing says “unprofessional” more than grammar and spelling errors, so double check all text on the site for mistakes and then check again.
- FORMAT WRITTEN CONTENT**  
Layout is important to make your site attractive and easy to consume. Avoid big blocks of text, use paragraphs, and don't forget about *headings*!
- CHECK FOR PLACEHOLDER IMAGES**  
Any stand-in visuals should also be removed and replaced with actual images.
- GO THROUGH VIDEOS AND AUDIO FILES**  
The latter also counts for other types of media. See that the right files are in the right place and that they are working properly.
- EXAMINE PAGE LINKS**  
Make sure no link is broken, internal links point where they are supposed to, and external links open in a new tab.
- CHECK DOWNLOADABLE FILES**  
If you have downloadables, make sure they are proofread, linked to correctly and can in fact be downloaded.
- SET UP A 404 ERROR PAGE**  
Though most themes have a default page for content that can't be found, you should also consider setting up a *custom 404 error page*. Either way, make sure there is a page for those who get onto your site through a faulty link.
- IMPLEMENT A CONTACT PAGE**  
Another important page visitors will appreciate is a contact page. Use plugins like *Jetpack*, *Contact Form 7*, and *Fast Secure Contact Form* to set up an easy way for users to communicate with you.
- SET UP REDIRECTIONS**  
If there is need for any redirections (such as to preserve link juice from an old site), make sure they are set up correctly. *Redirection* is an excellent tool for this.
- PREPARE LAUNCH CONTENT**  
To help your website start off on the right foot, it can make sense to prepare some posts to share on social networks upon launch.



# DESIGN

Good design ensures that web content is presented in the best way possible across different devices and user setups. This can often mean a lot more work, but it's definitely worth it.




***“There are three responses to a piece of design – yes, no, and WOW! Wow is the one to aim for.”***

***Milton Glaser***

- VALIDATE HTML MARKUP**  
To avoid incompatibilities, use tools like [W3C's Markup Validation Service](#) to check all pages of your site adhere to web standards.
- VALIDATE CSS**  
What goes for HTML is also valid for your styles, and you can use [this tool](#) for it.
- PREVIEW SITE IN MAJOR BROWSERS**  
To spot cross-browser compatibility problems, view your site in Firefox, Chrome, Safari, Internet Explorer/Microsoft Edge, and any legacy browser your client wants to support. Look especially at images and videos. An alternative is using a service like [Browsershots](#).
- CHECK RESPONSIVE DESIGN**  
Mobile is bringing in a lot of traffic these days and having a site that looks good on mobile devices is a must. To ensure an optimal user experience, test your design on different gadgets (both phones and tablets) and platforms (Android, iOS) and/or use something like [MobileTest.me](#).
- USE GOOGLE'S MOBILE TESTING TOOL**  
In addition to manual testing, Google also offers a [mobile testing tool](#) with lots of helpful feedback. Just input your URL and it will run a full analysis of your site.
- OPTIMIZE IMAGES**  
Reducing image size as much as possible (without compromising quality, of course) will improve page load time and thereby user experience and SEO. [TinyPNG](#) and [RIOT](#) can do this for you.
- ADD A FAVICON**  
Probably one of the most frequently forgotten parts of website design, a favicon appears in browser tabs and makes you look extra professional. Thankfully [Favicomatic](#) will easily create one for you.
- LINK HEADER LOGO BACK TO HOMEPAGE**  
First of all, make sure your company logo is present in the header. Secondly, check that it links back to the starting page (of your actual site, not the development site) so users can return there quickly.
- SET UP A PRINT STYLESHEET**  
For users who want to get your content down onto paper (because it's just that good!), you can make the task much easier with a print stylesheet. The [WordPress Codex](#) can tell you how to create one.

# FUNCTIONALITY

If your website doesn't do what it's supposed to, no amount of content and design will make up for it. Therefore, check all important functionality before real-life users do.



***“Form follows function - that has been misunderstood. Form and function should be one.”***

***Frank Lloyd Wright***

### TEST DRIVE WEB FORMS

Whatever forms you have on your site (contact, order, survey, etc.) ensure that they are submitting data correctly and that form emails arrive in the right place.

### CONFIRM FORM MESSAGES AND REDIRECTS

Likewise, do users get relevant help messages and are they moved on to the right place after submitting data? It's time to find out.

### REVIEW AUTORESPONDERS

If you have any sort of automatic emails in place, make sure they are working correctly.

### CHECK YOUR SPEED SCORE

Use a tool like [Google Pagespeed Insights](#), [GTMetrix](#), and [Pingdom](#) to see how quickly your site loads and what you can do to make it even faster. If at all possible, shoot for a loading time below two seconds.

### TEST SOCIAL SHARING FUNCTIONALITY

Check whether social sharing is in place, working properly, and includes the right platforms and profiles.

### TRY OUT SITE FEEDS

If you have RSS, news, social, or other feeds on your WordPress site, ensure they are working as they are supposed to before site launch.

### IMPLEMENT ACCESSIBILITY GUIDELINES

Accessibility is becoming more and more important around the web. [Read this article](#) on how to implement it in WordPress, especially if you are required to by law.

### TEST THIRD-PARTY TOOLS

In case you are using external tools for CRM, ecommerce, marketing, or something else, double check that they are present on-site and doing what they are meant to do.

# SEO

Of course, you're going to want to make sure your new site is visible for search engines from the very beginning and that they start indexing it right away. To do so, pay attention to the following points.

***“SEO is not something you do anymore. It's what happens when you do everything else right.”***

***Chad Pollitt***

### INSTALL AND CONFIGURE AN SEO PLUGIN

While WordPress is well configured for SEO as it is, an SEO plugin like *Yoast SEO* or *All-in-One SEO Pack* will take it to the next level and beyond.

### SET SITE TITLE AND TAGLINE

If your SEO plugin doesn't already take care of your site's title and tagline, make sure to set it under Settings > General.

### CONFIGURE SEO PAGE AND POST TITLES

All pages and posts on your site should have unique titles with less than 70 characters that include the keywords each of them are optimized for.

### IMPLEMENT META DESCRIPTIONS

Likewise, create unique and expressive meta descriptions for all posts and pages that include keywords and are less than 156 characters long.

### SET UP PERMALINKS

Make sure the permalink structure is set to your liking (Settings > Permalinks) and that each page URL contains its main keyword.

### OPTIMIZE IMAGES (AGAIN)

Also, check image file names, descriptions, and ALT tags for keyword inclusion and make sure each image is compressed for quick loading times (see above).

### SET FOCUS KEYWORDS

If you are using an SEO plugin, each post and page should also have a defined focus keyword. This will give you important information on how to further optimize them.

### WORK THROUGH CONTENT ANALYSIS

When you have set the focus keyword for a site, be sure to go through the tips inside the content analysis to achieve the best results.

### CREATE SITEMAP

*Yoast SEO* and *Google XML Sitemaps* can help you set up a sitemap to share with search engines. If you are still working in a development environment, skip this step until you have moved the site to its final destination.

### SET UP METADATA

Check meta tags for social and RSS feeds and whether they are set up correctly, appropriate, and proofread. Don't forget to implement optional tags like rel="nofollow".

# MARKETING

When launching a fresh site, it's not only important to make a good impression on search engines, but human visitors as well. Heeding the points that follow will help you jumpstart your marketing machine.



***“Web marketing is about delivering useful content at just the precise moment that a buyer needs it.”***

***David Meerman Scott***

### □ IMPLEMENT NEWSLETTER SIGNUPS

Have you included a signup form in all important places? Think not only pages but also popups and other prompts. Check out [SumoMe](#) for a great number of possibilities to grow your list.

### □ CONNECT WITH EMAIL MARKETING PROVIDER

When you include a form, make sure it also goes somewhere and that email collection works properly. [MailChimp](#) is a favorite tool in this area.

### □ SET UP SOCIAL ICONS

Examine your social icons for completeness, proper functionality, and whether they are linking to the correct addresses. Plus, if you haven't done so already, look into whether social sharing is working as it should.

### □ LOOK OVER SOCIAL PROFILES

While you are at it, check any social profiles belonging to the site for design consistency and whether all info found on there is correct and up to date.





# LEGAL

Taking care of the legal side of website building can be a bit of a dry topic but it's a necessary evil. Not complying with necessary legal requirements can be a big turnoff for site visitors and can actually get you into trouble, so don't skip this section.

***“You have to learn the rules of the game. And then, you have to play better than anyone else.”***

***Albert Einstein***

### SHOW COMPANY DETAILS

Making your contact details easy to reach from anywhere on the site is a sign of trustworthiness and often mandatory. Include important info like tax registration, etc. if necessary.

### ACQUIRE REQUIRED LICENSES

In case you are using images, fonts, code, plugins, etc. that need licensing, take care that everything is in place and stated as needed.

### INCLUDE COPYRIGHT NOTE

On a related topic, include a copyright statement if necessary.

### PROVIDE PRIVACY POLICY

Required in some places by law, an official privacy policy is always a good idea to create trust when collecting any sort of data.

### INCLUDE TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Don't forget those T&Cs! Especially if you are an ecommerce shop or otherwise dealing with transactions and money, this is an absolute must have.

### IMPLEMENT COOKIE WARNING

Especially in the EU, cookie warnings have become the law of the land. While a lot of people don't like cookies because they can mess with their design, you can save yourself a lot of legal hassle by including them on your site as needed.

### LOOK INTO LOCAL REQUIREMENTS

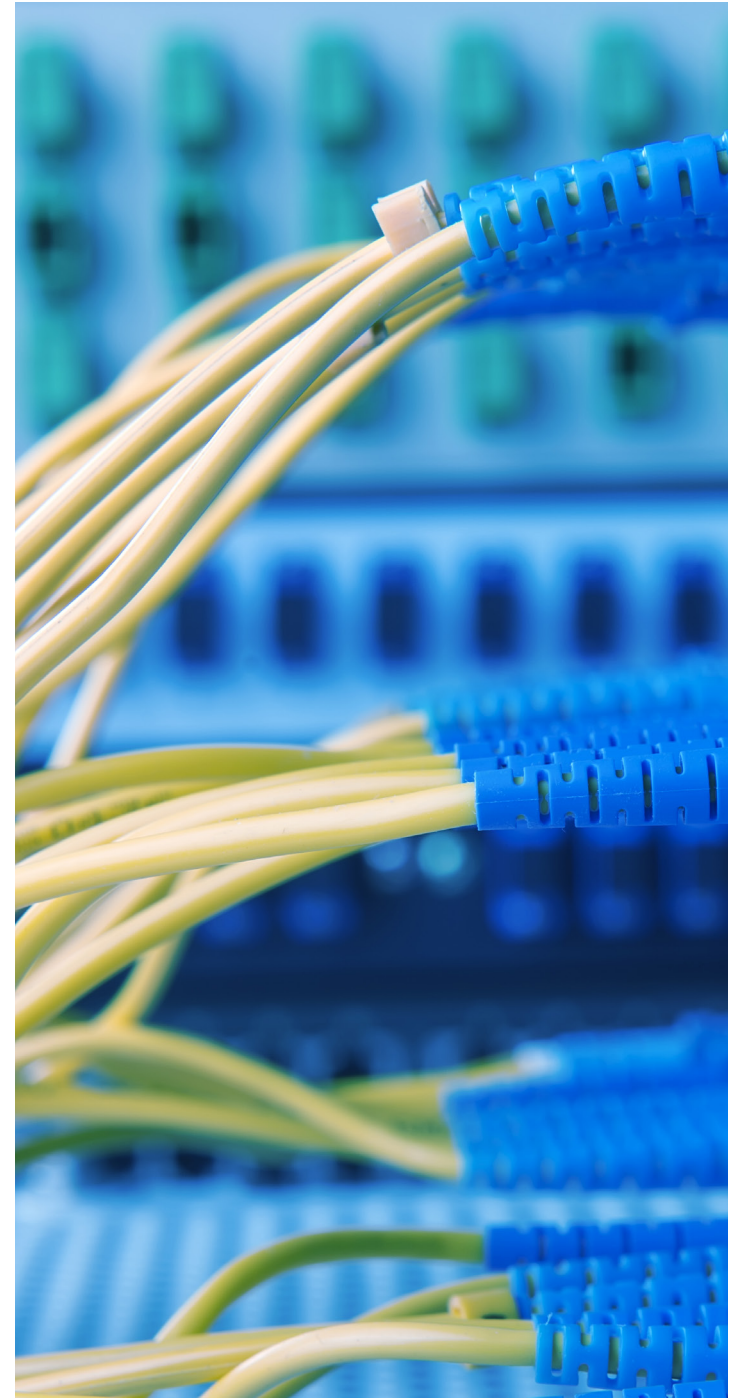
Your area might have specific legal demands for anti-spam measures, credit card processing, and more. Make sure you get informed and that your site adheres to them.



# MOVE SITE TO NEW SERVER

By now your website should be ready to make the move to its new home. This brings its own set of challenges and things to remember, but don't worry, I got your back.

- ACQUIRE AND SET UP DOMAIN**  
If you haven't secured and configured the domain for your new website yet, now is the time to do so.
- PREPARE DATABASE**  
Next, create a database and a user for the new site location.
- COPY SITE DATA AND DATABASE**  
After that, it's time to move both the site's data and MySQL database to the new location. Plugins for automatic site migration like *Duplicator*, *UpdraftPlus*, and *WP Migrate DB Pro* make this much easier.
- POINT DOMAIN TO NEW DIRECTORY**  
Once there is a site in place, you can point the new domain to its location.
- CHECK SITE DISPLAY**  
Have a quick look to see if the site is displaying properly in the new location. Especially look for missing images and icons. Should the design be completely messed up, something went wrong in the earlier steps.
- TEST LINKS AND PAGES**  
Dive deeper into the site and check if links work correctly, are pointing to the right addresses (the live site, not the development environment), and whether secondary pages are reachable and displayed correctly.



# PREPARE FOR LAUNCH

Now we come to the final countdown (you are welcome for putting that song into your head). Don't start slacking now, we still have important things to do!

- RELICENSE PRODUCTS**  
If your site is running commercial, third-party plugins or themes, it might be necessary to renew their licenses for the new domain.
- ACTIVATE SITE CACHING**  
Having a caching solution in place is always a good idea to speed up your site. Popular solutions include [WP Super Cache](#), [W3 Total Cache](#) and [WP Rocket](#). A managed hosting provider will handle caching for you.
- CONNECT TO CDN**  
For an even faster website and if you are using such a service, don't forget to set up your content delivery network. In case you are looking for a free solution, [Photon](#) might be worth a look. Most managed hosting providers offer CDN service.

- SET UP GOOGLE ANALYTICS**  
Collecting usage data is important to track site performance and make informed decisions. While there are [other analytics solutions](#) on the market, most of us go with Google's. [Google Analytics by Yoast](#) makes setup easy as pie.
- CONNECT GOOGLE WEBMASTER TOOLS**  
While you are at it, integrate the site with Google's webmaster suite.
- CLEAN UP**  
Finally, unless you keep it as a staging site, be sure to delete old and unneeded files, databases, subdomains, and any other remnants of the development site.



## BACKUP AND SECURITY

You thought we were through, didn't you? However, before sending your site off into the scary world of the Internet, we have to make sure it's safe and secure.

- INSTALL AN ANTI-SPAM SOLUTION**  
Trust me, if you have any sort of traffic, you will get spam on your site. A lot of it. Using a solution like *Akismet* or *Antispam Bee* will help you weather the worst.
- IMPLEMENT LOGIN PROTECTION**  
The login page is one of the most vulnerable parts of your WordPress site. Therefore, it's important to do due diligence in keeping it safe. Besides proper usernames and passwords, plugins like *Login Lockdown* will help you do so.
- SET UP A BACKUP SOLUTION**  
The only thing worse than losing your entire site is not having a way to bring it back. Therefore, setting up a backup solution for both your site data and database is a mandatory pre-launch step. Do it now and thank me later. A managed hosting provider will handle backups for you.
- VERIFY BACKUPS**  
However, a backup plan is only good if it's actually working. So, before you continue on, create your first backup and verify that it is saved successfully in the specified (hopefully remote) location.
- UPDATE ADMIN PASSWORD**  
If you haven't already set up a *safe password*, now is the time to do so. Also, make sure to save it in a secure place like *LastPass*.

***"The balance between freedom and security is a delicate one."***

***Mark Udall***



# LAUNCH

Alright, the time has come to put your site out there. This is the moment you have been waiting and probably worked towards for weeks. So, take a deep breath and make it happen!

- DISABLE “DISCOURAGE SEARCH ENGINES”**  
In the WordPress dashboard, under Settings > Reading uncheck the box that says “Discourage search engines from indexing this site.” Otherwise you can wait a long time for any organic traffic to show up.
- INSPECT ROBOTS.TXT**  
In the same vein, if you have *set up a robots.txt file*, make sure to delete or reconfigure it so that search engines aren't kept out of the live site.

- BUILD SITEMAP**  
If you haven't done so while checking your SEO settings, now is the time to create a sitemap. Afterwards, be sure to submit it to any search engine you care about ranking on.
- PROMOTE YOUR SITE**  
Finally, it's time to tell everyone about the site. Post your launch content on social media, email everyone you know, shout it from the rooftops – you have earned it!

*It's  
go time.*



# ORGANIZATION

## ***Congratulations, you did it!***

The new site is online and free for anyone to access. Unfortunately, work doesn't stop here. Especially if the website was created for a client, there is still a lot to do.

(If it's your own website, most of the work has actually just begun but that's a topic for another checklist.)

### **COMPILE DOCUMENTATION**

For a successful handover to the client, put together all necessary documentation, in particular:

- Login names and passwords
- Hosting information
- Database information
- FTP credentials
- Login information for other accounts (email marketing provider, social media, etc.)
- Expiration dates of paid plugins
- How-to guides for using the site
- Debrief on next steps

### **TRANSFER SITE PAYMENTS**

In case any payments related to the site (hosting, plugins, etc.) are still in your name, be sure to pass them on to the client.

### **SCHEDULE FOLLOW-UP**

To address any issues or new work requests that come up in the future, set up a follow-up call or meeting with the client.

### **WRITE INVOICE**

Probably the best part of the entire process. The moment you collect payment for the time and energy you have invested. Savor it, you've earned it.

### **UPDATE YOUR PORTFOLIO**

Before you go and squander all your hard-earned cash on whatever you are partial to, take one more minute to add the new site to your portfolio section. That way potential customers will know about the great work you have already done.

## ***Celebrate!***

Alright, now you may go out and paint the town red. Work is over. For now.

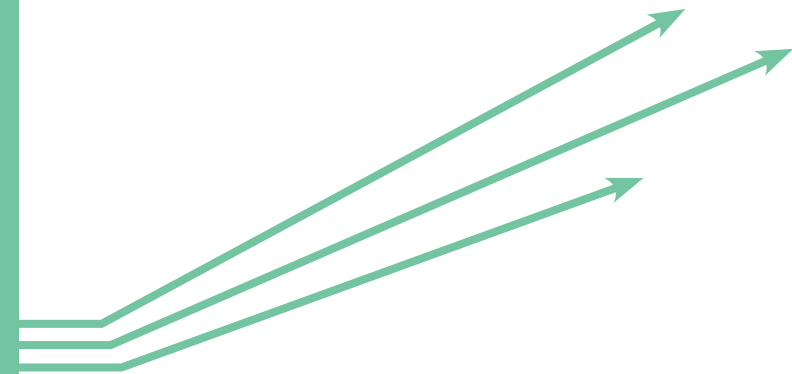
# WHAT'S ON YOUR WORDPRESS PRE-LAUNCH LIST?

Launching a WordPress website is a complex undertaking with many pieces and components to consider. Consequently, it can be overwhelming and confusing to put it all together.

Pre-launch checklists like this one are great productivity tools for anyone whose livelihood depends on building WordPress sites. They help get things done, make it less likely you forget something critical, and provide a good framework to get a website out the door.

Plus, having your own comprehensive checklist is a great investment into the future when you have to go and do it all over again.

*By regularly updating your checklist, you can make every launch a little bit smoother and greatly refine your workflow over time. This list is just an inspiration, now it's up to you to make it your own.*







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Nick is an entrepreneur, online marketer, and professional blogger. A longtime WordPress enthusiast, he helps clients across the world build successful online businesses through a mix of content marketing, blogging and web design. You can get in touch with him via Twitter or through his website.

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