INDIA INTERNET READY

WEBSITE LAUNCH CHECKLIST

CONTENT.DESIGN.FUNCTIONALITY.SEO.MARKETING

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.

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.

Website development can often be a lengthy and difficult process, especially if you're creating it for someone who doesn't have a clear vision of what they want. That's why India internet Ready created a pre launch chechlist to rush a site launch can be so tempting.

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

WORDPRESS WEBSITE PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST

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

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.

■ **Replace dummy content**
Check your site for placeholder text (such as Lorem ipsum) and make sure the actual (client-approved) content is in place.

■ **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.

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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.

- **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.

■ **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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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".

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.

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PREPARE FOR LAUNCH

Now we come to the final countdown. 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. 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.

Ask your Questions & get answers from our experts

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