Backup plan checklist

What a full WordPress backup contains, how often to run it, where to keep it, how to test it.

Check off each item as you go. Keep a printed copy somewhere other than your computer.

WHAT A FULL BACKUP CONTAINS

- [ ] The database: a complete dump of every table, e.g. wp db export or mysqldump.
- [ ] All of wp-content: uploads, themes, plugins and mu-plugins, not only uploads.
- [ ] wp-config.php and .htaccess (or the Nginx rules). Restores stall without them.
- [ ] A DNS zone export, with registrar and DNS logins kept in a password manager.
- [ ] Mailboxes, if email is hosted on the same server. Site backups often skip mail.
- [ ] A note of the PHP version, WordPress version and plugin list (wp plugin list).

MATCH FREQUENCY TO CHANGE RATE

- [ ] Shops, memberships, bookings: database at least daily, hourly if a lost day of orders hurts.
- [ ] Sites that change monthly: daily database and weekly files is a sensible default.
- [ ] Take an on-demand backup before every update, migration, theme change or bulk edit.
- [ ] Run backups outside peak hours and read the job log to confirm they finished.

RETENTION AND STORAGE

- [ ] Follow 3-2-1: three copies, on two kinds of storage, with one copy off-site.
- [ ] Keep one copy with a provider other than your host, in a separate account.
- [ ] Sensible default: daily copies for 14 to 30 days, weekly for 3 months, monthly for a year.
- [ ] Keep enough history to reach back before a quiet compromise. Some go unnoticed for weeks.
- [ ] Turn on versioning or object lock so a backup cannot be overwritten or deleted early.

LOCK DOWN THE BACKUPS

- [ ] Use separate credentials for backup storage, write-only for the backup job where possible.
- [ ] Encrypt backups and keep the key somewhere other than the web server.
- [ ] Print the restore steps. You may need them while the site and its email are down.

PROVE A RESTORE WORKS

- [ ] Restore to a staging copy at least quarterly, and after any change of backup tool.
- [ ] Confirm the SQL dump imports cleanly and the uploads folder is complete.
- [ ] On a different domain, run wp search-replace with --dry-run first, then for real.
- [ ] Test logins, forms, checkout and images, and record the time to restore.
- [ ] Alert on failed or missing backups, not only on success emails.