Pre-launch checklist

Check DNS, SSL, WordPress settings, security, speed, SEO, forms and backups before a new or redesigned site goes live.

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

DOMAIN, DNS AND SSL

- [ ] Registrar: auto-renew on, registrar lock on, 2FA on, contact email monitored.
- [ ] Record every DNS entry before changes: A, AAAA, CNAME, MX, TXT (SPF, DKIM, DMARC), CAA.
- [ ] Pick one canonical host. 301 every variant to it over https. Test with curl -I.
- [ ] HTTPS works on every page with no mixed content, and certificate renewal is automatic.
- [ ] Add HSTS only after HTTPS has been stable for a while. Never preload on launch day.

WORDPRESS SETTINGS

- [ ] Settings, Reading: "Discourage search engines" is OFF on the live site.
- [ ] Permalinks set to the final structure now. Changing them later breaks URLs.
- [ ] Timezone, site title and admin email set. Staging URLs replaced via wp search-replace.
- [ ] PHP on a supported version. WP_DEBUG false, and no public wp-content/debug.log.

SECURITY

- [ ] No user named admin. Every admin has a unique password and 2FA.
- [ ] Delete unused plugins, themes and test accounts. Deactivated code can still be attacked.
- [ ] Disable XML-RPC if nothing uses it (some apps and plugins do).
- [ ] Set DISALLOW_FILE_EDIT to true in wp-config.php.

SPEED AND SEARCH

- [ ] Page caching on, images resized and compressed. Test key templates in PageSpeed Insights.
- [ ] Every page has a unique title and meta description, and one H1.
- [ ] robots.txt does not block the site, and the XML sitemap loads (core: /wp-sitemap.xml).
- [ ] Redesign: map every old URL to its new page with a 301, and test the whole list.
- [ ] Submit the sitemap in Search Console after launch and watch the Pages report.

FORMS, LEGAL AND SAFETY NET

- [ ] Send site mail via SMTP or a transactional service, with SPF and DKIM aligned to your domain.
- [ ] Submit every form. Notifications and autoresponders land in the inbox, not spam.
- [ ] Privacy policy published. Cookie consent in place if your tracking requires it.
- [ ] Accessibility: alt text, keyboard navigation, visible focus, 4.5:1 text contrast.
- [ ] Full backup taken just before launch and stored off the server. Schedule confirmed.
- [ ] Uptime, SSL expiry and domain expiry monitoring on, alerting a real person.