Website backup and security checklist

An hour before you close for the break, so the site is still there, still yours and still sending enquiries in January.

> **Why now.** January is when websites quietly die: a domain lapses because the renewal email went to an old inbox, or an update breaks the form and nobody notices for three weeks. Every item below is free or nearly free, most take five minutes.

Back it up, then prove the backup works

- [ ] **Full backup: files and database**
  Both. UpdraftPlus, Jetpack Backup or your host's tool. Files-only leaves out every page, post and order.
- [ ] **Stored off-site**
  Google Drive, Dropbox or S3, not the same server: if the host is the problem, a backup on the host is gone too. Keep one copy on a laptop.
- [ ] **Test a restore**
  A backup you've never restored is a hope. Restore to your host's staging site and click around, or at least check the .sql file in the zip isn't 0 KB.

Update and tidy

- [ ] **Update WordPress core, plugins and theme**
  After the backup, not before. Then open the homepage, a service page and the contact form.
- [ ] **Delete unused plugins, themes and users**
  Deactivated is not removed; each is an unwatched door. Remove former staff, the 2021 designer, "admin" and "test".
- [ ] **Strong passwords and two-factor on all three**
  WordPress, hosting and domain registrar. A password manager plus the free WP 2FA or Wordfence plugin covers WordPress; hosts and registrars have 2FA in account settings.
- [ ] **Security plugin or host firewall on**
  Wordfence or Solid Security free tiers, or your host's firewall. Turn on login attempt limits.

Renewals: the dates that take sites offline

- [ ] **Domain renewal date, and who holds the login**
  Check it at whois.auda.org.au for .au names. If it renews between 15 December and 31 January, renew today. The registrant email must be one that three people read.
- [ ] **SSL certificate expiry**
  Click the padlock in your browser. Most hosts auto-renew; if yours expires in the break, ask them in writing. An expired certificate shows visitors a red warning page.
- [ ] **Hosting paid, card not expiring**
  Check the card on file. Cards expiring 12/26 are the classic January outage.

Make sure you'd know, and enquiries still arrive

- [ ] **Uptime monitoring, free tier**
  UptimeRobot or Better Stack free plans check every few minutes and alert you if it's down. Five minutes to set up.
- [ ] **Send a test through the contact form**
  From your phone. Did it arrive, and where? Forms silently stop delivering after updates. If it landed in spam, install WP Mail SMTP and send through your real mailbox.
- [ ] **Holiday auto-reply on the form and the inbox**
  "Thanks, we're back on 12 January 2027 and will reply then. For emergencies call 0400 000 000." Put the return date on the contact page too.
- [ ] **Google Business Profile holiday hours set**
  Special hours for 25 and 26 December, 1 January and any day you close. Wrong hours earn one-star reviews.
- [ ] **"If it breaks" contacts written down**
  Host support, registrar support, your web person, and the staff member with the logins. In the register below, not only inside the site that's broken.

Logins and renewals register

Keep it in your password manager or a locked drawer. Write where passwords live, never the passwords.

Item	Where (provider, URL)	Who holds the login	Renewal date / cost
Domain name(s)			
Hosting			
SSL certificate			
WordPress admin			
Backup storage			
Email (Workspace / 365)			
DNS (if separate)			
Plugin and theme licences			
Uptime monitor			
Web developer / support			

Rather not think about any of this?
Monthly support is $250 to $275 + GST a month, hosting included. Start by 31 March and the first month is free.

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