Third edition, 2026

The ultimate website launch checklist

156 checks across four phases, from first brief to the first 48 hours after launch



box UK

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What is in this checklist

A website launch checklist should cover four phases: before you build, before you launch, launch day, and after launch.

156	13	4
checks	sections	phases

Tick each check when it is done.

Phase 1: Before you build

1. Be clear about the purpose of the site p3
2. Define what you are launching p3

Phase 2: Before you launch

3. Content p4
4. Design and user experience p5
5. Accessibility p6
6. Performance p7
7. Security and risk p8
8. Search and AI discoverability p9
9. Measurement and analytics p10
10. Testing p11

Phase 3: Launch day

11. The go-live runbook p12

Phase 4: After launch

12. The first 48 hours p13
13. Plan the next launch p13

Phase 1

Before you build

1. Be clear about the purpose of the site

6 checks

- [ ] Website goals are documented and agreed with everyone who has a say
- [ ] Each goal has a measurable target and a date
- [ ] The commercial or organisational outcome the site is meant to move is named, not implied
- [ ] Success criteria for the launch itself are written down separately from success criteria for the site
- [ ] Each goal has a named owner for after launch
- [ ] Everyone involved can state the primary purpose of the site in one sentence, and gives the same answer

2. Define what you are launching

9 checks

- [ ] Supported browsers and devices agreed and written down
- [ ] Minimum and maximum supported screen sizes defined
- [ ] Behaviour on unsupported browsers agreed, including whether the site should still be usable
- [ ] Performance budget set, expressed in numbers rather than adjectives
- [ ] Accessibility conformance target agreed (WCAG 2.2 AA as the working default)
- [ ] Content migration scope defined: what moves as-is, what gets rewritten, what gets retired
- [ ] Integrations in scope listed, with the owner of each third-party system named
- [ ] Out-of-scope items listed explicitly, with what happens to them after launch
- [ ] Environments defined: local, staging, production, and who has access to each

Phase 2: Before you launch

3. Content

18 checks

- [ ] Content strategy in place and mapped to the goals in section 1
- [ ] Every page has a named owner
- [ ] Content proofed for spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalisation
- [ ] Terminology is consistent across the site (one word for one thing)
- [ ] Tone of voice is consistent and appropriate to the audience
- [ ] Heading structure is logical on every page: one H1, no skipped levels
- [ ] Contact details are accurate and easy to find from anywhere on the site
- [ ] Copyright date updates automatically
- [ ] All internal links resolve
- [ ] All external links resolve and behave as intended
- [ ] Images, audio and video play on every supported device
- [ ] Alt text is present and meaningful on every non-decorative image
- [ ] Decorative images are marked as decorative rather than given empty descriptions by accident
- [ ] Video has captions; audio has transcripts
- [ ] Privacy policy, cookie policy, accessibility statement and terms are published and current
- [ ] Any sector-specific required content is published (modern slavery statement, regulatory disclosures, and similar)
- [ ] Placeholder and dummy copy removed sitewide, including in components nobody looks at
- [ ] Test content, draft pages and test user accounts removed

Phase 2: Before you launch

4. Design and user experience

11 checks

- [ ] Layouts respond across the full supported range, not only at the design mock sizes
- [ ] The design adapts to input method: touch, pointer and keyboard
- [ ] Favicon and touch icons present at every required size
- [ ] Line length and type scale are readable at every breakpoint
- [ ] Fonts load without a visible flash of unstyled or invisible text
- [ ] The 404 page is designed, useful, and offers a route back
- [ ] Error, empty and loading states are designed for every dynamic component
- [ ] Form validation messages are designed and written, not left to the browser default
- [ ] Print styling checked if printing is a real use case for this audience
- [ ] Key conversion paths reviewed against the goals in section 1
- [ ] The design has been looked at on a real device, not only in the browser at a resized window

Phase 2: Before you launch

5. Accessibility

New for 2026

17 checks

Why this matters

Accessibility stopped being a quality bar and became a legal one. UK public sector bodies have had duties since 2018. Since June 2025 the European Accessibility Act extends similar obligations far more widely. If you are launching for a council or a membership body, treat every item on this page as a gate rather than an aspiration.

- [ ] Conformance target agreed and stated (WCAG 2.2 AA as the working default)
- [ ] Semantic HTML used throughout; landmark regions correct
- [ ] Page language declared
- [ ] Colour contrast meets the target for body text, large text, UI components and meaningful graphics
- [ ] No information is conveyed by colour alone
- [ ] Every interactive element is reachable and operable by keyboard
- [ ] A visible focus indicator is present on every interactive element
- [ ] Focus order matches visual order, including in modals and menus
- [ ] Form fields have associated labels, and errors are announced to assistive technology
- [ ] Skip link present and working
- [ ] Content reflows at 400% zoom without horizontal scrolling
- [ ] Motion and animation respect prefers-reduced-motion
- [ ] Touch and pointer target sizes meet the WCAG 2.2 minimum
- [ ] Tested with at least one screen reader by a person, not only by automated tools
- [ ] Automated accessibility testing runs in the build pipeline
- [ ] Accessibility statement published, accurate, dated, and describing the real state of the site
- [ ] Known issues logged with a remediation plan and an owner

Phase 2: Before you launch

6. Performance

13 checks

What has changed

One piece of advice from the 2015 edition has aged into the opposite of correct. We told you to combine files to cut the number of requests. That was right on HTTP/1.1 and it is wrong now: on HTTP/2 and HTTP/3 it costs you caching and parallelism. This section is built around the three metrics Google actually measures.

- [ ] Core Web Vitals measured on real pages: LCP, INP and CLS
- [ ] Measured on a mid-range device over a throttled connection, not only on the build machine
- [ ] The performance budget set in section 2 is met
- [ ] Images optimised, correctly sized for their container, and served in modern formats
- [ ] Images below the fold lazy-loaded; the LCP image explicitly not lazy-loaded
- [ ] Fonts subset, preloaded where they block render, with a sensible fallback
- [ ] Render-blocking CSS and JavaScript minimised
- [ ] Every third-party script has a named owner and a reason to exist; anything that fails that test is removed
- [ ] Caching strategy defined at CDN, server and browser level
- [ ] Compression enabled
- [ ] Assets served over HTTP/2 or HTTP/3, and not concatenated as though on HTTP/1.1
- [ ] Load tested at expected peak plus a margin
- [ ] Page weight and hosting carbon impact considered

Phase 2: Before you launch

7. Security and risk

14 checks

- [ ] HTTPS everywhere, HTTP redirected, HSTS set
- [ ] Certificate valid, with expiry monitoring and automatic renewal
- [ ] Security headers in place: content security policy, X-Content-Type-Options, Referrer-Policy and frame protection
- [ ] Dependencies scanned; no known high-severity vulnerabilities at launch
- [ ] Penetration testing completed and findings triaged, with a decision recorded on anything not fixed
- [ ] Injection and cross-site scripting tested
- [ ] CMS users and roles set to least privilege; default and test accounts removed
- [ ] Admin interfaces not publicly discoverable where that is avoidable
- [ ] Rate limiting and spam protection on every public form
- [ ] Backups scheduled, and a restore actually performed rather than assumed to work
- [ ] Uptime, error and certificate alerting in place, going to a named person who will see it
- [ ] Server capacity and scaling headroom checked against expected launch traffic
- [ ] PCI compliance confirmed if the site takes payment
- [ ] Data processing documented and retention periods set

8. Search and AI discoverability

16 checks

Watch for

Two items here cause more damage than everything else on this page combined, and neither appeared in the 2015 edition: an incomplete redirect map, and a staging noindex that nobody remembered to remove.

- [ ] Full inventory of old URLs taken before anything is switched off
- [ ] Redirect map covers every old URL with a single 301: no chains, no loops
- [ ] Redirects tested against the full list, not a sample
- [ ] Staging noindex removed and robots.txt disallow lifted at go-live, and verified rather than assumed
- [ ] Page titles unique, descriptive, and within display length
- [ ] Meta descriptions written for every indexable page
- [ ] Canonical URLs set correctly, including on paginated and filtered pages
- [ ] URL structure reflects the information architecture
- [ ] XML sitemap generated, accurate, and submitted
- [ ] robots.txt reviewed, including what it says to AI crawlers
- [ ] Structured data implemented in JSON-LD and validated
- [ ] Correct status codes returned for missing pages, redirects and errors
- [ ] Site verified in Search Console and Bing Webmaster Tools before launch day, not after
- [ ] Content written against real search query data rather than assumptions about what people search for
- [ ] Key pages contain a self-contained answer an AI assistant can quote without needing the rest of the page
- [ ] A decision has been taken on whether AI crawlers are welcome, and robots.txt reflects that decision

9. Measurement and analytics

10 checks

- [ ] Analytics installed and firing on every page, verified in staging before go-live
- [ ] Key events defined before launch and mapped back to the goals in section 1
- [ ] Form submissions tracked as events, and the tracking tested
- [ ] Consent management in place, and analytics behaviour tested under each consent state
- [ ] Internal traffic excluded or filtered
- [ ] Campaign tagging convention agreed and written down
- [ ] Search Console linked to analytics
- [ ] Error and performance monitoring reporting to a real person
- [ ] Baseline figures captured from the old site before it goes away
- [ ] A reporting view or dashboard exists before launch, not built in a panic afterwards

Phase 2: Before you launch

10. Testing

13 checks

- [ ] Smoke test defined and run against every environment
- [ ] All supported browsers and devices tested on real hardware, not only emulators
- [ ] Key user journeys tested end to end, repeatedly, by more than one person
- [ ] Forms tested end to end: validation, submission, confirmation, notification email, and delivery into the inbox or CRM
- [ ] SPF, DKIM and DMARC configured, and notification mail confirmed not to be landing in spam
- [ ] Bespoke and complex functionality tested against its acceptance criteria
- [ ] Automated unit and integration tests passing on the release candidate
- [ ] Regression suite run against the release candidate
- [ ] Load and stress testing completed
- [ ] Site search returns sensible results for the terms people will actually use
- [ ] The site tested as a content editor, not only as a visitor
- [ ] Third-party integrations tested against production credentials, not sandbox
- [ ] Every previously reported bug retested rather than assumed fixed

Phase 3: Launch day

11. The go-live runbook New for 2026

12 checks

Why this section is new

The previous two editions of this checklist had no section about launch day. That is a strange gap in a launch checklist, and it is the gap this edition exists to close.

- [ ] Launch date and time chosen deliberately, avoiding Fridays, holidays and known traffic peaks
- [ ] A named launch owner, and a named person who can call it off
- [ ] Written sequence of steps with an expected duration against each
- [ ] DNS TTL lowered well in advance of the switch
- [ ] Code freeze agreed, dated and communicated
- [ ] Rollback plan written, and the rollback itself tested rather than theorised
- [ ] Go and no-go criteria agreed in advance, so the decision is not made under pressure
- [ ] Everyone who needs to be available is available, and knows they are
- [ ] Client communications drafted in advance: internal announcement, external announcement, and a holding message if it goes wrong
- [ ] Post-launch smoke test written before launch day rather than improvised on it
- [ ] The old site preserved somewhere retrievable
- [ ] Support arrangement for the first week agreed and staffed

Phase 4

After launch

12. The first 48 hours New for 2026

10 checks

- [ ] Post-launch smoke test run immediately, with results recorded
- [ ] Redirects spot-checked against the live site
- [ ] Analytics confirmed to be receiving data
- [ ] Live form submitted and receipt confirmed at the other end
- [ ] Search Console checked for crawl errors and coverage changes
- [ ] Error monitoring watched actively rather than left to alert
- [ ] Core Web Vitals measured on the live site
- [ ] A route for reporting issues, and a named person triaging them
- [ ] Traffic and ranking compared against the pre-launch baseline
- [ ] A decision point scheduled: what is urgent, what waits for the next release

13. Plan the next launch

7 checks

- [ ] Retrospective held while it is still fresh
- [ ] Every surprise turned into a test or a new checklist item
- [ ] This checklist updated with what was learned
- [ ] A backlog exists for the improvements deferred before launch
- [ ] Release cadence agreed, so the next change is small
- [ ] Reporting in place to measure and share what the launch achieved
- [ ] Long-term goals reviewed against what the launch actually delivered

Not sure where to start?

If this checklist has raised more questions than it answered, we are happy to talk them through. Call us on +44 (0)20 7439 1900 or email info@boxuk.com.

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