BUILT BY STS / RESOURCE 001

WORDPRESS PROJECT LAUNCH CHECKLIST

Don't just launch it. Verify it.

A practical launch-day working document for freelancers, agencies, developers, and site owners.

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WORDPRESS PROJECT LAUNCH CHECKLIST

Don't just launch it. Verify it.

Launching a WordPress site is more than making it public. A successful launch means confirming that the site visitors - and search engines - actually receive is the site you intended to deploy.

This checklist is designed for freelancers, agencies, developers, and site owners who want a practical process for moving a WordPress project from development to production with confidence.

Built by STS principle: Configured isn't the same as verified.

1. Before You Begin

Before making launch-day changes:

- [ ] Confirm the production domain and canonical URL
- [ ] Confirm access to WordPress administration
- [ ] Confirm access to hosting/server controls
- [ ] Confirm access to DNS/CDN services
- [ ] Record the current WordPress, theme, and important plugin versions
- [ ] Confirm a recent backup exists
- [ ] Identify how the site can be restored if deployment fails
- [ ] Establish which version/build is intended for production
- [ ] Record any known issues intentionally being accepted at launch

> **Built by STS Note:** A backup existing does not prove recovery works. Know the difference between backup configured, backup created, and restore tested.

2. Content & Site Structure

- [ ] Homepage is correct and complete
- [ ] Required pages are published
- [ ] Placeholder/sample content has been removed
- [ ] Draft/private content isn't unintentionally public
- [ ] Page titles are correct
- [ ] Heading hierarchy is logical
- [ ] Each primary page has an appropriate H1
- [ ] Images and media display correctly
- [ ] Important images have appropriate alternative text
- [ ] Contact/business information is accurate
- [ ] Copyright/date information is appropriate
- [ ] Privacy/legal pages required for the site's functionality are available

3. Navigation & Link Integrity

- [ ] Desktop navigation works
- [ ] Mobile navigation opens and closes correctly
- [ ] Header links reach their intended destinations
- [ ] Footer links reach their intended destinations
- [ ] CTA buttons reach their intended destinations
- [ ] In-content links work
- [ ] External links point to the intended websites
- [ ] Anchor links reach the correct sections
- [ ] Logo/home links behave correctly
- [ ] No important broken links remain

> **Built by STS Note:** A 200 response doesn't prove a link is correct. A link can successfully load the wrong page. Verify the intended destination, not merely the HTTP response.

4. Responsive & Visual QA

Test representative pages at several viewport sizes. Suggested baseline: 1440px - 820px - 390px - 320px. Test on at least one physical phone when possible.

- [ ] No horizontal overflow
- [ ] Header remains usable
- [ ] Navigation remains usable
- [ ] Text doesn't clip or overlap
- [ ] Images scale correctly
- [ ] Buttons remain readable and tappable
- [ ] Cards/grids stack appropriately
- [ ] Footer remains readable
- [ ] Important controls remain visible
- [ ] Landscape orientation doesn't expose obvious problems
- [ ] Browser zoom/reflow doesn't break essential functionality

5. Forms & Communication

If the site contains forms, complete the checks below. If there are no public forms, record that explicitly rather than marking form testing as passed.

- [ ] Required fields behave correctly
- [ ] Validation messages are understandable
- [ ] Successful submissions are confirmed to the visitor
- [ ] Submission is stored where expected
- [ ] Notification email actually arrives
- [ ] Reply-to/from behavior is correct
- [ ] Spam protection works

- [ ] Test submissions are clearly labeled and removed if appropriate
- [ ] SMTP/mail delivery is verified where applicable

6. SEO & Metadata

For representative pages and posts:

- [ ] Document title is appropriate
- [ ] Meta description is present where intended
- [ ] Exactly one appropriate canonical URL is emitted
- [ ] Canonical uses the intended HTTPS hostname
- [ ] Open Graph metadata is correct
- [ ] X/Twitter metadata is correct
- [ ] Social images are appropriate
- [ ] No duplicate SEO fields are being generated
- [ ] Structured data, if intentionally implemented, is valid
- [ ] Important archive metadata is reviewed

7. Search Visibility - Pre-Launch

Before enabling indexing:

- [ ] Confirm whether WordPress currently discourages search engines
- [ ] Verify rendered robots directives
- [ ] Check for X-Robots-Tag restrictions
- [ ] Inspect robots.txt
- [ ] Check sitemap behavior
- [ ] Confirm staging/development URLs aren't leaking into metadata
- [ ] Confirm canonical URLs point to production
- [ ] Identify which archives should eventually be indexable

> **Built by STS Note:** Do not assume changing one WordPress setting removes every possible indexing restriction.

8. Social Sharing

- [ ] Homepage sharing preview is appropriate
- [ ] Representative page preview is appropriate
- [ ] Representative post preview is appropriate
- [ ] Social title is correct
- [ ] Social description is correct
- [ ] Social image is correct
- [ ] Default/fallback image behaves as intended
- [ ] Explicit article images override the fallback where expected

9. Accessibility Basics

This is an accessibility review, not a claim of WCAG compliance.

- [ ] Keyboard navigation works
- [ ] Focus states are visible
- [ ] Mobile menu can be operated by keyboard
- [ ] Escape closes overlays/menus where expected
- [ ] Focus returns appropriately after dialogs/navigation close
- [ ] Controls have understandable accessible names
- [ ] Important text/background contrast is reasonable
- [ ] Heading structure is logical
- [ ] Images have appropriate alt behavior
- [ ] Zoom/reflow doesn't make essential content unusable
- [ ] Forms have understandable labels and errors

> **Built by STS Note:** Test controls in their active state. A button that looks fine while a menu is closed may become invisible against the menu background after it opens.

10. Performance

- [ ] Important pages load without obvious delays
- [ ] Images are reasonably optimized
- [ ] No unnecessarily huge assets are being delivered
- [ ] CSS/JS assets return successfully
- [ ] Browser console doesn't reveal obvious production errors
- [ ] Caching/CDN behavior is working as intended
- [ ] Fonts don't create unnecessary loading problems
- [ ] Third-party scripts are intentional
- [ ] Real-user performance monitoring is configured if used

> **Built by STS Note:** Treat performance scores as measurements - not permanent grades. Test the actual user experience too.

11. WordPress & Technical Health

- [ ] WordPress core is current for the intended launch
- [ ] Active theme version is correct
- [ ] Important plugin versions are correct
- [ ] Database updates are complete
- [ ] REST functionality required by the site works
- [ ] WP-Cron has no obvious overdue failures
- [ ] Production debugging is appropriately configured
- [ ] PHP errors aren't being exposed publicly

- [ ] Site Health has been reviewed
- [ ] Genuine nonexistent URLs return HTTP 404
- [ ] No unexpected development/staging configuration remains

12. Security & Updates

- [ ] Check for WordPress security updates immediately before launch
- [ ] Check active plugins for available security updates
- [ ] Check active themes for relevant updates
- [ ] Review known vulnerability warnings
- [ ] Remove unnecessary/inactive components when appropriate
- [ ] HTTPS is working
- [ ] Origin certificate is valid where applicable
- [ ] CDN/proxy SSL mode is appropriate
- [ ] HTTP requests redirect to HTTPS
- [ ] Alternate hostname behavior is intentional
- [ ] Security tooling is functioning as intended

> **Built by STS Note:** A site can be fully updated when the launch audit begins and have a security release arrive before the audit ends. Check again immediately before launch.

13. Privacy & Data Flow

Document what the site actually does, not what a generic privacy-policy template assumes it does.

- [ ] Identify public forms
- [ ] Identify analytics services
- [ ] Identify cookies/browser storage
- [ ] Identify hosting/security logs
- [ ] Identify third-party embeds
- [ ] Identify user accounts/registration
- [ ] Identify checkout/payment processing
- [ ] Identify newsletter/signup systems
- [ ] Identify uploads or gated downloads
- [ ] Confirm comments/pingbacks are intentionally configured
- [ ] Privacy Policy reflects the actual site
- [ ] Privacy/contact method works
- [ ] Privacy Policy is publicly reachable and linked appropriately

14. Backups & Recovery

Record separately:

- [ ] Backup system is configured
- [ ] Recent backup exists

- [ ] Website files are represented
- [ ] Database is represented
- [ ] Recurring backup evidence exists
- [ ] Retention policy is known, if applicable
- [ ] Storage location is known, if applicable
- [ ] Offsite status is known, if applicable
- [ ] Restoration procedure is documented
- [ ] Successful restoration has actually been tested, if claimed

> **Built by STS Note:** Never report "recovery proven" merely because a backup exists.

15. Final Human Review

Put the developer brain away for a few minutes. Ask: Does this feel finished to someone who didn't build it?

- [ ] Browse the site in a private/logged-out window
- [ ] Browse it on a physical phone
- [ ] Navigate as a first-time visitor
- [ ] Read important copy instead of merely checking layout
- [ ] Try every major CTA
- [ ] Look for unfinished language or placeholders
- [ ] Confirm visitors can understand what the site is and what to do next
- [ ] Check footer/legal information
- [ ] Review the overall experience without developer/admin privileges

16. Deployment Verification

- [ ] Intended release was actually deployed
- [ ] Production version matches the intended release
- [ ] Expected changed files/content are present
- [ ] No duplicate/nested deployment exists
- [ ] Production - not staging - was tested
- [ ] Deployment didn't overwrite site-specific configuration
- [ ] Critical functionality was retested after deployment
- [ ] CDN/server caches aren't serving an older release

> **Built by STS Note:** Preparing a release isn't deploying a release. Verify what's actually running in production.

17. Indexing Transition

Only after pre-launch blockers are resolved:

- [ ] Create/confirm final backup
- [ ] Enable WordPress search-engine visibility

- [ ] Confirm the setting actually changed
- [ ] Immediately request fresh anonymous pages
- [ ] Verify unintended noindex/nofollow is gone
- [ ] Verify HTTP indexing headers
- [ ] Recheck robots.txt
- [ ] Recheck sitemap availability

> **Built by STS Note:** Enabling indexing isn't the end of launch. It's the beginning of post-launch verification.

18. Post-Launch Verification & Monitoring

- [ ] robots.txt permits intended crawling
- [ ] XML sitemap returns successfully
- [ ] Sitemap contains intended published content
- [ ] Draft/private/trash content isn't exposed
- [ ] Canonicals remain correct
- [ ] HTTP -> HTTPS works on multiple paths
- [ ] www/non-www behavior is correct
- [ ] Redirects preserve paths and necessary query strings
- [ ] Category archives are intentionally indexable or restricted
- [ ] Author archives are intentionally indexable or restricted
- [ ] Date archives are intentionally indexable or restricted
- [ ] Feeds behave intentionally
- [ ] Attachment pages behave intentionally
- [ ] Real 404s remain real 404s
- [ ] Analytics/monitoring receives production traffic
- [ ] Fresh and cached responses are checked where relevant
- [ ] Search-engine webmaster tools are connected if part of the project
- [ ] Sitemap is submitted where appropriate
- [ ] Site is monitored after launch for errors or regressions

Final Launch Record

Project: _____

Domain: _____

Launch Date: _____

WordPress Version: _____

Theme/Build Version: _____

[ ] Backup Verified

[ ] Indexing Verified

[ ] Post-Launch Verification

Reviewed By: _____

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