

DELRAY DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Practical digital marketing for local business

Website Rescue & Migration Guide

Fix a broken or hacked site and move hosts or platforms without downtime, lost email or lost rankings

A free guide from Delray Digital Solutions

About this guide

Two situations bring most small businesses to a website emergency: the site is broken (hacked, white screen, down after an update) or it needs to move (new host, new platform, new agency) without losing traffic, email or sales. This guide gives you a calm order of operations for both.

What's inside

#	Section	What you'll do
1	First 15 minutes: triage	Work out what is actually broken before touching anything
2	Common failures and fixes	White screen, hacked site, expired domain or SSL, downtime
3	Recovering from a hack	Contain, clean, restore, harden
4	Planning a migration	Inventory, timing, and what breaks if you forget it
5	Zero-downtime migration checklist	Step-by-step move with no visible outage
6	Post-migration verification	Confirm traffic, email, forms and rankings survived
7	Prevention: the monthly 10-minute check	Catch problems before customers do

Please note: Platform interfaces and hosting tools change frequently; verify current steps with your provider.

1. First 15 minutes: triage

Most damage in a website emergency is done by rushed fixes. Before changing anything, establish the facts.

#	Question	How to check
1	Is the whole site down, or one page/feature?	Load the home page, a service page and the contact form from a phone on mobile data
2	Is it the domain?	Check the registrar for expiry; confirm DNS records still point to your host
3	Is it the certificate?	Browser warning about security or 'not private' usually means SSL expired
4	Is it the host?	Check the host's status page; log in to the hosting panel
5	Was something changed recently?	Plugin/theme update, new plugin, new user, hosting plan change
6	Is it a hack?	Unfamiliar admin users, redirects to other sites, spam pages in search results, host warning email
7	When was the last good backup?	Find it now - you may need it in the next hour

Tip: Write down the time, the symptom and each step you take. It helps whoever assists you and stops you repeating steps.

2. Common failures and fixes

#	Symptom	Usual cause and first fix
1	White screen / 'critical error'	Plugin or theme conflict after an update. Rename the plugins folder via the host's file manager, then re-enable one at a time
2	'This site can't be reached'	DNS or domain issue. Confirm the domain has not expired and A/CNAME records are correct
3	Security warning in browser	Expired SSL. Renew or re-issue via the hosting panel; force https after
4	Site loads but very slowly	Host resource limits, bloated plugins, no caching, huge images. Check the host's resource usage graph first
5	Emails from forms not arriving	Missing SPF/DKIM or host blocking mail. Send via an SMTP/transactional service
6	Redirects to unknown sites / spam pages	Malware. Go to section 3 immediately
7	Cannot log in	Password reset by email; if the admin email was changed, reset via database or ask the host
8	Database connection error	Database credentials changed or database down; check hosting panel and configuration file

Tip: Before any fix, take a fresh backup of the broken site - you may need evidence of what happened or files you did not know were there.

3. Recovering from a hack

Contain

- Change hosting, database, admin and email passwords; enable two-factor authentication.
- Remove any admin users you do not recognise.
- Take the site into maintenance mode if it is actively redirecting visitors.

Clean or restore

- If a clean backup from before the compromise exists, restoring it is usually faster and more reliable than cleaning.
- If not, run a reputable malware scanner, replace core files with fresh copies, reinstall themes and plugins from source, and inspect the uploads folder for executable files.
- Ask your host to scan the account; many include this in support.

Harden

- Update everything; delete unused plugins and themes.
- Add a firewall/login-protection plugin or the host's equivalent.
- Request a review in Google Search Console if a security warning was shown.
- Set up daily off-server backups if they were not already in place.

Tip: A cleaned site with the same outdated plugin will be hacked again. The update step is the fix; the clean is only the start.

4. Planning a migration

A migration is a move of files, database, domain, email and integrations. Most 'the migration broke everything' stories come from forgetting one of the last three.

Inventory before you move

#	Item	Notes
1	Pages, posts, media, forms and their entries	Export or back up; note total size
2	Plugins and licences	Which need re-activation on the new host?
3	Domain and DNS records	Screenshot the full DNS zone, including MX, SPF, DKIM, verification records
4	Email hosting	Is email on the web host? If so, it must move too or be separated first
5	Integrations	Payment gateways, CRM, booking tools, analytics - anything with a key or webhook
6	SSL certificate	New host will issue a new one; plan for it
7	Redirects	Existing redirect rules must be carried over
8	Cron jobs / scheduled tasks	Backups, sync jobs, newsletter sends

Timing

- Choose the lowest-traffic window in your week.
- Freeze content changes 24 hours before the move so the copy does not drift.
- Lower DNS TTL to 300 seconds at least a day beforehand.

5. Zero-downtime migration checklist

#	Step	Done
1	Full backup of the current site (files + database) stored off both hosts	
2	Set up the new hosting account; note server IP and temporary URL	
3	Copy files and import the database to the new host	
4	Update the site's configuration for the new database credentials	
5	Preview the new copy using the temporary URL or a local hosts-file override	
6	Test: home page, key pages, contact form, checkout/booking, login, search	
7	Issue SSL on the new host (may require DNS validation or temporary record)	
8	Re-create redirects, cron jobs and any server-level settings	
9	Content freeze confirmed; final sync of any changes since step 3	
10	Switch A / CNAME records to the new host (do NOT touch MX or email records)	
11	Confirm https loads on the live domain from a phone on mobile data	
12	Submit a test form entry and test transaction on the live domain	
13	Keep the old host running for at least 7 days as a fallback	
14	Raise DNS TTL back to normal after 48 hours	
15	Cancel the old host only after email, forms, analytics and rankings are verified	

Tip: If email is hosted with the old provider, move email first (or to Google Workspace / Microsoft 365) as a separate project. Do not change MX records during the website move.

6. Post-migration verification

#	Check	How
1	All pages resolve; no 404s	Crawl the site or check Search Console coverage after 48 hours
2	Redirects from old URLs still work	Test the top 10 URLs from analytics
3	Forms deliver notifications	Submit a test on every form; check spam folder
4	Email sending and receiving unaffected	Send from and to a business mailbox
5	Analytics receiving data	Real-time report shows your own visit
6	Search Console has no new errors	Coverage and security reports
7	Rankings stable	Compare positions for 5-10 key terms at day 1, 7 and 30
8	Page speed equal or better	Run a speed test on the home page and a service page
9	Backups running on the new host	Confirm the first automatic backup completed
10	Integrations working	Payment test, booking test, CRM sync

7. Prevention: the monthly 10-minute check

- Load the home page, a service page and the contact form on your phone.
- Check that the last backup completed and that you know how to restore it.
- Apply pending updates (on staging first if you have one).
- Review admin users; remove anyone who no longer needs access.
- Confirm the domain and SSL renewal dates are more than 60 days away.
- Glance at Search Console for security or coverage warnings.
- Note anything unusual in analytics (sudden drops or spikes).

Need a rescue or a safe move?

Delray Digital Solutions' Migration & Rescue service handles broken-site recovery and zero-downtime migrations, including domain, DNS, email and integrations. Details at delraydigitalsolutions.com/migration-and-rescue/ or email hello@delraydigitalsolutions.com.