

The Complete Domain Transfer Checklist

Domain • Hosting • Email • SEO • Analytics • Paid Media • Social • Local • CRM • Legal — BFJ Digital

What's in this checklist: every step of a full website or domain migration — the asset inventory, domain & DNS transfer, hosting, email, SEO and content parity, analytics, paid media (Google Ads & Meta), socials, local listings, citations & aggregators, CRM & integrations, the customer/supplier communication plan, the legal paper trail, and a 30/60/90-day post-launch validation. Work top to bottom; assign one accountable owner per side; tick nothing off on someone's word alone.

Rule zero: Nothing gets deleted, cancelled or decommissioned until every item below is confirmed complete **in writing**. Agree who decommissions what, and only after written confirmation of receipt. Ownership and access are not the same thing.

0. Plan the project

- Migration goal written down; defines what may and may not change
- Every task assigned to a named person (agency / in-house / dev)
- Timeline built backwards from launch date; weeks not days
- Small/medium sites: move all at once (Google guidance); large sites in phases
- Moving to an existing domain: backlink/penalty/Wayback health check first

1. Asset inventory (do first)

- List every domain (incl. old, redirect and defensive registrations)
- List hosting accounts, server environments and staging sites
- Identify DNS provider (may differ from registrar, e.g. Cloudflare)
- List email hosting and every mailbox/alias on the domain
- List CMS admin accounts, theme/plugin/builder licences
- List GSC, GA4, GTM, Google Ads, Meta BM, Merchant Centre, Microsoft Ads
- List Google Business Profiles (one per location)
- List social accounts: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, YouTube
- List email marketing platform, CRM, forms, chat, booking, payments
- List call tracking numbers and IVR configuration
- List review platforms, directories, integrations, APIs, webhooks
- For each asset record: owner, admin access holders, login location

2. Domain & DNS

- Registrant of each domain is your business entity (correct ABN)
- Domain password / EPP / auth key obtained for each domain
- Domain unlocked at current registrar; transfer confirmed at receiving end
- All DNS records exported/screenshoted before nameserver change
- DNS management account (e.g. Cloudflare) transferred to your ownership
- SSL certificates checked: issuer, expiry, survives the move
- TTL lowered 24–48 hrs before cutover
- Credentials shared via secure method only (never plain email)

3. Website & hosting

- Complete backup taken: files AND database
- Backup restored and verified in new environment before old is touched
- Fresh named CMS admin account in your name (not shared agency login)
- Premium plugins/themes/licences listed; agency-licensed + domain-locked ones flagged

- Hosting platform, plan, config (caching, CDN, firewall) documented
- Staging environments migrated or recreated
- Old hosting decommission date agreed in writing, post-confirmation only
- Copy of final backup stored somewhere you control

4. Email

- Email host identified (may share server with website — check first)
- All mailboxes/aliases listed; mail data migrated before cutover
- MX records updated at correct point in cutover sequence
- SPF, DKIM, DMARC recreated for new environment
- Email marketing platform ownership transferred; lists exported as backup
- Sending domains updated and re-verified

5. SEO

- Full site crawl and URL inventory exported before changes
- 301 redirect map built and tested (page-to-page, not all-to-homepage)
- Redirects prioritised by URL value (traffic, conversions, backlinks)
- Redirect chains flattened (Google: no more than 3 hops)
- Rankings, top pages and organic traffic benchmarked
- Backlink profile exported; top linked pages redirect correctly
- GSC verified for EVERY variant (www/non-www, http/https, subdomains), both sites
- Change of address submitted in GSC for each old-domain variant
- Both sitemaps kept submitted (old + new) to watch indexation cross over
- Disavow file re-uploaded to new property (if one existed)
- Host warned of post-migration crawl surge; capacity confirmed
- XML sitemap and robots.txt updated; no accidental noindex
- Staging noindexed until launch; canonicals audited at cutover
- Custom 404 page live; 404 traffic monitored in GA4 for 30 days
- Old URLs left crawlable post-cutover (no robots block / noindex)
- Bing: Site Move submitted + Bing Places updated
- Domain updated across directories, listings, partner sites, signatures
- Rankings and crawl errors monitored weekly for 90 days

6. Content parity — protect the rankings

- Every page triaged: keep / refresh / consolidate / retire / redirect-only
- Retired pages with backlinks redirected to relevant pages, never 404
- No redesign + migration at once (or accept the risk knowingly, benchmark harder)
- Ranking pages ported near word-for-word; same headings and intent
- Title tags and meta descriptions kept identical
- URL slugs unchanged wherever possible
- Media library migrated: same file names and alt text
- Schema/structured data carried over (LocalBusiness, FAQ, Product, reviews)
- Internal links point to new URLs directly, not via redirects
- Core Web Vitals benchmarked before and after
- Accessibility checked on new templates (headings, contrast, keyboard) + PDFs

7. Analytics & tracking

- GA4 owned at account level by your business (not a seat on agency's)
- GTM container ownership transferred; container exported as backup
- All conversions, events and goals documented
- Tracking re-verified on new site before cutover (forms, calls, sales)
- Call tracking account and numbers transferred (numbers may be agency-licensed)
- Heatmaps, session recording, dashboards and reporting connections moved

8. Paid media

- Google Ads account under YOUR billing/admin; agency linked via MCC only
- Agency MCC unlinked and agency users removed on exit
- Historical performance data and ad copy exported
- Meta: your own Business Manager set up; you own page and pixel
- Meta: new ad account in your BM if old one sits in agency's (non-transferable)
- Agencies granted partner access — never sole ownership
- Merchant Centre, Microsoft Ads, LinkedIn transferred same way
- Billing details updated so campaigns don't stop or misbill
- Final-month spend pacing agreed and visible in writing

9. Social - per platform

- Meta: Page inside YOUR Business Portfolio; ex-staff/old agency admins removed
- Meta: NEW domain verified in Business Manager (Brand Safety > Domains)
- Meta: Page About URL, CTA button, pinned posts updated
- Meta: Facebook Login OAuth redirect URIs updated to new domain
- Instagram: linked to correct FB Page; bio link + link-in-bio buttons updated
- Instagram: action buttons updated; IG Shopping catalogue domain updated
- LinkedIn: current company-controlled Super Admin confirmed
- LinkedIn: About URL, custom button, Showcase Pages updated; top posts re-pinned
- LinkedIn: team profile links updated
- TikTok: account + Business Center ownership confirmed; bio link updated
- TikTok: pixel/events re-verified; TikTok Shop domain updated
- YouTube: channel owned by company Google identity (not personal Gmail)
- YouTube: associated website re-verified; About/banner links updated
- YouTube: end screens, cards, top descriptions, pinned comments swept
- X: bio website field + pinned post updated
- Pinterest: new domain claimed; rich pins re-validated
- GBP: every location profile transferred individually + URLs updated; Bing Places
- Scheduling tools reconnected; queued posts + UTM templates updated

10. Citations & aggregators

- NAP citations audited (name, address, phone, website)
- Data aggregators updated (feeds for Google, Apple Maps, Bing, navigation)
- Major directories: Yellow Pages, True Local, Yelp, industry associations
- Review platform profiles updated
- Partner/supplier sites linking to old domain asked to update (easy backlinks)
- Affiliate links, QR codes and short URLs in circulation checked
- Physical world: vehicles, signage, packaging, cards — reprint or keep redirect

10b. E-commerce (if applicable)

- Merchant Centre feed URLs updated; feed validated pre-cutover
- Payment gateway webhook URLs + allowed domains updated (Stripe/PayPal etc.)
- Transactional + abandoned-cart flows: links and sending domains swept
- Review platform integrations (Yotpo/Trustpilot etc.) re-pointed
- Marketplace/channel links covered by page-to-page 301 map
- Real end-to-end test transaction on launch day (order email + conversion)

11. Communication plan

- Customers emailed pre-cutover (what's changing) and post-cutover (confirmed)
- Explicit fraud warning: bank details have NOT changed; verify by phone
- Suppliers/partners notified via trusted channel, incl. new AP contacts
- Team assets swept: signatures, letterheads, templates, auto-responders
- Legal/admin updated: contracts, terms, privacy policy, insurance docs
- Old-domain email receiving/forwarding kept 12+ months
- Critical SaaS login emails migrated off @olddomain BEFORE mailboxes close
- Team trained on new CMS/URLs/email before launch; decision log kept
- New address promoted pre-launch (email, social, PR)
- Rebrand: paid search running on OLD brand name post-launch
- Stakeholder expectations set: 1-4 month organic dip is normal

12. CRM & integrations

- CRM admin transferred; full data backup exported
- Every form, chat, booking and payment integration re-pointed and live-tested
- Webhooks, automations (Zapier etc.) and API keys updated
- Transactional email (confirmations, autoresponders) verified firing
- Domain-verified SaaS tools updated

13. The paper trail

- Written confirmation of exactly what was handed over; receipt confirmed
- Outgoing provider's data retention & disposal policy obtained
- Final invoices settled; commercial closure confirmed in writing
- IP ownership of code, content and creative confirmed per agreement
- One named owner on each side accountable for the transfer

14. AI search (AEO)

- AI visibility benchmarked pre-move (cited pages, brand mentions)
- Old URLs redirect permanently — AI citation indexes refresh slowly
- Most-cited pages preserved with extra care
- AI citations re-checked at day 30/60/90

15. Timing, rollback & the old domain

- Cutover in quiet season, early in the week, never mid-campaign
- Rollback plan: old environment untouched until a full business cycle passes
- DNS rollback path and decision-maker named
- Redirects live 1+ year minimum (Google guidance); old domain on auto-renew indefinitely — redirects protect backlinks and print

16. Multi-market & app (if applicable)

- hreflang rebuilt against new URLs and validated per market
- Per-market redirect maps + GSC properties (ccTLDs/subfolders)
- Apple Universal Links / Android App Links files updated on new domain
- In-app hard-coded links to old domain updated
- API consumers inventoried, notified; old endpoints proxied during transition

Post-launch validation (Day 0 to 90+)

- Launch day: top pages + forms live-tested; redirects spot-checked; GA4 real-time firing; robots.txt + sitemap verified
- Day 2: full crawl vs baseline; 404 log reviewed; GSC coverage checked
- Week 1: all pages/forms/redirects/email/call tracking confirmed
- Day 30: rankings & traffic vs benchmark; crawl errors; paid delivering; AI citations
- Day 60-90: linked pages holding; old domain redirecting; nothing orphaned
- After day 90: named owner for ongoing monitoring (post-project governance)