

Hyde & Co.

FREE RESOURCE · NO. XIII

The launch & handoff *manual*

Everything to check before a site goes live, and everything to take possession of afterwards.

The launch checklist is the part everybody knows about. **The handoff is the part that determines whether you own a business asset or rent one** — and almost nobody does it.

FREE TO USE AND SHARE
COMPANION TO HIRING A WEB DEVELOPER

AN AGENCY FOR BUSINESS OWNERS
ORLANDO, FLORIDA



Two different jobs

Launching is making sure the new site works. Most people do some version of this.

Handoff is making sure that if your developer disappeared tomorrow — moved on, retired, fell out with you, went out of business — you would still control everything your business depends on. Almost nobody does this, and it is the more consequential of the two.

The uncomfortable version: a launch failure is embarrassing and fixable in a week. A handoff failure means someone else holds your domain, your hosting, your email, and your customer data — and your options at that point are expensive, slow, and uncertain.

Do the handoff section even if you are not going anywhere. It is not an act of distrust. It is the same reason you keep a spare key.

Content and accuracy

- ☐ Every page proofread — **read out loud**, which catches what your eyes skip
- ☐ No placeholder text, no lorem ipsum, no "coming soon" on anything important
- ☐ Phone numbers correct on every page, and **tappable** on mobile
- ☐ Email addresses correct and clickable
- ☐ Address and opening hours correct, and matching your Google Business Profile **exactly** — character for character
- ☐ Prices and offers current
- ☐ Staff names and titles current
- ☐ Copyright year correct (*a footer reading 2019 quietly tells visitors nobody is home*)

Legal pages

- ☐ Privacy policy present and linked from the footer
- ☐ Terms of service, if you sell anything
- ☐ Cookie notice, if you use tracking and your jurisdiction requires it
- ☐ Returns and shipping policies, if you sell products — as **standalone footer links** labelled exactly "Return Policy" and "Shipping Info," because that is what people search the page for
- ☐ Any licence numbers or regulatory disclosures your trade requires

Every link and every form

- ☐ Every internal link goes somewhere real
- ☐ Every external link opens correctly
- ☐ Social media links point to accounts that exist and are current
- ☐ **Every form submitted, from a phone, with a real email address**
- ☐ Confirmed each submission arrives — inbox, spam folder, and CRM
- ☐ Confirmation page exists, says what happens next, and has its own address
- ☐ Automatic reply, if you use one, is not embarrassing

TEST THE FORMS AS A STRANGER WOULD

Use a personal email address, not a company one. Company mail servers often accept mail that gets filtered elsewhere, which is exactly how a form appears to work for months while quietly failing for customers.

The one that costs the most

- ☐ Check `yourdomain.com/robots.txt` for `Disallow: /`

A leftover instruction from the staging site telling search engines to ignore everything is the single most expensive small mistake in web development. It is invisible from the front of the site and can go unnoticed for months while traffic never arrives.

- ☐ Check for `noindex` tags on pages that should be found
- ☐ Confirm the staging site itself is not publicly reachable

Redirects, if you are replacing an existing site

- ☐ Every old URL that had traffic redirects to its closest new equivalent
- ☐ Redirects are permanent (301), not temporary
- ☐ Test the ten most important old links from an old email, an old business card, or an old brochure
- ☐ No redirect chains — old page to new page, not through three hops

Get a list of your old URLs before launch, from Search Console or Analytics. Once the old site is gone, reconstructing it is guesswork.

Security and performance

- ☐ HTTPS working, padlock present, no mixed-content warnings
- ☐ The non-`www` and `www` versions both resolve to one canonical version
- ☐ `http://` redirects to `https://`
- ☐ Pages load in a reasonable time on a phone on mobile data — not office wifi
- ☐ Images resized and compressed
- ☐ Explicit width and height on images (*prevents layout shift*)

The real-device test

Not the browser's device simulator. An actual phone.

- ☐ Text readable without pinching
- ☐ Buttons tappable accurately, one-handed
- ☐ No sideways scrolling
- ☐ Correct keyboard appears for each form field
- ☐ Popups closable with a thumb, and not covering the content
- ☐ Complete your own main journey: home → service → contact

Measurement

- ☐ Analytics installed and **verified recording** — visit your own site and watch Realtime
- ☐ Google Search Console verified — **by you**, using a method you control
- ☐ Sitemap submitted
- ☐ Form submissions and phone-number clicks set up as key events
- ☐ Baseline recorded: current traffic, rankings, review count (*see Part 6*)

Launch day

- ☐ Site live and reachable on a phone, on mobile data, off your own network
- ☐ Someone outside the business confirms they can reach it
- ☐ Email still working — **check this specifically**, because DNS changes break email far more often than they break websites
- ☐ Test transaction, if you sell online
- ☐ Old site fully retired or redirected

The first week

- ☐ Watch Search Console for crawl errors daily
- ☐ Watch analytics for pages with unexpectedly high exit rates
- ☐ Test forms again — twice in the first week
- ☐ Ask three real customers or friends to use the site and tell you honestly what annoyed them
- ☐ Fix broken things immediately; write everything else on a list

EXPECT A SHORT TRAFFIC DIP

A relaunch often causes a temporary drop while Google re-crawls and re-evaluates. Google's own guidance is that changes can take anywhere from hours to months to take effect, and that you should generally wait a few weeks before drawing conclusions. Do not panic in week one — but do check robots.txt again, because that is the difference between a dip and a disaster.

This is the important part.

Tier 1 — existential. sort these today.

ACCOUNT	WHY IT IS EXISTENTIAL	VERIFY BY
Domain registrar	Whoever is the registered name holder owns the domain. Not the person who paid for it. Not the administrative contact.	Log in yourself. Run an ICANN lookup and read the Registrant field
DNS	Controls where your website <i>and your email</i> point	Log in and see your records
Business email	Losing email is worse than losing the website	Access the admin console yourself

On the domain specifically: ICANN's position is that the Registered Name Holder is the party of record, and ICANN itself states it *"does not have contractual authority to require a registrar to transfer a domain name back to a different registrar or registrant, even if a transfer was the result of an unauthorized access."*

If the registrant is not your business, fix it now. And plan around the transfer locks: after a change of registrant, your registrar must apply a **60-day lock** on transferring to a different registrar unless you opted out *before* the change. Do not discover that during an emergency.

Tier 2 — serious. sort these this month.

- **Hosting** — account in your business's name, with billing on your card
- **CMS administrator** — an admin account that is yours, that can grant and revoke access
- **Google Search Console** — **verified by you**, using your own verification method
- **Google Analytics** — administrator access
- **Google Business Profile** — primary owner, not manager
- **SSL certificate**, if purchased separately
- **CDN or security service**, if you use one

The Search Console trap: removing someone from the user list does **not** remove their access if their verification token is still on your site — they can simply re-verify. And if all verified owners are removed, everyone else loses access too. Verify yourself, and check for verification methods you do not recognise.

Business Profile is recoverable if you lose it — you can request access at business.google.com, and the current owner has three days to respond. There is no equivalent for a domain or hosting account, which is why those are Tier 1.

Tier 3 — important

- Email marketing platform
- Payment processor (*should already be yours — it takes your money*)
- Booking or scheduling software
- Any third-party service embedded in the site
- Stock photography and font licences — **in your name, and transferable**

That last one is a real and commonly missed liability. Font and stock-image licences frequently sit in the developer's name and are non-transferable, which means the site you own contains assets you are not licensed to use.

Ask for all of this **in writing, before final payment**. The industry's own standard design contract conditions transfer of rights on payment in full — which is fair, and which means the moment before you pay is the moment you have the most leverage.

1. access

- ☐ A written list of every account, what it does, and who currently controls it
- ☐ Confirmation you hold administrator rights on all of them
- ☐ Any account still in the developer's name identified explicitly
- ☐ The developer's own access removed or reduced when the relationship ends

2. files

- ☐ Complete source files — code, templates, design files
- ☐ A database export, in a standard format
- ☐ Original image files, not just the compressed web versions
- ☐ Any custom code, documented
- ☐ Confirmation of what is **not** included and why

3. rights

- ☐ A signed **assignment of copyright** in the deliverables — in writing, and not merely a "work for hire" clause

That distinction matters more than it sounds. Under US copyright law, website code and design commissioned from an independent contractor fall **outside** the nine categories that qualify as work made for hire. A work-for-hire clause standing alone may transfer nothing. What transfers ownership is a written, signed assignment.

- ☐ A perpetual, transferable licence to anything the developer retains — their own frameworks, libraries or tools — so you can legally run what you own
- ☐ Third-party licences listed, and confirmed transferable

4. documentation

- ☐ How to edit content, in plain language
- ☐ What the maintenance routine is and who does it
- ☐ Where backups are, how often they run, and how to restore one
- ☐ Any scheduled or automated processes
- ☐ Known issues and anything deliberately deferred

5. the exit terms

- ☐ What happens on termination, in writing
- ☐ How many days to deliver everything
- ☐ What happens to hosting if the developer resells it to you
- ☐ Who owns the content you supplied (*you — but say so*)

Before launch, and again 90 days after. Without this you will never know whether the new site was an improvement, and you will have no defence against whoever claims credit.

Capture and screenshot:

- ☐ Monthly visitors, last full month
- ☐ Percentage from organic search
- ☐ Search Console clicks, last three months
- ☐ Your five highest-traffic pages
- ☐ Enquiries last month — forms and calls
- ☐ Review count and average rating
- ☐ Rankings for your three most valuable searches, checked in a private browser window from your actual location
- ☐ Your Core Web Vitals field data

Put it somewhere you will find it in a year. A folder in your email works.

The recurring failures, and what they cost.

WHAT HAPPENS	WHY	COST
Site never gets indexed	Staging noindex or robots.txt block went live	Months of invisibility
Traffic never recovers after relaunch	Old URLs not redirected	Years of accumulated ranking, gone
Forms silently stop working	Plugin update, host migration, email change	Every lead, until someone notices
Email breaks on launch day	DNS records replaced rather than migrated	Immediate, and highly visible
Developer disappears with the domain	Registered in their name	Legal action, or buying your own name back
Cannot edit the site	No admin access, no source files	A rebuild
Cannot move hosts	Proprietary platform	A rebuild
Site hacked	Plugins never updated	Cleanup, blacklisting, lost trust
No backup exists	Backups "configured" but never tested	Everything

Notice how many are prevented by one afternoon of paperwork rather than by technical skill.

The short version

Before launch:

1. Read every page out loud
2. Submit every form from a phone with a real email address
3. Get your list of old URLs before the old site disappears

Launch week:

4. Check robots.txt for Disallow: / — this is the expensive one
5. Confirm email still works after the DNS change
6. Test on a real phone, on mobile data
7. Verify analytics is actually recording

The handoff:

8. Confirm the domain **registrant** is your business — not the admin contact
9. Verify Search Console yourself, and check for tokens you do not recognise
10. Get a signed copyright assignment, not just "work for hire"
11. Get source files, a database export, and a written account list
12. Do all of it **before** final payment

Afterwards:

13. Record your baseline, and again at 90 days
14. Test your forms monthly, forever
15. Restore a backup once, so you know it works

— THE SECTION WE WROTE AGAINST OURSELVES

Ask us for all of it, in *writing*.

Part 5 is a list of things to demand from your web developer before final payment. We are a web developer. We published it anyway.

Hold us to every line of it. **Hyde & Co. is an agency for business owners** — ownership transfers to you, and we continue to host and maintain it because you want us to, not because you are stuck.

i. Every account in your name, on your card, from day one.

ii. A signed assignment of copyright, not just a work-for-hire clause.

iii. A written exit: what you get, in what format, within how many days.

No obligation, and no charge for the conversation.

[Book a consultation](#)

[hyde-co.com](#)

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WE BUILD ASSETS, NOT JUST WEBSITES

Sources

USED IN	SOURCE
Domain ownership and locks	ICANN, <i>Registrant Rights and Responsibilities</i> ; ICANN Transfer Policy and Change of Registrant guidance; ICANN statement on unauthorised transfers
Copyright and assignment	17 U.S.C. §§ 101, 201(a), 204(a); US Copyright Office Circular 30 — website code and design fall outside the nine work-made-for-hire categories
Payment conditioning transfer	AIGA Standard Form of Agreement for Design Services — grants of rights conditioned on payment in full
Search Console ownership	Google Search Console Help — verified vs delegated owners; removed owners can re-verify unless the token is removed
Business Profile recovery	Google Business Profile Help — request access, three-day response window
Post-launch expectations	Google Search Central — changes may take hours to months; generally wait a few weeks before assessing
Returns and shipping links	Baymard Institute — shoppers go to the footer and search for the words "return" and "shipping"

This manual is free to use and share. Give it to anyone about to launch a website, or about to change developers. The only goal is better websites and better results.