

IF YOUR WEBSITE PERSON DISAPPEARS

The Small Business Owner's Guide
to Access, Backups, and Taking Control



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Before you need this book

A client, whom I'll call Claire, asked what would happen to her website if something happened to me. Could someone else take over?

My first answer gave her downloadable files. That left her to figure out what to do with them. She had an event to organise, not a new technical career to begin.

This book helps you prepare a better answer. Start with one page and a request to your provider. The technical work belongs with a qualified person. Your job is to decide what the business needs, keep usable access and choose who maintains the site.

Do this first

Write the answers to these three questions on a sheet of paper. Leave gaps visible; "I don't know yet" is a useful answer.

What must customers still be able to do? Name one action, such as asking about a booking and receiving a reply.

Who may approve help if you are unavailable? Name an authorised person and agree their limits.

Where should that person start? Identify the current plan or write "Ask our provider." Record a location, never a password.

Send one request

"Please help me make sure another qualified person could maintain our website if either of us became unavailable. I need my own sign-in, a recovery copy we control and instructions a replacement can use. Our most important customer action is [write it here]. Please tell me what already works, what is missing and the cost of any extra work before starting."

You can stop here today. Keep your answers, give the request to your provider and agree when you will review the reply. You do not need to complete the workbook first.

Read only what you need next

Website working? Start with Chapter 1. Use Chapters 3 and 4 when you are ready to check access and recovery.

Website down or provider missing? Go straight to Chapter 6. Preserve what works and commission a limited diagnosis before buying a rebuild.

Changing providers? Start with Chapter 7. Chapter 2 helps with ownership and export limits; Chapter 8 explains the rehearsal.

What a useful answer looks like

A saved copy is a start. Stronger proof is a qualified replacement using it, with authorised account access, to restore the agreed functions in a separate test copy. Keep the latest successful backup date separate from the latest successful recovery test. Chapter 9 shows why this matters.

Claire's case is real, with her name and the event name, Bright Ideas Awards, changed for privacy. Downloadable files were available and data restoration had been tested at the time of writing. Independent takeover had not. Other business examples are fictional.

Never write passwords, recovery codes or live keys in this book. Use an approved secure method for access. Exact account buttons change; consult the provider's current instructions when taking action.

Get the free quick-start sheet at websiteperson.machineoverhuman.com. Share a blank copy with another owner. Keep completed business records private.

Your website is more than a website

Find the services behind one customer action. Stop when you know which unanswered question to give your provider.

Mara runs a small bakery. Her homepage loads, her photographs look good and a button invites customers to order celebration cakes. She thinks of the whole arrangement as “the website.” On Tuesday, the cake inquiries stop arriving. She assumes business is quiet. On Friday, a customer calls to ask why nobody answered.

The homepage never went down. A form subscription had expired. The customer saw a submission screen, Mara saw an empty inbox, and the person who built the site was away. An uptime check on the homepage would have called the week a success.

Start where the customer starts. A site exists to help somebody do something. A restaurant wants reservations. A consultant wants qualified inquiries. A venue wants dates and deposits. A shop wants orders that can actually be fulfilled. Those actions often cross several services.

Follow one customer

Take the most important action and describe it in ordinary language. “A visitor asks whether September 18 is available, leaves contact details, receives an acknowledgment and becomes a record staff can follow up.” That is a better starting point than a list of technologies.

Now ask where each part occurs. The visitor reaches a domain name. DNS directs the browser to a web service. The page displays a form. A form system accepts the submission. A mail service sends a notification. A database or customer system stores the record. A member of staff responds.

Each link can work while another fails. The page may be visible while the submission is lost. The record may exist while the notification goes to spam. A notification may arrive while the person responsible is no longer employed. Your map should reach the actual business outcome.

Choose one journey for the first pass. Trying to document every digital asset before understanding a single transaction makes this exercise needlessly exhausting. Once you know how to trace one journey, the others become easier.

If a customer reports a missing reply, record that symptom before naming a cause. “No reply to Tuesday’s inquiry” leaves the investigation open. “The website is broken” may send a replacement toward the wrong service.

Give the test inquiry a distinctive label and record its time. Follow that same label through the form, stored record and staff response. This lets you demonstrate that all three observations concern one journey.

Four addresses that people confuse

Your domain name is the familiar address people type. The registrar is the company through which that name is registered. The DNS provider publishes the records telling other systems where services for the domain can be found. The host or website platform serves the site itself.

These may be four parts of one provider’s offering, or they may be separate. A payment to a familiar hosting company

does not establish that it also controls the domain. An agency invoice may bundle several underlying subscriptions. Ask which account owns each service and who can authorize changes.

Business email is another dependency. It may continue working when the website fails, or fail because someone changes DNS while trying to repair the website. Write down the email provider separately even when it appears on the same invoice.

Do not make a technical change to learn what a component does. Ask for the map, inspect the account with someone qualified, and preserve the existing configuration. Turning things off one by one is a poor discovery method on a live business.

If one subscription serves several businesses, mark the boundary of your business's information. Ask which records, roles and exports can be separated. A replacement needs your portion, not indiscriminate access to somebody else's customers.

The difference between editing and control

You may have a login that allows you to edit text. That is valuable, but it may not let you invite another administrator, change billing, export records or retrieve the source. The word "admin" can conceal several different permission levels.

Instead of asking whether you have an administrator login, ask whether you can perform five specific actions: invite an authorized replacement, retrieve the business's records, manage billing, recover access after a lost device, and obtain the materials needed to operate elsewhere. Some actions may require separate accounts.

The answer may legitimately be that the platform does not support a particular action. That belongs in the inventory as a limitation, not a concealed failure. A well-understood hosted service can be a sensible choice even when it is not fully portable. An undocumented dependence is harder to manage.

Custom software adds a recipe

A custom application usually needs more than its visible pages. The source code describes how it is built. Dependencies are the software components it uses. Configuration tells it which services and settings to use. A database stores changing information. Uploaded media may live elsewhere. Deployment is the process that turns the source into the running application.

A source archive without these other pieces may be incomplete. A running copy without source may be difficult to maintain. A database without a description of its structure may be technically readable but operationally confusing. Ask your developer to identify the minimum package another qualified developer would need.

You don't have to understand every line of code. You need to know who can retrieve the package, what is included and when somebody last demonstrated that the instructions work.

Find evidence in ordinary places

Invoices, renewal notices and approved expense records are useful clues. A provider may be billed annually, so a single month's statement may miss it. A free service may have no invoice at all. A contractor may pay through an agency account that serves several clients.

Ask your provider to walk through the accounts on a call while you complete the inventory. Where possible, open the business-owned account yourself. Record the official sign-in address through a trusted route. A search advertisement or an unexpected email is not a reliable substitute for a verified service address.

For each entry, record the service, purpose, account owner, your role, billing responsibility and recovery route. Add the last verification date. “Hosting, probably with the developer” is a useful first clue but not a completed entry.

Unknowns need a next action. “Ask Alex which account stores uploaded invoices by Thursday” is actionable. “Website information needed” can remain on a list for years.

Give the map a business order

Rank dependencies by what the business loses when they fail. A broken decorative gallery may be inconvenient. Missing customer deposits or a lost domain can be more serious. Your business may have different priorities, especially during a launch or an event.

For each critical function, ask how long it can be unavailable before you must use a fallback. The answer is a planning assumption, not a promise that recovery will meet it. A venue might tolerate a day without a gallery but need a working inquiry route within an hour during a campaign.

This order makes the map useful during an incident. The replacement can start with the transaction that matters, rather than polishing whatever is easiest to repair.

End the first working session with one complete journey and no more than three urgent unknowns. Put a person and a

deadline beside each. Leave yourself something you can finish next week.

Mara's first useful map

Mara discovers that the domain is in her account, the DNS is managed by her freelancer, the site runs on a hosted builder, and the order form belongs to a separate subscription. Notifications go to an old employee's mailbox. The form stores submissions even when notifications fail, so the inquiries can be retrieved.

She does not rebuild the website. She renews the legitimate subscription through the verified account, corrects the destination with authorized help and tests one labeled inquiry from submission to staff response. Then she documents who will receive renewal notices.

Mara needed a working form and somebody reading the right mailbox. Buying a new website would have been an expensive way to avoid finding that out.

Trace one customer

Choose the single most valuable customer action. Trace it until a real person or operating system receives the result. Record the services involved and one tested piece of evidence for each critical link. Complete Worksheet 1 and the appropriate account sheets in the field workbook.

When a customer says "it didn't work," you should now know where to look first.

A page to pass on

Could someone else keep your website running?

Start with three answers. Write Ask our provider when you do not know. Keep passwords and recovery codes elsewhere.

What must customers still be able to do?

Who may approve help if you are unavailable?

Where should that person start?

Send one request

Please help me make sure another qualified person could maintain our website if either of us became unavailable. I need my own sign-in, a recovery copy we control and instructions a replacement can use. Our most important customer action is [write it here]. Please tell me what already works, what is missing and the cost of any extra work before starting.

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