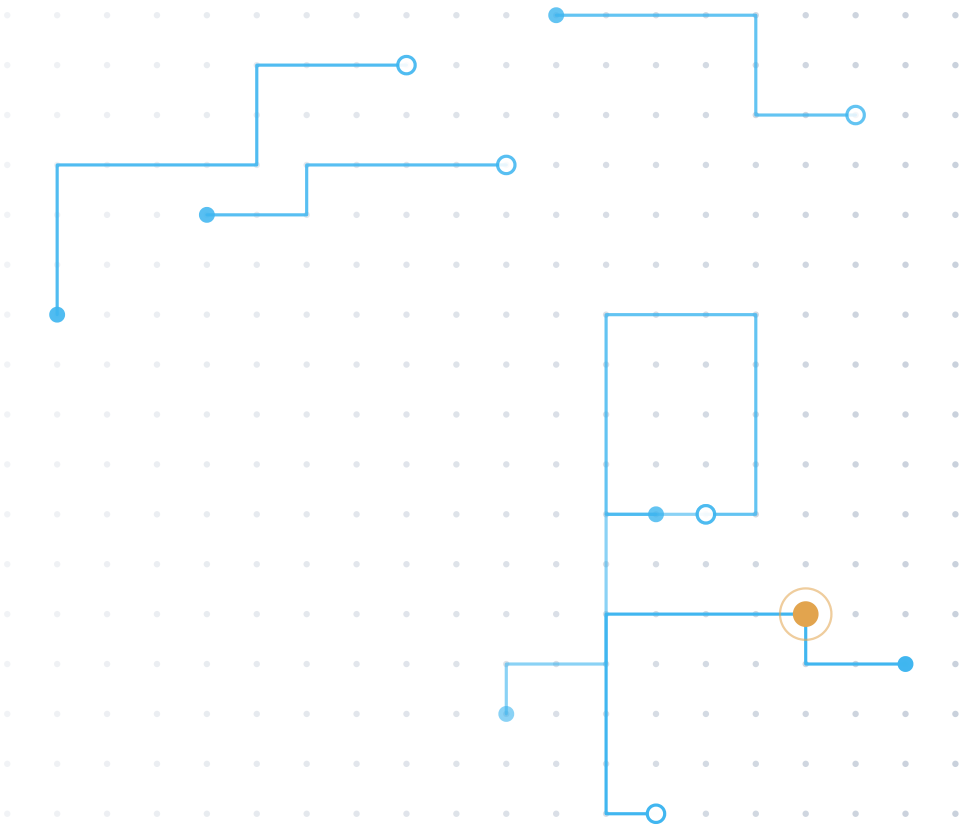


PRACTICAL GUIDE

A website live in one afternoon: Next.js and Vercel without surprises

What "live" really means, what to ask whoever builds it and how to check it yourself

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FOR
small business owners and the people who build their websites

READING
9 min

EDITION
v2.0 · November 2026

BEFORE YOU START

What you will get from this guide

01 Tell an uploaded website from a live one, with four checks on your phone.

02 Review every change on a preview before it reaches your domain.

03 Ask for keys to be kept out of the code and for a contact form that warns you when it fails.

04 Check for yourself that Google can find and read the site.

05 Know what makes a site slow on a phone, and measure it before changing anything.

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For: small business owners and the people who build their websites · 9 min read

01 What "live" really means

Opening a shop takes more than the premises. You need a sign over the door, a lock that works, the address on the map and a letterbox where the post actually arrives. A website is the same: "it has been uploaded" does not mean "it is live".
A website is live when four things are true at once. You check them on the real domain, never on the laptop of the person who built it:

PIECE	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW YOU CHECK IT	IF IT IS MISSING
Domain	It opens at your address, not a temporary one	Type your domain on your phone	nobody finds you
HTTPS	The padlock shows and the connection is encrypted	Look at the browser bar	the browser warns
Indexable	Google can find it and read it	Check it in Search Console	weeks off Google
Contact form	The message reaches your inbox	Send a real one and receive it	messages get lost

Next.js is the framework the site is built with; Vercel is the service that hosts it and puts it online. With the two of them, a simple site can be ready in one afternoon. What takes the time is checking the four pieces, and that is why most of this guide is about checks.

IN ONE LINE

A website is not live until all four pieces have been checked on the real domain.

02 True first, pretty second

Before anyone picks colours, the site has to tell the truth: this month's opening hours, the services you really offer and a phone number that someone answers. A beautiful site still showing the summer hours in November does more harm than a plain one that is up to date.

When the owner corrects something, for example "the phone number has to be tappable" or "on Saturdays we only open in the morning", I write it down as one line in a project notes file. That way the correction does not depend on someone remembering it, and the next page comes out right. The owner's taste ends up written somewhere anyone can read.

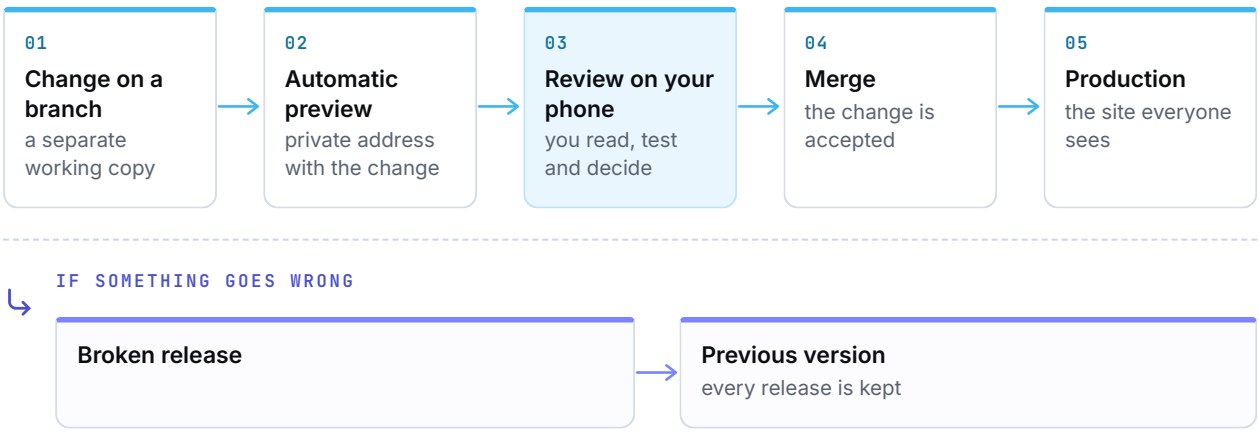
One more thing: not everything needs a screen. Your customers need the website. You, on the other hand, rarely need an admin panel to read the contact form; it is enough for the messages to land in your email. Every extra screen is one more thing to maintain and one more thing that can break.

> *True first; pretty second.*
>
> FLOWARA AI WORKING RULE

03 From a change to your domain, with no jumps

The code lives in a *repository*, a store of the full history of changes, usually on GitHub. When someone proposes a change, Vercel creates a *preview* on its own: a copy of the site with that change at a private address, which you can review without touching the public site. Every change follows this path:

FIGURE 1 **From one change to your domain**



Your part as the owner is step three. You open the link on your phone, read the text, try the form and say "yes" or "change this". Until you say yes, the public site stays as it is. If something goes wrong later, going back to the previous version takes a moment.

> ✦ **IDEA**
>
> Always ask for the preview link before anything goes live. If whoever builds your site cannot give you one, ask why.

If you are the one building websites, the preview is also a good way to start the conversation. A business with no website is more convinced by seeing its own site already built, with its own text and opening hours, than by reading a proposal. A word on pricing: a simple website is a deliverable with clear edges, so a fixed price suits it. An automation is better priced by what it saves.

04 Keys out of the code, and forms that speak up

Your site connects to other services, such as the one that sends the contact form emails. Each connection uses a *key*, which works like a password. Those keys are stored as *environment variables*: the code only contains the name, and the value lives only in the hosting dashboard. The repository just needs an example file with the names left empty:

```ini
# .env.example: names go here, never values
CONTACT_TO_EMAIL=
CONTACT_FROM_EMAIL=
EMAIL_SERVICE_API_KEY=
```

Two traps come up again and again. The first is that the host keeps separate environments (production, preview and development), and the key has to be in every one you use. On top of that, after adding it you have to deploy again, because the version already running cannot see it. The second trap is that a form that works on the developer's laptop can still fail on the real site.

So the form has to fail loudly. If a key is missing, it shows a clear error. It should never say "message sent" when nothing was sent, because that message was a customer trying to reach you.

> ⚠ **CAUTION**
>
> If a key ever ends up in the repository, treat it as lost. It has to be replaced with a new one; deleting it from the file is not enough.

IN ONE LINE

The code knows the names, only the host knows the values, and a failure always shows.

05 Getting found on Google

If Google cannot find your site, then for someone searching for a business like yours, you do not exist. Customers are lost there without anyone noticing. For Google to find the site and show it properly, you need five pieces:

01 **robots.txt:** a file that tells search engines what they may read. During testing it usually says "do not index", and that has to come off at launch.

02 **Sitemap:** the list of every real page, each with its last-changed date.

03 **Canonical:** on each page, its official address, so Google does not see duplicates.

04 **hreflang:** on a bilingual site, which page is the other-language version of which.

05 **Search Console:** Google's free tool where you prove the domain is yours, submit the sitemap and ask for each page to be indexed.

Everything is checked on the real domain. Open your domain followed by `/robots.txt` and then `/sitemap.xml`, and make sure both respond. Working on the preview guarantees nothing in production.

EXAMPLE

Launching with the testing "do not index" still switched on happens all the time. It takes five minutes to fix; the expensive part is the weeks without showing up on Google.

IN ONE LINE

Indexable and indexed are different things: check on the real domain and tell Google.

06

Fast on a phone, because that is where people look

Most of your customers will open the site on their phone, sometimes with a weak signal. What slows it down is rarely the design. Usually it is what gets downloaded without anyone asking for it. On a real site I measured before touching anything, almost all the downloaded weight was video, even though nobody pressed play.
The fix was simple, and it comes down to five rules:

01 **Not one byte of video before the click.** The video only downloads when the visitor asks for it.

02 **A poster in its place.** A light still image of the video, so nobody sees a black box.

03 **A single font,** served from the site itself.

04 **Images at the size they are shown,** not poster size.

05 **Measure before and after.** How much downloads on page load, on a simulated phone, before touching anything and after each change.

Measuring first stops you fixing what was not broken. Sometimes the suspect (the images, the font) turns out to be fine and the real problem is something else.

IN ONE LINE

What nobody sees should not be downloaded, and what you do not measure you cannot improve.

07

Example: the garage that opens at five

A neighbourhood garage wants a simple website with its services, opening hours, directions and a form to book a slot. This is a synthetic example, but the way the afternoon splits up is realistic:

FIGURE 2 **One afternoon of work, hour by hour (synthetic example)**

1. **14:00 Repository connected**
   First preview with the garage's own text.
2. **15:00 Owner's review**
   He corrects two services and asks for a tappable phone number.
3. **15:45 Keys added**
   Email set up in production and preview; a new deployment.
4. **16:15 Domain and padlock**
   A real message from the form reaches the garage's inbox.
5. **16:40 Visible to Google**
   "Do not index" removed, sitemap submitted, both paths checked.
6. **17:00 Measured on a phone**
   A light page and no video until the click.

Look at the order. The owner sees his own site on his own phone one hour in, and his correction goes in before anyone touches the domain. The final test is always a real message sent from the owner's phone, not from the laptop of whoever built the site.

IN ONE LINE

One afternoon is enough if every piece is checked on the real domain before anyone says "done".

08

Launch checklist

Before you call the site live, go through these ten points with your phone in your hand:

Launch checklist

10 ITEMS

- [ ] Opens on your domain
  with and without www
- [ ] Padlock on every page
  HTTPS switched on
- [ ] Every change goes through a preview
  reviewed by the owner on a phone
- [ ] No keys in the repository
  only the names, in an example file
- [ ] Variables in every environment
  followed by a new deployment
- [ ] A real message has arrived
  in the business inbox
- [ ] The form warns when it fails
  it never pretends to have sent
- [ ] No "do not index"
  robots.txt and sitemap.xml respond on the domain
- [ ] Canonical, hreflang and sitemap
  submitted in Search Console
- [ ] Measured on a phone
  no video until the click, before and after

NEXT STEP

Free diagnostic (20 min)

If you want to see which part of your business can be automated with the risk under control, book a free 20-minute diagnostic.

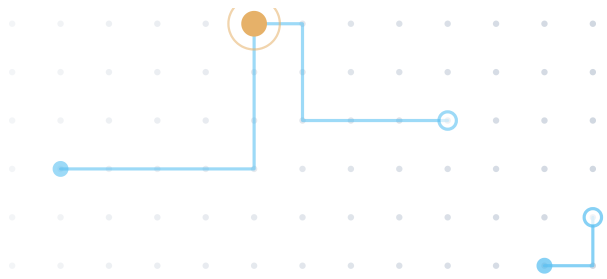
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