

As you are planning out your year, here is an annual checklist of items that you should plan for related to your website. Some of these items will take just a couple of minutes while others will require a bit more time to complete.

Domain Registration

There have been news-making events where major websites went off-line because the registration for their domain name had expired. Don't let that happen to your website.

- Log into your domain registrar and check on when your domain registration expires. While most (all?) domain registrars will send out renewal emails beforehand, it is a good idea to set yourself a reminder as a backup. If it is expiring this year, set a reminder in your calendar near the expiration date to:
 - Update credit card details
 - Verify contact information
- If you have other services purchased through your domain registrar, check those renewal dates also.

While you are checking your registration details, consider the renewal length of your domain name. If you are planning on staying in business for 5-10 years, why not renew your domain name for that length of time? This is more of a convenience factor than anything else. Some have, falsely, indicated that domain registration length is a factor in SEO ranking.

To the best of my knowledge, no search engine has ever confirmed that they use length of registration as a factor in scoring. If a company is asserting that as a fact, that would be troubling.
Google's Matt Cutts

Update Copyright Year in Page Footers

How many times have you visited a website where you were looking for current information on a topic that does not have any other dates other than the copyright year listed? Ever find yourself discounting the information because the copyright year was from 2002? Update the copyright year on your website so your site visitors do not think of this for your website.

- It should be set to happen automatically. However, if it is not, update your page footers to either use the current year such as (c) 2021 XYZ Company or (c) 1997-2021 XYZ Company.
- If you can, use the following bit of JavaScript code just before the closing `</body>` tag to update the year:

```
<script>
    document.getElementById("year").innerHTML = new Date().getFullYear();
</script>
```

On the line where you have your copyright year in your page footer, use `` to display the current year. For example, the copyright line on mswhite.com it uses:

```
<li class="list-inline-item">
    &copy; 1997-<span id="year"></span> - MSWhite & Co.
</li>
```

Check HTTPS/SSL Certificate

In days past, having an HTTPS/SSL certificate on your website was cost prohibitive for many small websites that did not have online stores. As the pricing has either been eliminated or included with your hosting, your website should have a current HTTPS/SSL certificate. While there does not appear to have a direct impact on the search engine results algorithms, web browsers warn users that a site is not secure. Most websites listed in search engine results use HTTPS/SSL. If your website is listed among them but it does not use HTTPS/SSL, that will lessen the likelihood that people will visit your site. And, if they do visit your site, they will have a poor user experience from the web browser warning them.

- Just like your domain name registration, you should get an email before your certificate is set to expire. Either way, look at your certificate and make a reminder in your calendar to:

- Update credit card details.
- Verify contact information.

If your web host automatically does this for you, great. Still, a good idea to verify all information is correct.

- If you are paying for a SSL certificate, you may want to investigate using one of the free, auto-renewing certificate platforms such as letsencrypt.org. It may not work for everyone, but it will likely work for most.

Evaluate Your Website Hosting Provider

Many have done research for hosting their website when they were first setting it up or if there was a major redesign that required other functionality. Other than that, most have likely not thought much about where their website is hosted. It's working, why change?

Well, this is something that should be evaluated periodically. Site speed has a major impact on search rankings as well as user interaction with the site. If you have a slow loading website, it may be because the server the site is hosted on may be too busy.

- Run speed tests to check website speed.
- Evaluate other web hosts to see if there are alternatives that better fit your web hosting needs.

Run First-of-Year Audits on Your Site

These should be routine tasks that are done more frequently than just annually. If you have not done them in a while, the start of a new year is a great time to get back on schedule.

- Run a website audit that looks for technical problems with your website.
- Run a SEO audit that looks at the elements on your website pages that contribute to your search engine results page ranking.
- Run an accessibility audit to ensure compliance with website accessibility laws.

If there is anything that comes up from these audits that need to be addressed, create a plan to get them resolved.



Annual Website Checklist

<https://www.mswhite.com>

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You may not be able to accomplish all the fixes at the first of the year. Some may require longer-term planning. Plus, as the year goes on, there may be new website issues that need to be addressed. To that end...

- Create a monthly schedule to run these audits throughout the year.

Conclusion

While you may be posting updates to your website – updating a calendar, highlighting the latest sale, or welcoming a new staff member – your website needs behind-the-scenes maintenance. Just like pieces of equipment that need maintenance to run smoothly, your website can also break down.

If this is not where you'd rather spend your time or don't have the technical staff to maintain your website, MSWhite & Co. can help. We have different maintenance plans that can help keep your website from breaking down. Find out more and get in touch with us at <https://www.mswhite.com>.