

57 Things to Do *Before* You Ship.

The pre-launch checklist for anyone building client websites on Vercel. What to fix, why it costs you when you skip it, which free tool does the job, and the exact order to work through on launch day. Now with UK data protection and fair-selling rules.

57

CHECKS BETWEEN "LOOKS
DONE" AND DONE

52%

OF MOBILE SITES FAIL CORE
WEB VITALS

£0

EXTRA TOOLING. EVERY FIX
HERE HAS A FREE TIER

The sitemap is not the finish line

You added a sitemap. Good. That is roughly check number one of fifty-seven, and it is the one everybody remembers because it has a file name. The other fifty-six are the ones that turn up three weeks after handover, when the client rings and asks **why they still cannot find themselves on Google**, why the site "feels slow on my phone", or whether they need one of those cookie pop-ups.

This is the list I run before a client site goes live. It assumes Next.js on Vercel because that is what most of us ship now, but the thinking transfers to any stack. Nothing here is theory. Every item is something that has cost somebody a lead, a ranking, or an awkward email.

PART 1

Found

Crawling, indexing and local search. Twelve checks that decide whether the site exists to Google.

PART 2

Fast

Core Web Vitals and accessibility. Eleven checks that decide whether visitors stay.

PART 3

Legal

Cookies, data protection and company disclosures. Eleven checks that keep the client out of trouble.

PART 4

Converting

Measurement, fair selling, forms, security and calls to action. Twenty-three checks that turn traffic into money.

One day

That is the whole list on a site you have already built. About a working day on your first client, closer to two hours once you have done it twice, and £0 in extra tooling because every service here has a free tier that covers a small business site. Charge for it as a launch package and it pays for itself on the first project.

One rule before you start: **do not work through this in the order you find things.** Half of these checks are blocked by the other half. The launch-day order on page 15 is the sequence that does not double back on itself.

01 Crawling and indexing

7 CHECKS

These are the checks that decide whether Google can read the site at all. Get them wrong and everything else on this list is decoration.

-
- ☐ **01 Sitemap with a real last-modified date**

Ship `app/sitemap.ts` and make sure every entry carries the date that page actually changed.

GOTCHA: Stamping every URL with today's date at build time teaches Google to ignore the field entirely. A wrong signal is worse than no signal.

 - ☐ **02 robots.txt that points at the absolute sitemap URL**

One file, one line for the sitemap, using the full https address rather than a relative path. In Next.js this is `app/robots.ts`.

 - ☐ **03 A canonical URL on every single page**

Without one, every tracking parameter a client pastes into Facebook becomes a separate page in Google's eyes, splitting the ranking signal across copies of itself.

 - ☐ **04 One host, enforced with a 301**

Pick www or the bare domain, then permanently redirect the other. Vercel handles the http to https jump for you. The www decision is yours and nobody makes it.

 - ☐ **05 A unique title and description on every page**

Not a global template repeated across all six pages. This is the single most common gap on sites that were built by somebody who called them "SEO ready".

 - ☐ **06 metadataBase set in the root layout**

Skip it and every Open Graph image URL resolves relative, which means every link the client shares on LinkedIn or WhatsApp previews as a blank grey box.

 - ☐ **07 A real 404 page and redirects for every old URL**

If you replaced an existing site, list its indexed pages and 301 each one. Those URLs already have authority. Throwing it away is the most expensive thing you can do on launch day.
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02 Local search

5 CHECKS

For a trade, a clinic or a local service business, this section is worth more than every other section combined. It is also the one most developers skip because it does not feel like code.

- ☐ 08 **LocalBusiness structured data, using the most specific subtype**

Not `LocalBusiness` if `Plumber`, `Electrician`, `RoofingContractor` or `Dentist` exists. Google recommends JSON-LD, and the required fields are name, address, telephone and opening hours.
- ☐ 09 **Service and FAQ schema on the pages that earn it**

Add `Service` to each service page, `FAQPage` where real questions are answered, and `BreadcrumbList` on anything nested. Then validate it in Google's Rich Results Test before you call it done.

GOTCHA: Valid markup makes you eligible for a rich result. It does not guarantee one. Google still judges content quality on top.
- ☐ 10 **Name, address and phone identical everywhere**

Byte for byte across the website, the Google Business Profile and every directory listing. "Ltd" on one and "Limited" on another is enough to weaken the match.
- ☐ 11 **Google Business Profile claimed and pointed at the new site**

Free, and it does more for a local business than anything you will write in code. Complete profiles get materially more visits than half-finished ones.
- ☐ 12 **One indexable page per service and per town**

Not a single page listing twelve towns in a paragraph. One page per money keyword, each with its own title, its own copy and its own reason to exist.

46% of all Google searches carry local intent. The local three-pack sits above *everything* for those queries.

WHY PART ONE
PAYS FIRST

03 Speed and Core Web Vitals

6 CHECKS

Google grades three numbers from real visitors: how fast the main content paints (under 2.5s), how quickly the page answers a tap (under 200ms) and how much the layout jumps about (under 0.1). You need 75% of real visits to pass.

- ☐ 13 **Every image through next/image with a size**
Explicit width and height, or `fill` plus a `sizes` attribute. Unsized images are the single biggest cause of both a slow paint and a jumping layout.
- ☐ 14 **priority on the hero image, and nothing else**
Marking six images as priority is the same as marking none. The browser needs to know which one matters.
- ☐ 15 **Fonts self-hosted through next/font**
No external font request, no flash of invisible text, no layout shift when the real face swaps in.
GOTCHA: In Next 16 with Tailwind 4, the font variables belong on the `html` element, not the `body`. Put them on `body` and half your components silently fall back to system fonts.
- ☐ 16 **Lighthouse run on mobile throttling, not desktop**
Desktop scores are a comfort blanket. Google grades the mobile experience, and roughly half of all mobile sites fail. Run the mobile audit or you have not run one.
- ☐ 17 **Hero video controlled, if you are using one**
Poster frame set, preload restricted, and the still image visible until the video can genuinely paint. An ambient hero that pops in half a second late reads as a bug.
- ☐ 18 **Third-party scripts deferred or lazy-loaded**
Chat widgets, pixels, review carousels and map embeds all load on the main thread by default. Load them after interaction or on a timer, never in the initial bundle.

04 Accessibility

5 CHECKS

In the UK this is not only good practice. The Equality Act 2010 requires reasonable adjustments, and any site that lets somebody book, buy or enquire counts as a service under it. WCAG 2.2 level AA is the benchmark everyone is measured against.

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- ☐ 19 **Contrast measured, not eyeballed**

4.5:1 for normal text, 3:1 for large text and for interactive elements like buttons, inputs and focus rings.

GOTCHA: Warm editorial palettes are the usual offender. Tan on cream looks expensive and fails at 3.8:1. Measure it with a contrast checker before the client's solicitor does.

 - ☐ 20 **Visible focus states on everything interactive**

If you removed the default outline for looks, you owe the page a replacement. Keyboard users cannot navigate a site that gives no feedback.

 - ☐ 21 **Alt text written, decorative images marked empty**

Describe what the image communicates, not what it contains. Purely decorative images get an empty alt so screen readers skip them instead of reading a filename.

 - ☐ 22 **One h1 per page, headings in order, real labels on inputs**

A placeholder is not a label. It disappears the moment somebody types, and screen readers do not reliably announce it.

 - ☐ 23 **prefers-reduced-motion respected**

Scroll reveals, parallax and animated counters all need an off switch for people who get motion sickness from them. Two lines of CSS.

GOTCHA: Check the reveals actually fire when you click through the nav rather than hard-loading each URL. An effect keyed to first mount leaves client-side navigations stuck at zero opacity, and the page looks blank.
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05 Compliance and disclosure

6 CHECKS

The boring section that gets you a phone call. UK rules changed on 5 February 2026: cookie breaches now carry the same maximum penalty as data-protection breaches.

- ☐ **24 Privacy policy live before the first form submission**
A contact form, a newsletter box or an analytics tag all count as collecting personal data. If any of them are on the site, the policy needs to be there too.
- ☐ **25 Cookie policy backed by an honest cookie audit**
Open the browser storage panel and list what the site actually sets. Write the policy from that list, not from a template that mentions cookies you do not use.
- ☐ **26 Consent banner, but only if you genuinely need one**
See the decision below. If you do need one, reject has to be as easy as accept: same prominence, same number of clicks, no dark patterns.
- ☐ **27 Nothing non-essential fires before consent**
Load the tags conditionally. Hiding the banner while the pixel has already fired is the failure regulators actually look for.
- ☐ **28 Company details in the footer**
For a limited company: registered name, company number, place of registration and registered office address. VAT number if registered. This is required by the trading disclosure and e-commerce regulations, and almost nobody does it.
- ☐ **29 Terms if anything is sold, accessibility statement if it helps them win work**
The statement is optional for private companies and quietly valuable for anyone bidding on public-sector or corporate contracts.

Do you actually need a cookie banner?

NO, IF

The site uses only cookieless analytics (Plausible, Fathom, Vercel Web Analytics), or, since 5 February 2026, first-party analytics used only to improve the site, with an opt-out and no sharing. You need a cookie policy, not a banner.

YES, THE MOMENT YOU ADD

A Meta or TikTok pixel, Google Ads conversion tracking, GA4 shared with Google for advertising, a YouTube embed, or a third-party chat widget. Advertising is outside the new exemptions: all of these need consent before they load.

VERDICT. Decide the analytics stack first, then the banner follows from it. Choosing cookieless analytics is the cheapest compliance decision available to you, and it removes an entire component from the build.

06 Data protection

5 CHECKS

A contact form makes your client a data controller. These five checks are what the ICO asks about when something goes wrong, and most small sites have never heard of two of them.

- ☐ 30

ICO registration paid by the business that owns the data

Most organisations that process personal data must pay the ICO data protection fee: £52 a year for most small businesses (tier 1), £78 for medium (tier 2). Run the ICO fee checker before launch. It is the client's registration: they are the controller, you are their processor, so sign a short data processing agreement too.
- ☐ 31

A lawful basis for every field, and special category data spotted

List each field and why you need it. Health, religion or belief, ethnicity, sexuality, politics, union membership, biometrics and genetics are special category data: they need explicit consent, a clear explanation before the answer, and a "Prefer not to say" option, because a required question is not freely given consent.
- ☐ 32

A DPIA when the processing is likely to be high risk

See the decision below. Screen every site in ten minutes and write the answer down; complete the ICO's free DPIA template whenever a trigger applies, before the form goes live.
- ☐ 33

An age gate if the service is for adults only

A required "I am 18 or over" confirmation at the point you take an email or payment, checked on the server, not just in the browser. Age bands that start at 18 are not a gate.
- ☐ 34

Retention written down and enforced in code

Every retention period in the privacy policy needs a scheduled job behind it: a monthly cron that deletes leads older than the promise, with a log of each run. Sensitive answers stay hidden in admin screens until a support request needs them.

Do you need a DPIA?

YES, IF THE SITE

Stores special category data beyond a one-off enquiry, profiles people to personalise what they get, tracks behaviour systematically, targets children, applies AI to personal data, or combines several data sources.

USUALLY NOT, IF

It is a brochure site with a contact form, a newsletter box and cookieless analytics. Record the screening anyway: one paragraph saying what you collect and why no trigger applies.

VERDICT. The ICO treats a DPIA as best practice even when it is not required. Ten minutes of screening on every build, and a two-page DPIA when a trigger hits, is the cheapest insurance on this list.

07 Measurement

5 CHECKS

A site that reports pageviews and nothing else tells the client nothing, which means in six months they cannot tell whether you were worth the money. Measure the events that are actually worth money.

- ☐ 35 **Search Console verified and the sitemap submitted by hand**
Do not wait for Google to discover it. Verify the property, submit the sitemap, then check the coverage report a week later to see what got indexed and what did not.
- ☐ 36 **Analytics installed, cookieless where you can get away with it**
Vercel Web Analytics if you are already on Pro, Plausible if the client wants their own dashboard. GA4 only when they specifically need it, because it drags the consent banner in with it.
- ☐ 37 **Conversion events on the things that make money**
Form submitted, phone number tapped, WhatsApp opened, purchase completed. Without them you are reporting traffic, not results.
GOTCHA: Events sent to Meta, TikTok or Google Ads fire only after consent: queue them until the visitor accepts, drop them on reject. Send the event name and value, never the form answers.
- ☐ 38 **A thank-you page with its own URL**
Not a message that swaps in on the same page. A real route, so it can be counted as a conversion and used as an ads goal later.
- ☐ 39 **One dashboard the client can read without you**
Send the login, walk them through it once, and write down the two numbers they should care about. This is the difference between a project and a retainer.

If it is not measured, the client will judge your work on *vibes* and their brother-in-law's opinion.

THE RETAINER
RULE

08 Selling fairly

5 CHECKS

Since 6 April 2025 the CMA can fine a business up to 10% of global turnover for misleading selling, without going to court first. These are the patterns it is enforcing against right now.

- ☐ 40

No fake urgency

A countdown, "only 2 left" or "offer ends tonight" must reflect a real deadline or real stock. A timer that restarts on refresh or after it expires is exactly what the CMA took Emma Sleep to the High Court over in May 2026.

GOTCHA: If the intro price is always available to new customers, say "Intro price for new members" and drop the clock.
- ☐ 41

Honest prices and honest billing names

The headline price includes every mandatory fee (drip pricing is banned). A struck-through "was" price must be one people genuinely paid. Name the billing period exactly: a plan that charges every 4 weeks is "4-weekly", not "Monthly", because it bills 13 times a year.
- ☐ 42

Subscriptions people can leave as easily as they joined

Show the first price and the renewal price side by side, and offer cancellation online in a couple of clicks. The DMCC subscription rules start in January 2027: reminder notices before renewals, and a second 14-day cooling-off period after trials and annual renewals. Build the reminders now.
- ☐ 43

Real reviews, labelled affiliates, approved financial wording

Fake or undisclosed incentivised reviews are banned. Affiliate links are ads: label them "Ad" where people can see it before they click. Promoting investments, pensions, mortgages or credit needs wording approved by an FCA-authorised firm, so use the provider's approved copy, never your own pitch.
- ☐ 44

Ad copy that describes the product, not the person

Meta and TikTok reject ads that assert or imply personal attributes: "Struggling with debt?" or "Recently divorced?" fail, "Free money guide for UK renters" passes. Never build ad audiences from sensitive form answers.

A timer that resets is not marketing. Since 2025 it is a *10% of turnover* question.

THE FAIR-SELLING
RULE

09 Forms and lead capture

5 CHECKS

The form is the product. Everything else on the site exists to get somebody to it. Treat it like the most important route in the codebase, because it is.

- ☐ 45 **Server-side validation, not just client-side**
Client-side validation is a courtesy to the user. Server-side validation is the only one that is actually enforced.
- ☐ 46 **Honeypot field plus a time-to-submit check**
A hidden field that only bots fill, and a rejection of anything submitted within two seconds of page load. Costs nothing, adds no friction, and stops most of it.
GOTCHA: Only reach for Cloudflare Turnstile if spam gets through. It is free with no request cap, but it is still a third-party script on the page.
- ☐ 47 **Rate limit on the submit route**
Without one, a single bored script fills the client's inbox overnight and burns their email quota.
- ☐ 48 **Write to the database and send the email**
Both, every time. Email alone means lost leads whenever deliverability hiccups. Database alone means the client never notices a lead arrived.
- ☐ 49 **SPF, DKIM and DMARC on the sending domain**
Set them up when you connect the domain to Resend or whichever provider you use. Skip it and the notification emails land in spam, which looks exactly like a broken form.

Test it like a customer, not like a developer

WHAT DEVELOPERS TEST

That the form submits without a console error, on desktop Chrome, with a valid email address, once.

WHAT ACTUALLY BREAKS

The notification email in the client's spam folder. The apostrophe in O'Brien. The mobile keyboard covering the submit button. The second submission that never arrives because the rate limit is too tight.

DO THIS. Submit a real enquiry from your phone, on mobile data, with a real name and a real message. Then check it landed in the inbox, in the database, and in your analytics as a conversion. Then delete the test row so the client's data starts clean.

10 Security and uptime

4 CHECKS

Four checks that take fifteen minutes and save you the worst kind of phone call: the one where the site has been down for two days and the client found out before you did.

- ☐ **50 Security headers set in the config**
Strict-Transport-Security, X-Content-Type-Options, Referrer-Policy and a frame policy. A content security policy too, if you can afford the tuning time.
- ☐ **51 No secrets in anything prefixed NEXT_PUBLIC_**
That prefix means the value is compiled into the JavaScript bundle and served to every visitor. Grep for it before you deploy.
- ☐ **52 Uptime monitor and a deploy-failure alert**
Better Stack's free tier covers ten monitors. UptimeRobot's free plan is personal use only, so on client work you are on their paid tier or somebody else's free one. Read the licence before you rely on it.
- ☐ **53 Smoke test the real production domain**
Confirm the deployed commit matches your latest, then load the site on the domain the client will actually use.
GOTCHA: Read the production domain from the platform, never assume it is `projectname.vercel.app`. Names collide globally and get silently suffixed. On brand new projects, check deployment protection is off, or every route quietly redirects to a login screen that only you can pass.

The one that catches out agencies

THE RULE

Vercel's Hobby tier is for personal, non-commercial projects. If the site belongs to a paying client, or the client's business earns money from it, it belongs on Pro at \$20 per developer seat per month.

WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU

Pro also brings the \$20 monthly usage credit, higher limits and free viewer seats so the client can look without paying. Build the seat cost into your quote rather than discovering it in month two.

VERDICT. One Pro seat covers all your client projects. It is the only line item on this entire checklist that is not free.

11 Turning visits into enquiries

4 CHECKS

The site is found, fast, legal and measured. None of that matters if the visitor cannot work out how to contact anyone in under three seconds.

- ☐

54 Every phone number is a real tel: link

On mobile, a phone number that cannot be tapped is a phone number that does not get called. This takes one minute and it is missed constantly.
- ☐

55 A sticky mobile call-to-action bar

Call, WhatsApp, get a quote. Fixed to the bottom on small screens. Under sixty lines of your own code and it out-converts anything you can buy.
- ☐

56 A chat route the client will actually answer

See the decision below. The wrong choice here loses you leads rather than winning them.
- ☐

57 Every call to action tracked

If you cannot say which one produced the enquiries, you cannot improve it, and you cannot prove it worked.

The chat widget decision, in order of what I would actually ship

START HERE

1. WhatsApp click-to-chat. A plain link. No JavaScript, no cookies, no consent implication, and trades and local businesses genuinely answer WhatsApp. Best result per unit of effort by a wide margin.

2. Sticky mobile CTA bar. Your own code, no third party, no performance cost.

THEN, ONLY IF EARNED

3. An AI-answered widget on your own API route, using the site's own service and pricing copy as context and handing off to the contact form. This is the one worth building rather than buying.

4. Third-party live chat. Tawk.to is genuinely free with unlimited agents. Crisp starts free and gets expensive quickly. Both are heavy scripts and both drag in cookie consent.

THE RULE. Never install a live chat widget unless a human is going to answer it. An unanswered chat bubble is worse than no bubble, because the visitor tries it instead of calling, waits, and leaves.

THE NUMBERS

What the whole checklist costs

Every job on this list has a free option that comfortably covers a small business site. The only unavoidable cost is the Vercel seat, and that is a business cost rather than a per-client one.

JOB	WHAT I USE	COST	UPGRADE WHEN
NON-NEGOTIABLE			
Hosting	Vercel Pro	\$20/seat/mo	Day one on client work. Hobby is non-commercial only
Data protection fee	ICO registration	£52/yr (tier 1)	Paid by the client as controller, renewed yearly
DPIA	ICO DPIA template	Free	Whenever a high-risk trigger applies
Indexing	Google Search Console	Free	Never
Local presence	Google Business Profile	Free	Never
Schema validation	Google Rich Results Test	Free	Never
Speed audit	Lighthouse, mobile profile	Free	Never
PICK ONE PER ROW			
Analytics	Vercel Web Analytics	Included on Pro	Past the included events, then \$3 per 100k
Analytics, client-owned	Plausible	From \$9/mo	When the client wants their own login
Transactional email	Resend	Free, 3,000/mo	Past 3,000 emails, then \$20/mo
Spam protection	Honeypot, then Turnstile	Free, no request cap	Only when spam gets through
Cookie consent	vanilla-cookieconsent	Free, MIT licence	Only if you set non-essential cookies
Uptime	Better Stack free tier	Free, 10 monitors	More sites, or you need phone alerts
Error tracking	Sentry Developer	Free, 5k errors/mo	When one site becomes a real application
Chat	WhatsApp click-to-chat	Free	When somebody is genuinely staffing a chat

\$20/mo

That is the honest total for you. One Vercel Pro seat, covering every client site you host. The client pays their own ICO fee, £52 a year for most small businesses. Everything else is free at this scale. The cost of this list is your attention, not your card.

Launch day, in this exact order

Half of these checks depend on another one being done first. This is the sequence that never doubles back.

1 Decide the analytics stack

It determines whether you need a consent banner at all, which changes what you build. Make this call before you write a line of the legal pages.

2 Lock the host and the domain

www or bare, redirect the other, then set metadataBase to match. Everything downstream inherits this URL.

3 Metadata, canonicals, sitemap, robots

Checks 1 to 7 in one pass, now that the canonical host is settled.

4 Structured data and the local pages

Checks 8 to 12. Validate every block in the Rich Results Test as you go, not at the end.

5 Performance and accessibility pass

Checks 13 to 23 together, because most of the fixes touch the same components. Run mobile Lighthouse, fix, run it again.

6 Legal, data protection and fair selling

Checks 24 to 34, then 40 to 44 before any offer or advert goes out. Get company details in writing, confirm the ICO registration and record the DPIA screening.

7 Forms, email auth, security headers

Checks 45 to 51. Do the email authentication the same day you connect the domain, because propagation takes time.

8 Deploy, then measure the live thing

Checks 35 to 39 and 52 to 57 all need a live URL. Verify Search Console, submit the sitemap, fire a real test enquiry, confirm it lands in all three places, then delete the test data.

The two-hour challenge: take the last site you shipped, open it right now, and work down this list marking only what is genuinely done. Most people who have never used a checklist like this find between twelve and twenty gaps on a site they already handed over and got paid for. Fix them this week, then send the client a short note about what you improved. That note is how a one-off build turns into a monthly retainer.

FINAL WORD

Anyone can build the site. *Almost nobody finishes it.*

The building is the part that got commoditised. AI writes the components, the template handles the layout, and a decent developer can have something that looks like a five-thousand-pound website live by Friday.

What did not get commoditised is the fifty-seven. The redirects from the old site. The schema that puts them in the map pack. The consent banner they legally need, or the one they do not. The ICO fee nobody told them about. The countdown timer that was quietly a legal risk. The form that actually reaches the inbox. That is the work clients cannot see, cannot do themselves, and will happily pay for once you show them it exists.

So show them. Run this list on the last site you shipped, count the gaps, and send them the number.

Want the whole thing done for you?

If you would rather hand the launch checklist to somebody else, or you want the same system running across every site your agency ships, book a call with B2BLCC and we will look at your current process and where it leaks.

b2blcc.com · sam@b2blcc.com