404 Error Fix Checklist

A step-by-step guide to finding, fixing, and preventing 404 errors to reclaim traffic and boost your SEO.

Phase 1: Find & Audit Your 404 Errors

☐ **Google Search Console:** Log in and navigate to the 'Not found (404)' report under 'Indexing' > 'Pages'. Export the list.

☐ **Website Crawler:** Use a tool like Screaming Frog to crawl your entire site. Filter the 'Response Codes' tab for 'Client Error (4xx)' to find all 404s.

☐ **Backlink Analysis:** Use Ahrefs or SEMrush to find 404 pages with the most valuable backlinks pointing to them. Prioritize these for fixing first.

☐ **Consolidate List:** Combine all findings into a single spreadsheet with columns for: [Broken URL], [Source of Error], [Backlinks?], [Proposed Solution], [Status].

Phase 2: Plan & Prioritize Your Fixes

☐ **301 Redirect:** For each 404, determine if there is a new, relevant page to redirect to. Use a 301 redirect for moved, merged, or updated content.

☐ **Custom 404 Page:** For pages with no logical replacement, ensure your custom 404 page is helpful, friendly, and includes a search bar and navigation links.

☐ **410 Gone (Optional):** For pages intentionally removed forever (e.g., old event pages), consider using a 410 status code to tell Google they are permanently gone.

☐ **Avoid Bad Practices:** Confirm you are NOT redirecting all irrelevant 404s to your homepage (this creates a "soft 404").

Phase 3: Implement Your Redirects

- [ ] **.htaccess (Apache):** Access your .htaccess file. Add `Redirect 301 /old-url https://www.yourwebsite.com/new-url` for each redirect. Save and test.

- [ ] **Nginx Server:** Edit your server block configuration file. Add `location /old-url { return 301 https://www.yourwebsite.com/new-url; }` for each redirect. Restart the server.

- [ ] **WordPress:** Install and activate the 'Redirection' plugin. Add your source and target URLs in the plugin's interface. It's the easiest method.

- [ ] **Shopify:** Go to 'Online Store' > 'Navigation' > 'View URL redirects'. Add your old and new URL paths in the redirect manager.

- [ ] **Test Your Work:** After implementation, manually visit several of the old URLs to confirm they redirect correctly to the new destination.

Phase 4: Proactive Prevention

- [ ] **Plan for Changes:** Before any site redesign or migration, create a full URL map and pre-load all necessary 301 redirects.

- [ ] **Don't Change URLs:** Avoid changing URLs unless absolutely necessary. A stable URL structure is best for SEO.

- [ ] **Regular Audits:** Schedule a quarterly crawl of your site to find and fix new 404 errors before they impact your rankings.

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Notes & Observations

Use this space to jot down any specific issues, complex redirects, or notes for your team...