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Cron jobs worth setting up on a small website: seven ideas that save time

Cron Jobs

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Cron jobs worth setting up on a small website: seven ideas that save time

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A cron job is for anything you would otherwise repeat by hand at the same time every day or week: taking a copy of the database, deleting temporary files, importing a price list, sending a summary by e-mail. If you already know how to create one, here are **seven concrete uses** for a small site on shared hosting. To create one, see **cron jobs: what they are for and how to create one**.

Seven ideas, most useful first

1. **A database copy every night.** A `mysqldump` into a folder outside `public_html`, named after the day. It is your insurance against a mistake of yours or a plugin's. The steps are in **automatic backups with cron and mysqldump**.

2. **Clearing out old files.** Exports, temporary files and old copies fill the space without anyone noticing. For example, `find /home/ACCOUNT/exports -type f -mtime +7 -delete` removes whatever is older than seven days. Run it first with `-print` in place of `-delete` to see what would go.

3. **Replacing the WordPress scheduler with a real cron job.** Scheduled posts go out on time even with no visitors. See **swapping WP-Cron for a real server cron job**.

4. **Calling an address on your own site.** Many applications ship a file made for this, such as `/usr/bin/curl -s "https://yourcompany.com/cron.php?key=SECRET" >/dev/null 2>&1`. Put a key in the address, or anyone can call it.

5. **Importing data from outside.** A price or stock list a supplier drops every night, read by a PHP script. See **running a PHP script from a cron job**.

6 **Sending a report.** Today's orders, enquiries received, space used. See **a scheduled report by e-mail**.

7 **Warning you when something fails.** A script that checks a page or a file and sends a notice. See **getting an alert when your site goes down**.

How often, and where to see the result

Job	A reasonable frequency	Where you see it ran
Database copy	Once a day, in the small hours.	The new file in the backup folder.
Clearing files	Once a day or once a week.	A smaller folder; use `>>` for a log.
WordPress cron	Every five minutes.	A scheduled post that goes out on time.
Importing data	When the supplier updates, plus a margin.	The modification date of the file or table.
E-mail report	Once a day or once a week.	The e-mail in your inbox.

A cron job spends your account's resources like a visitor does.
Do not schedule anything every minute unless you must: if one run takes longer than the interval they start piling up. The reasoning is in **cron jobs**.

Keep scripts outside `public_html`
, in a folder such as `/home/ACCOUNT/scripts`. Nobody can open them from a browser, and they stop depending on the site's address. Add `>> /home/ACCOUNT/cron.log 2>&1` to the end of the line for the first weeks, so you have a record of what happened.

RECOMMENDED
Want a plan with cPanel and scheduled tasks? See the hosting plans.
See the plans →

Where to see it in your account

Your cron jobs run inside your account, under the same limits as the rest of the site. The **Cron Jobs** page in cPanel lists what is scheduled and when. To know whether a job ran into a limit, open **Resource Usage**: it shows CPU, memory, entry processes and I/O against the limits of your account, and when the ceiling was reached. A job that goes past those limits can be slowed down or stopped, so it is better to split long jobs into short parts or, for heavy work, move them to a VPS, which gives you full SSH access. For the exact figures that apply to your account, read them on those screens or ask us.

SEE ALSO

- **Cron jobs: what they are for and how to create one**
- **A cron job that does not run or sends no output: a checklist**
- **Cron schedule examples: every 15 minutes, weekdays at 8, the first of the month**
- **Hosting plans**

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TAX NO. (SARS)	943 907 6234
REGISTRATION NO. (CIPC)	2025/667953/07
REGISTERED OFFICE	1111 Olive Street Saint Louis 63101, Missouri, United States
CONTACT	info@mozout.com · +27 78 823 3325 · www.mozout.com
OPENING HOURS	Monday to Friday - 08 AM to 04 PM Saturday & Sunday - Closed

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