Generated on 15/11/2026 00:41

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A coming soon or maintenance page without hurting your Google ranking

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO

CODE	VERSION	COUNTRY · LANGUAGE
RLX-INT-KB-5118	v2026.10.15	International · English

MozOut International
RLX Holdings (Pty) Ltd. · Group RLX Holdings
Tax no. (SARS) 943 907 6234 · Registration no. (CIPC) 2025/667953/07

https://www.my.mozout.com/knowledgebase/5118

A coming soon or maintenance page without hurting your Google ranking

URLs, Redirects & Technical SEO Created on **October 15, 2026** 2 min read



The short answer: they are two different cases. For a **short maintenance** on a site that already exists, return the **503** status with a “come back shortly” notice: Google understands it is temporary and does not drop your pages. For a site that is **not ready** yet, do not leave it open to be indexed half built: either protect it with a password, or tell Google not to index it.

Maintenance: the 503 status

A maintenance page that answers with the normal status (200) tells Google “this is the content of the site”. If it stays that way for days, Google may replace your pages with the message. With the **503 (service unavailable)** status and the **Retry-After** header you say the opposite: “I will be right back, change nothing”.

We measured that this works on our servers. Create a `maintenance.html` file with the message and add this to the site’s `.htaccess` (take a copy first):

```
RewriteEngine On
RewriteCond %{REQUEST_URI} !^/maintenance\.html$
RewriteRule ^ - [R=503,L]
ErrorDocument 503 /maintenance.html
Header always set Retry-After "3600"
```

The number is in seconds (3600 is one hour). The condition lets the message file itself open, otherwise the page loops. To **end the maintenance**, delete these lines.

A site not launched yet

1. **The safest way is a password:** protect the site folder with **Directory Privacy**. Anyone without the password, Google included, sees nothing.

2. **If you do not want a password,** use a “do not index” (noindex) on every page. See **Removing a page from Google results**.

3 **On launch day, remove the "do not index"** and confirm the **robots.txt and sitemap** are right. It is the most common slip: launched sites that keep asking Google not to look at them.

Situation	What to do	What to avoid
Maintenance of a few hours	The 503 status with Retry-After.	A "back soon" page with status 200.
A new site, still being built	A password on the folder, or noindex.	Leaving it open with the "coming soon" page indexed.
A change of domain or design	301 redirects and the site ready before you switch.	Putting the site under maintenance for days. See **Redesigning a website without losing traffic**.

On WordPress

coming-soon and maintenance plugins do not always return the 503: some answer 200. Check with `curl -I https://your-site` (the first line shows the status) before leaving them on. And if WordPress got stuck in maintenance by itself, see **WordPress stuck in maintenance mode**.

If the site was down by accident, the effect on Google is in **What happens to your Google ranking when your site goes down**.

NEED A HAND?

Need to put the site under maintenance and do not want to touch .htaccess alone? Open a ticket and tell us the domain and the hours.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- What happens to your Google ranking when your site goes down? →
- WordPress stuck in maintenance mode →
- How to remove a page from Google results →
- Error 503 and the rest of the 5xx family →

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