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# Automatic file transfers: scheduled SFTP and rsync from a script

Ideas & Everyday Automations

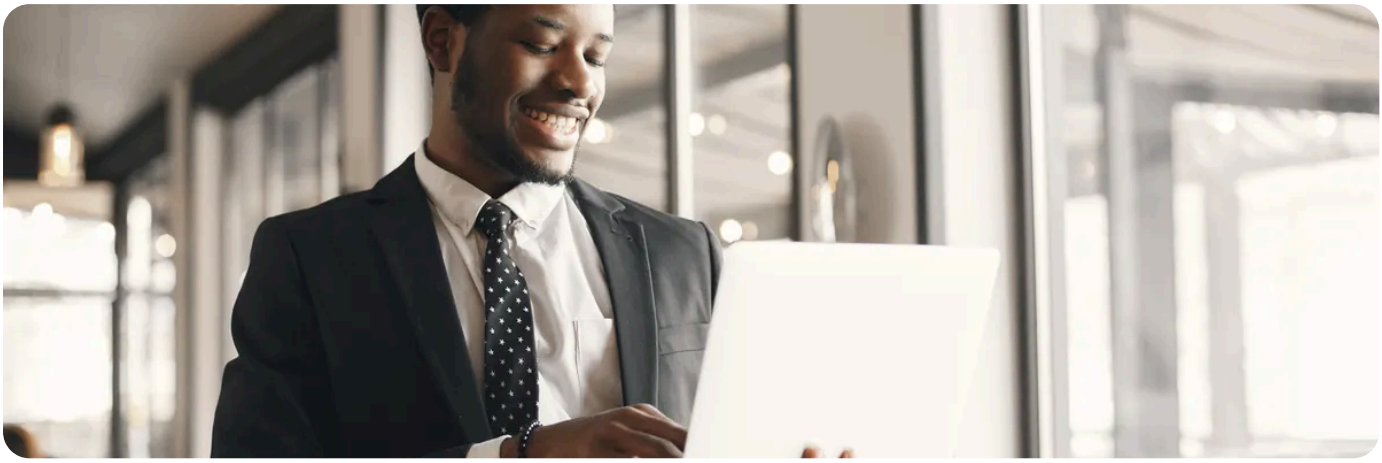
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| RLX-MZ-KB-1080 | v2026.10.18 | Mozambique · English |

**Interweb Mozambique**
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Tax ID (NUIT) 401 191 607 · Legal entity no. (NUEL) 105 045 974 · Economic activity code (CAE) 62022

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# Automatic file transfers: scheduled SFTP and rsync from a script

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To send or fetch files every night without opening FileZilla, use a cron job that runs the `sftp` command with an instruction file, or `rsync` over SSH. Both need **key authentication**, because nobody is there to type a password, and **SSH switched on for your account**. On Interweb's shared servers the SSH port is 2299, and every plan has SSH.

## When it makes sense

| Situation | Direction | Tool |
|---|---|---|
| **Fetching a supplier's price file every night** | From the supplier to you | `sftp` with `get`, or `rsync` |
| **Sending exports to a partner** | From you to the partner | `sftp` with `put` |
| **Copying backups to another server of yours** | From you to the other machine | `rsync` |

## Setting it up, step by step

1. **Confirm where SSH is. Every plan has it: the Terminal and "SSH Access" appear in cPanel. See SFTP instead of FTP.**

2. **Create a key just for this job.** In cPanel's "SSH Access" you generate a pair. If the destination is another machine, the public key must be authorised there, on the account that will receive the files.

3. **Connect once by hand**, to accept the server's fingerprint. Without that, the first connection from cron stops waiting for an answer that never comes.

4 **Write the instruction file** for `sftp`, with lines such as `cd /folder` and `put /home/ACCOUNT/export.csv`. The command is `sftp -P PORT -i /home/ACCOUNT/.ssh/KEY -b /home/ACCOUNT/instructions.txt user@server`. The `-b` runs in non-interactive mode.

5 **Or use rsync:** `rsync -az -e "ssh -p PORT -i /home/ACCOUNT/.ssh/KEY" /home/ACCOUNT/backups/ user@server:/destination/`. It only sends what changed.

6 **Put the command in cron** with a log, and check at the destination that the files arrived: **cron jobs**.

**Rehearse before you schedule.** `rsync` has a simulation option (`-n`, or `--dry-run`) that shows what it would copy without copying anything, and `-v` lists the files. Run it like that the first time and check the source and destination are where you think. A slash too many or too few at the end of a path changes the result.

! **A key with no passphrase, in a cron job, is a key that anyone who steals it can use.**
So use a key just for this job, with the destination account limited to the folder it needs, and read permission for you alone on the key file. Never put it inside `public_html`.

`rsync` has an option that deletes the source after sending (`--remove-source-files`). It is useful and dangerous: use it only after watching the copy work for several nights, and never on files that exist only there. For backup strategy, see **making and keeping your own backup, and testing that it works**.

**If the supplier only offers FTP**
, ask for SFTP. Plain FTP sends the password unprotected. If there is nothing else, use FTP over TLS and keep that password for this job alone.

NEED A HAND?
Not sure where to find SSH or how to set up the key? Ask us. Every plan includes SSH.
Open a ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **SFTP instead of FTP: when you can, and why it is better** →
- **The cPanel Terminal: a command line with nothing to install** →
- **Automatic backups of your own application: cron and mysqldump** →

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## Interweb Mozambique

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