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The 3-2-1 backup rule for a website: which three copies, and where to keep them

Backups & Migration

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The 3-2-1 backup rule for a website: which three copies, and where to keep them

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The 3-2-1 rule says: **3 copies** of what matters, on **2 different kinds of storage**, with **1 copy away** from where the rest lives. The point is not the numbers: it is making sure **no single accident catches every copy at once**. The general ideas are in **making and keeping your own backup**. This article gets concrete: what the rule looks like for a site on shared hosting.

The three copies of a site

Copy	Where it lives	What it protects you from
1. The original	The live site, in the account.	Nothing. It is what you are protecting.
2. Your local copy	On your computer or on an external disk that stays unplugged.	A closed account, a serious server failure, a mistake nobody noticed for weeks.
3. Your off-site copy	Somewhere else, with someone else: cloud storage or another server.	A stolen or dead computer, a fire or flood at the office, ransomware that encrypts the connected disk.
Bonus: our automatic copy	In JetBackup, in cPanel. Daily, before dawn, with the last 30 days kept on active accounts.	A recent mistake: a plugin that broke the site, a folder deleted this week. See **restoring with JetBackup**.

The **two kinds of storage** are, for example, the server disk and your external disk; the **off-site** copy is the one held by another party at another address. Our daily copy is an excellent safety net for everyday accidents, but **do not count it as the off-site copy**: it covers this week's mistakes, not a closed account or damage older than a month.

Putting the rule to work

1. **Decide what "what matters" is.** On a site it is four things: the files, the database, the mailboxes (if you use them) and whatever lives only in your head (passwords, DNS records, a list of plugins). Without the database, a copy of the files gives you an empty site.

2. **Make the local copy.** The simplest is the full cPanel backup, downloaded to your computer: **making a full cPanel backup and downloading it**. To copy just the database and the files often, see **automatic backups of your own application**.

3. **Make the off-site copy.** Send a second copy of the same file to cloud storage or to another server: **off-site backups**. If you have a VPS, **rsync** does this well.

4. **Write down where each copy is and what day it is from.** A sheet with three lines is enough. When it matters, nobody remembers which disk held the good one.

5. **Rehearse a restore.** A copy that was never restored is a hope. The drill is in **testing a backup on a test subdomain**.

A synced folder is not a backup.
Services that keep a folder identical in several places also replicate what you delete and what ransomware encrypts. If you use one, pick one that keeps older versions of files, or use it only as transport and keep dated copies separately.

Encrypt the copies that leave the building.
A full copy carries the database with your customers' data and the `wp-config.php` with its passwords. Keep it in a password-protected archive and keep that password somewhere else, not next to the file.

NEED A HAND?

Want to confirm what your account keeps for you before deciding what is left for you to keep?

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Making and keeping your own backup, and testing that it works** →

- **Off-site backups: cloud storage, S3 and Google Drive**
- **How long we keep backups, and how to restore one**
- **Hosting plans and what each includes**

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