

Moving email off shared hosting, onto Google Workspace.

Your email has lived on the same server as your website. Moving it to Google Workspace is mostly a quiet background copy and some waiting, plus one switch that generic "just change your MX" guides skip. **Changing your MX record is necessary, but not enough:** the old server keeps swallowing your mail until you tell it to stop. This is the order, and where to stop and get help.

ESSENTIAL

Skip it and mail bounces or is lost

GET HELP

Advanced or has no undo, stop if unsure

The label on the right is when, or how long.

Before you start: admin screens, menu names and limits change often. Use this guide for the order of events and the traps to avoid; check the current screen in your own admin console as you go.

01 Before you touch anything

- ☐

ESSENTIAL

Make sure you can edit your domain's DNS. Several of the steps here change a DNS record. If your web host or a vendor registered the domain and holds the login, get that access first, or the move can stall halfway.

DO FIRST
- ☐

ESSENTIAL

Add your domain to Google Workspace and verify it. A short TXT record proves you own the domain. Do this early in the week, not on switch day: Google says it can take up to 72 hours to be recognised, though it is usually much faster.

UP TO 72H
- ☐

ESSENTIAL

Create each person's Workspace account and give it a licence. The migration only fills inboxes that already exist. It does not create the accounts, and it will not deliver mail to a user without a licence.

DO FIRST
- ☐

ESSENTIAL

List the real mailboxes, separately from aliases and forwarders. Only a real mailbox holds mail worth moving. A forwarder or a catch-all is a routing rule with no storage of its own, so there is nothing inside it to copy. Sort these apart now and the migration list writes itself.

DO FIRST
- ☐

GET HELP

Watch for POP accounts with nothing left on the server. If someone has collected mail by POP for years, their app may have downloaded and deleted it as it went, so the only copy lives on their laptop, not the server. Rescuing that is a separate job from this migration.

CHECK
- ☐

GET HELP

Lower your MX record's TTL a day or two before. The TTL is how long the internet is allowed to cache your mail settings. Lowering it in advance means the later switch takes effect in minutes instead of a day. Put it back to normal once everything has settled.

A DAY OR TWO AHEAD

02 Copy the mail across

Nothing breaks in this part. Mail still flows to the old mailboxes the whole time, because this step only ever copies.

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- ☐

ESSENTIAL

Use Google's own migration service, in its IMAP mode. Run from the

RUNS FOR DAYS

Workspace admin console, it reads each old mailbox over a secure connection and copies the mail in. It copies; it never deletes or changes the original, so you can run it, check it, and run it again.

 - ☐

ESSENTIAL

Point it at your host's mail server, one mailbox at a time. You will need each

BACKGROUND

mailbox's password. The person who holds the hosting control-panel login can reset them, but a reset locks that mailbox's owner out of the old inbox until they are told the new one, so time it and warn them.

 - ☐

ESSENTIAL

Spot-check the copied mailboxes in Workspace. Before you switch anything over,

BEFORE SWITCH

open a few migrated inboxes and confirm the folders are there and the message counts look about right against the originals.

The good news for this particular move. Plain hosting email is usually just mail: there is no shared calendar or company contacts sitting on the server to lose, which is what makes moving *off* old hosting simpler than moving between Microsoft and Google. Anything saved in your webmail's own address book is separate, so export that yourself before the old mailbox is switched off.

03 Switch it over

Set authentication up ahead, then change the MX and the mail routing together, in one sitting.

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|--------------------------|---|----------------------|
| ☐ | <div style="background-color: #1a2b3d; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; display: inline-block;">ESSENTIAL</div> Get authentication ready, and start DKIM early. SPF, DKIM and DMARC do not carry over, and without them your outgoing mail can land in spam. Set up DKIM a day or two before switch day, because it can take up to two days to begin working. Replace the single SPF record as you switch, then add DMARC once SPF and DKIM are live. Our separate one-page guide gives the order. | BEFORE SWITCH |
| ☐ | <div style="background-color: #1a2b3d; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; display: inline-block;">ESSENTIAL</div> Change the MX record to Google, and remove the old one. Delete the old host's MX record rather than just lowering its priority. From now on, new mail is meant to go to Google. | SWITCH DAY |
| ☐ | <div style="background-color: #1a2b3d; color: white; padding: 2px 5px; display: inline-block;">ESSENTIAL</div> In the same sitting, tell the old host to stop handling mail. In cPanel, set the domain's email routing to "Remote Mail Exchanger". In Plesk, turn the domain's mail service off. Without this, the old server keeps accepting your mail into the abandoned mailboxes, silently, whatever the MX record now says. | SAME SITTING |
| ☐ | Run a "delta" pass to catch mail that arrived mid-switch. The migration service can re-scan and pull anything that landed on the old server while the DNS change was still spreading, so nothing from that gap is lost. | AFTER SWITCH |
| ☐ | Recreate forwarders and aliases, and decide your catch-all. These were routing rules on the old host and do not migrate. Rebuild them in Workspace as aliases or groups, and choose deliberately what happens to mail sent to an address that no longer exists. | AFTER SWITCH |

The one trap to remember. Changing the MX record moves where *new* mail is supposed to go. The mail-routing setting inside cPanel or Plesk decides whether the old server still grabs it first. Both have to change, or some mail keeps quietly landing in the old inbox and nobody notices until they go looking for a message that never arrived.

04 Test it before you trust it

Do all of these the same day you switch, not a week later.

Send and receive both ways	From outside into each new inbox, and out from each one to an external address.
Confirm the old server stopped catching mail	Send a fresh test, then open the <i>old</i> webmail. Nothing should arrive there. This is the trap check.
Every alias and forwarder delivers	You rebuilt these by hand, so prove each one lands where it should.
No mail app still points at the old server	An old app keeps showing cached mail while quietly receiving nothing new.
Authentication passes	Check a received message shows SPF, DKIM and DMARC pass. You cannot test DKIM by emailing yourself.

05 What you can undo, and the one thing you cannot

Almost every step is reversible. Knowing which one is not keeps a bad day small.

Adding users, the copy, testing in Workspace	Reversible. None of it touches your old mail, which stays exactly where it is.
The MX change and the mail-routing switch	Reversible. You can point them back if something looks wrong.
Deleting the old mailboxes	The only step with no undo. Do it last, after everything is verified, never on switch day.

The copy itself is safe. Reading a mailbox to copy it never changes the original, so keep the old mailboxes intact right through the switch and the checks afterwards. The cost of leaving them a few extra days is trivial next to the cost of losing mail nobody double-checked had arrived.

06 Where to stop and call someone

Most of this move is straightforward. These are the parts that are not, and where a second pair of hands earns its keep.

- ☐ **GET HELP Old mail that only exists on a laptop.** POP accounts often leave nothing on the server to migrate. If that history has to survive, it has to come from the person's own computer, which the migration tool cannot reach.
- ☐ **Mailboxes near the host's storage limit, or very large and old.** A mailbox that has been sitting near its quota may already have been dropping or pruning mail before you started. Worth checking, not assuming it all made it.
- ☐ **A host that "repairs" your email settings after the switch.** Some control panels have a button that regenerates their own SPF record, which can overwrite the one pointing at Google. If yours offers that, check your SPF again after anyone uses it.
- ☐ **A copy that looks stuck for hours.** Shared servers cap how many connections one mailbox may open at once, so a big migration can crawl. Usually it is patience that is needed, not a fix.

Rather hand this over? We move small-business email onto Google Workspace from old shared hosting as a paid service: the copy, the switch, the mail-routing setting those generic guides skip, and the authentication afterwards. The guide is free either way, and we will tell you honestly if it is simpler than you feared. info@xsquare.com.sg · xsquare.com.sg/google-workspace