Checklist: 15 Reasons Your WordPress Site Stopped Indexing

When a WordPress site stops indexing, the traffic cliff is immediate and merciless. One morning Google Search Console reports zero indexed pages, and organic impressions nosedive. The cause is rarely a single gremlin. Far more often, it is a cascade of silent configuration flips, server missteps, and content decay that crept in unnoticed. This checklist: 15 Reasons Your WordPress Site Stopped Indexing is the diagnostic protocol we use when a client's visibility evaporates overnight.

In practice, migrating a site and leaving the "Discourage search engines" checkbox on is so common I've documented it in over a dozen post-mortems. A news publisher lost 80% of organic traffic in a weekend because an intern toggled that setting during staging. The damage is binary: Googlebot obeys, no questions asked.

The checklist does not speculate. Each item maps to a concrete signal you can verify in Search Console, server logs, or HTTP response headers. And while you will find 15 potential culprits, the Pareto rule holds fiercely: roughly a third of them cause 90% of the disasters.

If your site is live but pages refuse to appear in search, the following breakdown lets you triage—starting with the dumbest, costliest mistakes.

The Fast Death: Blocking Bots Without Realizing It

Reason 1. The "Search engine visibility" checkbox in Settings > Reading. WordPress calls it "Discourage search engines from indexing this site." Checked, it pours <meta name="robots" content="noindex, nofollow"> into every page head and slaps Disallow: / into the server's robots.txt. Check this first. Log into wp-admin, navigate to Settings → Reading, uncheck the box, and save. Then immediately inspect a live page source and run curl -I https://example.com to confirm the header is gone.

Reason 2. Staging or development robots.txt pushed to production. A Disallow: / sitting in the site root is a blunt instrument. If you use version control, verify the file contains User-agent: *\nAllow: /—or at least no blanket disallow. Many WordPress hosts auto-generate a restrictive robots.txt during one-click staging launches and fail to clean it up.

Reason 3. An SEO plugin's global noindex toggle. Yoast, Rank Math, and SEOPress each offer a per-post noindex. But they also ship a site-wide *"noindex this post type"* switch, often flipped during bulk edits. Go to SEO → Search Appearance → Content Types, check every post type and taxonomy, and smash that blue "show in search results" button back to "Yes."

> Rule of thumb: If the site used to rank, always reprocess a fresh URL with the URL Inspection tool in Google Search Console before you touch a single line of code. It tells you instantly whether Google is seeing a noindex directive.

When the Content Itself Gets Flagged

Reason 4. Thin or duplicate content under a new codebase. After a theme swap or dynamic block injection, a WooCommerce shop with 50,000 product variants can accidentally generate near-identical pages. Google’s crawling and indexing systems will drop huge swaths when the duplicate ratio crosses a quality threshold. Run site:example.com in Google and look for a sudden shrinkage combined with “soft 404” spikes in Search Console’s Coverage report.

Reason 5. Keyword stuffing and auto-generated content. A membership site that auto-populated 100,000 location pages from a CSV and slipped 200 keyword variants into a hidden footer will usually see those pages de-indexed en masse. The fix is not a tweak; it is removal, then a reconsideration request if a manual action appeared.

Reason 6. An accidental canonicalization loop. A <link rel="canonical"> pointing to another page that itself points back to the original creates a ring that confuses crawlers. Check the top 50 most important URLs with a curl command:

```
curl -s https://example.com/important-page | grep -i '
```