

6/30/2026

DIY Tech Troubleshooting

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You might have an IT person or a “web guy,” (I’m the “web guy” for a lot of businesses) that can help you when your email stops working or your website goes down, but maybe you don’t. And even if you do, you’re going to have to give them some information so they can help you. What do you need to give them? How can you find it? Tear this out of the magazine and keep it handy because this is your tech troubleshooting guide.

We’re going to approach this like a newspaper article and for each problem find the: Who, What, Where, Why and How.

Who

If you have an IT person or “web guy,” establish contact with them when you find a problem. The person responsible for paying bills (with credit card/checking account access) might be needed because more often than you’d think, there’s an expired credit card at the root of the problem. And if you have anyone who works with the problem software (such as someone who updates your website), round ‘em up.

What

Identify the problem(s). Say your website is down. Is your email still working? Your POS is offline. Can you navigate around the internet? Figuring out what isn’t working can help isolate the problem. Here are some examples:

Issues: Email not working on desktop, POS offline, website accessible on mobile.

Probable diagnosis: Your internet is offline. Check the router and call your internet provider.

Issues: Email not working at all, website down.

Probable diagnosis: Something’s wrong with your domain. Either an expired credit card or someone transferred domain registration, but not management or the domain registration expired. Find emails about your domain (GoDaddy, Network Solution, Bluehost, Square, etc. etc.)

Issues: Email is working, website is down.

Probable diagnosis: Expired credit card on the website host.

Issues: Email is not working, website is up.

Probable diagnosis: Expired credit card with the email service (i.e. Microsoft, Google).

Issues: No online service is working on mobile or desktop. POS is down, you can't pull up sites online, email is scattered, you can't sign into the bank.

Probable diagnosis: Widespread internet outage. Check downdetector.com. If AWS (Amazon Web Services) or Cloudflare have issues, half the internet stops working.

If someone is helping you troubleshoot, identifying which parts of your tech stack are offline will help them diagnose and treat.

Where

If a website goes down, email stops working or something wonky happens with an account somewhere, I always ask clients to send me the last three emails from whatever service is causing them problems.

Why the emails?

Because everybody has so many logins to so many places that it's nearly impossible to remember them all. I'll have a client look me straight in the face over Zoom and tell me their domain (www.myawesomegardencenter.com) is registered with GoDaddy, but they forward me emails from Network Solutions. This is normal! Rather than trying to remember, just find the emails. That will tell you WHERE you're trying to fix the problem.

If multiple services are down, try to find emails from all of the services.

Once you find the emails in question, look for this info: What email address received the emails from the service?

For instance, you might have two email addresses that you use for account signup:

info@myawesomegardencenter.com and me@myawesomegardencenter.com AND those two email addresses

might arrive in ONE email inbox. CONFUSION! Look at the "to" field in the email. That will tell you what email address is associated with the account, so that if you need chat help or to reset a password, you know which email address to use.

Customer number or account number: GoDaddy assigns customer numbers, and when you log in, it's much easier to log in with a customer number as the "username" than an email address. You'll need this number for support and account recovery.

Password reset links and buttons: These links might be expired, but often if an email has a link in it, you can click it and request a NEW, active link.

If you can't find the emails, you can go to builtwith.com, enter your website address and get a list of tech used to build/in conjunction with your website. Visit lookup.icann.org to look up your domain registration provider and hostingchecker.com will tell you where a website is hosted. It's creepy, but if you have the website address, you can find a lot of information about how/where it's registered and managed if you sleuth around online.

Why

One of the most common issues with tech troubles is an expired credit card or a credit card that has hit its credit limit during the spring. When in doubt about why something isn't working, FIRST CHECK THE BILLING. My experience is that at least half the time, it's a billing issue that took down the system. (Which is why you need to have your accounts payable person on call!)

If the card on file hit the limit, make a payment and try again.

How

As Wendy Hatoum who works with me told one of our clients lately, “You can Google a lot of step-by-step help articles. That’s what most tech people do. They’re not smarter than you and they don’t know everything. They look it up.”

I’m one of those. I’ll be on a Zoom call with a client and, with my screen shared right in front of them, search for something like, “How to set up a subdomain for Shopify on Square domains.” Even though I’ve set up something like 67 subdomains over time, I’ve done it with different combinations of providers and I can’t remember the ins and outs of how each one works specifically.

Tech issues become much less scary and straightforward to solve when you know how to look for the information you need to solve the problem. Hopefully, these tips will help you get started. Questions? You can always ask. I love solving puzzles! **GP**

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