# How to Prevent Accidental Joomla Version Jumps with Update Channel Management

One wrong Joomla update channel setting can jump your site from Joomla 4 to 5 or 5 to 6. Here is how mySites.guru detects and prevents this.

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**TL;DR:** Joomla's update channel setting controls which versions your site is offered. If it's set to "Joomla Next" instead of "Default", a routine update check can offer a major version jump - from Joomla 4 to 5, or from 5 to 6. mySites.guru flags this misconfiguration on every connected site and lets you fix it remotely in one click.

One wrong setting in the Joomla Update component is all it takes to accidentally upgrade a production Joomla 4 site to Joomla 5, or a Joomla 5 site to Joomla 6. The setting is called the **update channel** (internally called `updatesource`), and it determines which versions Joomla considers available when you hit “Check for Updates” in the admin panel.

Most Joomla administrators never think about this setting because it ships on “Default” out of the box. But it only takes one change (during a test, by a team member who didn’t know what it did, or after following a tutorial that forgot to mention switching it back) and suddenly your next routine update isn’t a minor patch. It’s a full major version jump.

## What is a Joomla update channel?

The update channel is a configuration option inside the **Joomla Update component** (Components > Joomla Update > Options in the Joomla admin panel). It tells Joomla which update server to check and, critically, which version series to consider as available updates.

Joomla’s update system works by fetching an XML file from an update server URL. The update channel setting determines *which* XML file gets fetched, and each file points to a different set of available versions.

The channels you’ll encounter:

### Default

This is what every production site should use. The Default channel only offers updates within your current major version series. If you're running Joomla 5.2.3, the Default channel will offer 5.2.4, 5.3.0, and so on - but it will never offer Joomla 6.0.0.

The Default channel is the safe choice because it keeps your site on the version series you intentionally installed and tested against.

## Joomla Next

This is the channel that causes problems. The Joomla Next channel includes the next major version series in the available updates. If you're on Joomla 5 and Joomla 6 has been released, the Joomla Next channel will show Joomla 6 as an available update.

The Joomla Next channel exists for a legitimate purpose: when you've done your compatibility testing, confirmed your extensions and templates work with the new version, and are ready to intentionally upgrade to the next major version. The problem is that once enabled, it stays enabled. People switch to it, upgrade one site, and then forget to switch it back. Or they switch it on a test site and accidentally leave it on a production site.

## Testing

The Testing channel gives access to pre-release builds: alphas, betas, and release candidates. These are builds published by the Joomla project for community testing before a stable release.

This channel should only ever be used on dedicated test environments. Pre-release builds can have bugs, incomplete features, and database schema changes that aren't finalised. Installing a testing build on a production site is asking for trouble, and there's often no clean upgrade path from a beta to the final stable release.

## STS and LTS (legacy)

Older Joomla versions (particularly the Joomla 3 era) used **Short Term Support (STS)** and **Long Term Support (LTS)** channels. These distinguished between feature releases

and long-term maintenance releases within the same major version.

In modern Joomla (versions 4, 5, and 6), the STS and LTS distinction no longer applies in the same way. You may still see these values in some site configurations, particularly on sites that were migrated from Joomla 3 and never had the setting cleaned up. For practical purposes, they behave like the Default channel, but it's still best practice to explicitly set the channel to Default to avoid any ambiguity.

## Why are wrong Joomla update channels dangerous?

A misconfigured update channel doesn't break anything immediately. Your site keeps running fine. The danger only shows itself when someone checks for updates and accepts what Joomla offers.

### The accidental major version jump

The scenario plays out regularly across the Joomla community:

1. A site administrator sets the update channel to "Joomla Next" to upgrade one of their sites from Joomla 4 to Joomla 5
2. The upgrade goes fine, the site is now on Joomla 5
3. The administrator forgets to switch the channel back to "Default"
4. Months later, Joomla 6 is released
5. The admin panel shows "An update is available" - looks like a routine update
6. The administrator (or a junior team member) clicks Update
7. The site is now on Joomla 6, which was never tested, and extensions start breaking

This is not a hypothetical scenario. It happens after every major Joomla release. The Joomla forums fill up with posts from administrators who accidentally jumped to a new major version and now have broken sites. With Joomla 6 released in October 2025 - and Joomla 6.1 now out - this is happening right now to Joomla 5 sites that still have the Joomla Next channel enabled from when they upgraded from Joomla 4.

## There is no rollback

When you upgrade from Joomla 5 to Joomla 6, the database schema changes. Tables are altered, columns are added or removed, and data is migrated.

You cannot simply downgrade the files back to Joomla 5 because the database no longer matches the Joomla 5 schema. The only recovery path is restoring a full backup - files and database together - from before the upgrade happened.

If you don't have a recent backup, or if your backup schedule hasn't run since the last content changes, you're looking at data loss on top of the version mess.

## Extension and template incompatibility

Major Joomla version upgrades routinely break third-party extensions and templates. Extension developers need time to update their code for new APIs, deprecated features, and changed behaviour in a new major version.

When you intentionally plan a major version upgrade, you check each extension's compatibility first. You review the Joomla 6 requirements to make sure your server meets the minimums. You test on a staging site. You have a plan.

When the upgrade happens accidentally, none of that preparation has been done. Extensions that haven't been updated for the new version will throw errors, produce white screens, or malfunction. Templates may break entirely, leaving your site looking nothing like it should.

## The problem multiplies across a portfolio

For anyone managing multiple Joomla sites, the risk compounds quickly. If you set one site to the Joomla Next channel and then used a configuration template or copied settings across sites, you could have dozens or hundreds of sites with the wrong channel. A mass upgrade from one dashboard becomes a mass problem if the update channel is wrong on the sites being upgraded.

The sites look fine, the update channel is buried in a component options page that nobody routinely checks, and the actual failure only happens when an update is offered and accepted.

## How to check your update channel in Joomla

If you're managing sites individually, here's how to verify the update channel on each one:

1. Log in to the Joomla administrator panel
2. Go to **Components > Joomla Update**
3. Click the **Options** button in the toolbar (top right)
4. Look at the **Update Channel** dropdown

If it says "Default", you're fine. If it says anything else - particularly "Joomla Next" - change it back to Default and save.

The problem with doing this manually is obvious: you have to log into every single site, navigate to the same page, check the same dropdown, and remember to do this periodically. For anyone with more than a handful of sites, this doesn't scale.

## How does mySites.guru monitor Joomla update channels?

mySites.guru tracks the update channel setting for every connected Joomla site automatically.

### Snapshot monitoring

Every time mySites.guru runs a snapshot of your sites, it reads the `updatesource` parameter from the Joomla Update component configuration. This value is stored and

displayed in the dashboard alongside your site's Joomla version, PHP version, and database details.

On the Joomla 6 compatibility checker page, the update channel column shows a **green badge with a checkmark** when the channel is set to Default, and a **red badge with an X** when it's set to anything else. You can see at a glance which of your sites have a misconfigured update channel without logging into any of them.

## Best practice audit

The mySites.guru best practice audit includes a dedicated check for the update channel. The audit tool - titled "Use Default Update Channel on Live Sites to prevent accidental series jump" - evaluates every connected Joomla site and flags any site where the channel is not set to Default.

This runs automatically with each snapshot, so even if someone changes the update channel on a site between your manual checks, mySites.guru will catch it on the next scan. The check also tracks trend data: if a site's channel changes from Default to something else (or vice versa), the dashboard highlights the change so you can investigate.

## Remote fix

When mySites.guru detects a site with the wrong update channel, you don't have to log into that site to fix it. The dashboard provides a toggle that remotely sets the update channel back to Default. For a single site, it's one click. For multiple sites, you can view all affected sites filtered by this specific issue and work through them.

This means you can fix a misconfigured channel in seconds from your dashboard instead of discovering it after the damage is done.

## Forced Default during upgrades

When you use mySites.guru to upgrade Joomla core, the upgrade process **forces the update source to Default** before applying the update, regardless of what the site's

local setting is. Even if a site is set to Joomla Next, mySites.guru overrides this to prevent the upgrade from jumping to a different major version series.

This means that when you do a bulk upgrade across hundreds of sites, you know that every site will get the latest minor/patch release for its current major version - not an unexpected jump to a new series. This is a intended safety mechanism built into the upgrade connector for Joomla 3, 4, 5, and 6.

> **Key point:** Even if a site has the wrong update channel, mySites.guru forces the channel to Default before performing any core upgrade. This prevents accidental series jumps regardless of the local configuration. You can still intentionally upgrade major versions through the dedicated migration tools.

## When should you use the Joomla Next channel?

The Joomla Next channel exists for good reasons, and there are legitimate times to use it:

For intentional major version upgrades: when you've verified your server meets the requirements, confirmed your extensions are compatible, tested on a staging site, and taken a full backup, switching to the Joomla Next channel is the right way to perform the upgrade.

For dedicated migration projects: if you're working through a batch of Joomla 4 to Joomla 5 migrations, or Joomla 5 to Joomla 6, you'll use the Joomla Next channel on each site during the upgrade window.

Either way: **switch back to Default the moment the upgrade is done.** Don't leave it for later. Don't assume you'll remember. Set it back to Default as the final step of every major version upgrade.

## How does the Joomla update channel affect end-of-life versions?

Update channels become even more relevant when a Joomla version reaches end of life. When Joomla 4 reached its end-of-life date, sites still running Joomla 4 stopped receiving security updates through the Default channel. Some administrators then switched to the Joomla Next channel thinking it would give them “the latest updates” without realising it would offer Joomla 5 as the update.

This creates a dangerous situation: an administrator trying to get security patches for an EOL version inadvertently triggers a major version upgrade. The site jumps to Joomla 5, extensions break, and the administrator is worse off than before.

The correct approach for end-of-life Joomla versions is to plan a proper migration, not to change the update channel hoping for patches. mySites.guru clearly flags sites running end-of-life versions and tracks the update channel separately, so you always know which sites need migration attention and which are safely configured.

## What are the common mistakes with Joomla update channels?

### Copying configuration between sites

If you use a staging or template site to spin up new Joomla installations, check the update channel on that template. Whatever is set on the template gets inherited by every new site. If your template site was last used for a major version upgrade test and still has the Joomla Next channel enabled, every site you spin up from it will have the same misconfiguration.

### Tutorials that don’t mention switching back

Plenty of Joomla upgrade tutorials explain how to switch to the Joomla Next channel but don’t mention switching back afterward. Some end at “congratulations, your site is

now on Joomla X" without mentioning the update channel at all. If you followed a tutorial to upgrade one of your sites, go back and check the channel setting now.

### Assuming "it only affects the next update"

Some administrators know their channel is set to Joomla Next but think it's fine because they'll "just not click Update" next time a major version appears. This is fragile. It relies on whoever checks for updates knowing the difference between a patch and a major version jump, and reading the version number carefully every single time. On a Monday morning with fifty sites to update, that's a bad bet.

### Not auditing after team changes

When team members join or leave, their access to Joomla admin panels may change, but their past configuration changes remain. A developer who changed the update channel while testing something may have left the organisation months ago, and the setting sits there waiting. Automated monitoring catches this kind of configuration drift that manual reviews miss.

## A practical Joomla update channel checklist

Whether you manage one Joomla site or a thousand, the same steps apply:

1. **Audit all sites now.** Check the update channel on every Joomla site you manage. With mySites.guru, this is visible at a glance on the Joomla 6 compatibility page. Without it, you'll need to log into each site individually.

2. **Set every production site to Default.** No exceptions. If a site is live and serving users, its update channel should be Default.

3. **Only switch channels temporarily.** When you need the Joomla Next channel for a planned migration, enable it, perform the upgrade, and disable it immediately. Treat it like scaffolding: put it up, use it, take it down.

4. **Monitor continuously.** A one-time audit isn't enough. Settings change, team members make adjustments, and tutorials give bad advice. Use automated snapshot monitoring to catch changes as they happen.

5. **Keep backups current.** Even with the right channel, things can go wrong. Make sure your backup schedules are running and that you've tested a restore at least once.

6. **Check automated core updates too.** Joomla 5.4+ and 6.0 introduced automated core upgrades that can apply patches without admin interaction. Even with the right update channel, a site with automated updates enabled can still update itself at an inconvenient time. Audit both settings together. The right channel also cannot protect you from a bad release: 5.4.7 and 6.1.2 both shipped a core regression that makes Joomla ignore every Option set on an article.

7. **Document your migration process.** Write down the steps for a major version upgrade, including the step where you switch the channel back to Default. Make it part of the procedure, not an afterthought.

## Configuration management at scale

The update channel is one setting on one component in Joomla. But it's a good example of how a small misconfiguration can cause real damage when you're managing dozens or hundreds of sites.

mySites.guru applies the same approach here as it does with security headers, PHP version tracking, and end-of-life version monitoring: monitor automatically, flag deviations, and provide remote fixes.

If you're managing multiple Joomla sites and haven't checked your update channels recently, start with a free audit to see what mySites.guru finds across your connected sites.

**Further reading:** Joomla technical requirements - Joomla getting started guide

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Read more about safe upgrade strategies in our CMS updates guide.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**What is a Joomla update channel?**

A Joomla update channel is a setting in the Joomla Update component (Components > Joomla Update > Options) that controls which versions Joomla offers when you check for updates. The Default channel only offers minor and patch updates within your current major version, while the Joomla Next channel offers major version upgrades.

**What happens if I leave the Joomla Next update channel enabled on a production site?**

Joomla will offer the next major version (e.g. Joomla 5 to Joomla 6) as a regular update. If you or a team member clicks Update without realising, the site jumps to the new major version. This can break templates, extensions, and custom code that hasn't been tested against the new version.

**Can I roll back a Joomla major version upgrade?**

No. Joomla does not provide a built-in rollback mechanism for major version upgrades. The database schema changes during a major upgrade, so the only way back is to restore from a backup taken before the upgrade happened.

**How does mySites.guru detect a wrong update channel?**

mySites.guru reads the updatesource parameter from the Joomla Update component on every connected site during each snapshot. If any site is set to anything other than Default, the dashboard flags it with a red badge and the best practice audit raises an issue. You can fix it remotely with a single toggle.

**Does mySites.guru prevent accidental major version upgrades?**

Yes. When mySites.guru performs a Joomla core upgrade, it forces the update source to Default before applying the update, regardless of what the site's local setting is. This prevents the upgrade process from jumping to a newer major version series.

**What is the difference between the Joomla STS and LTS update channels?**

STS (Short Term Support) and LTS (Long Term Support) are legacy channel names from older Joomla versions. In modern Joomla (4, 5, and 6), the relevant channels are Default (minor/patch updates only), Joomla Next (major version upgrades), and Testing (pre-release builds). STS and LTS may still appear in some configurations but are effectively equivalent to Default.

**Should I use the Testing update channel on staging sites?**

The Testing channel provides access to alpha, beta, and release candidate builds. It is appropriate for dedicated testing environments where you are evaluating upcoming Joomla releases. Never use it on production sites, and never use it on staging sites that mirror production data unless you are specifically testing Joomla core compatibility.

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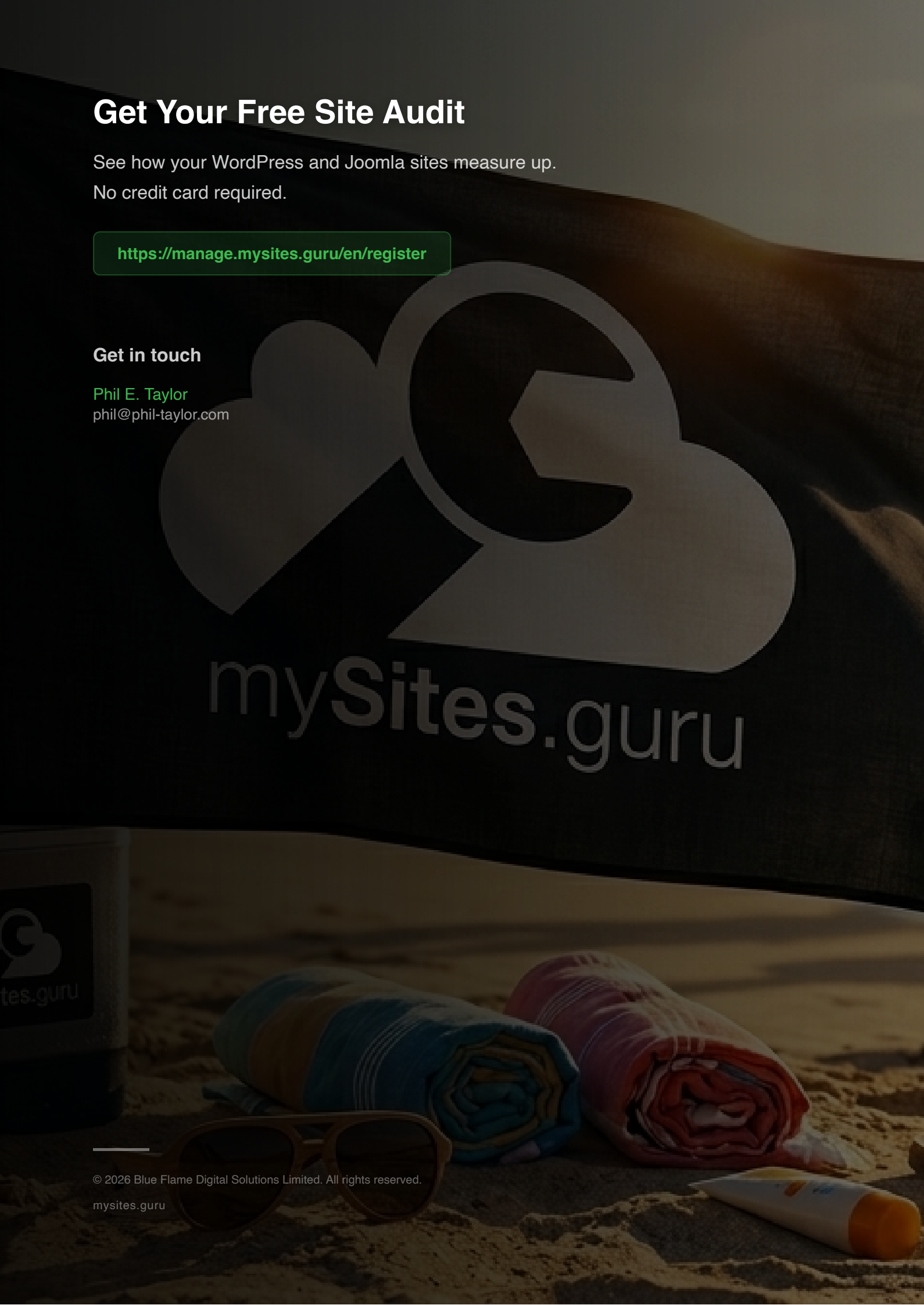


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