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A scheduled report by e-mail: a script, a cron job and an SMTP account

Cron Jobs

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A scheduled report by e-mail: a script, a cron job and an SMTP account

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To get a summary of the site in your e-mail every morning (the day's orders, enquiries received, new sign-ups) you need **three pieces**: a PHP script that fetches the figures from the database, an e-mail account the message goes out through, and a cron job that runs the script at the set time. All of it fits on a shared hosting plan.

The three pieces

Piece	What it does	Watch out for
PHP script	Runs the query, writes the text and sends it.	Keep it outside `public_html`. Credentials go in a separate file.
SMTP account	It is how the e-mail goes out.	Use a mailbox on your domain, with the connection details cPanel shows for that account.
Cron job	Runs the script at the right time.	The time is the server's.

Step by step

1. **Decide which figures.** Three or four are enough: how many orders, how many enquiries, how many new sign-ups. A report nobody reads to the end stops being opened.

2. **Create a read-only database user.** In cPanel, under MySQL Databases, create a user and give it only the query permission (SELECT). If the report is stolen, nobody can change anything.

3. **Write the script.** It connects with that user, runs the queries and builds plain text with the date in the subject. To send, use PHPMailer with SMTP: see **sending e-mail from your own code with PHPMailer**.

4 **Run it by hand once** and confirm the e-mail arrives, and arrives in the inbox.

5 **Schedule it.** Once a day, at an hour when the server is quiet, such as the small hours or before you reach work. The line has the full path to PHP and to the script: see **running a PHP script from a cron job**.

6 **Keep a log.** Add `>> /home/ACCOUNT/report.log 2>&1` to the line, so you know what happened if one day the e-mail does not come.

Design the report to be read in ten seconds. The most important figure in the e-mail subject, the rest in a few lines, always in the same order. Compare with yesterday or last week: a figure on its own says little, a change says a lot. If you want more detail, add a link rather than a huge table.

! **Do not put too much personal data in the e-mail.**
A report with full names, phone numbers and amounts stays in mailboxes, copies and phones. Send totals and counts, and a link to the panel where the detail is protected.

If the report lands in the junk folder, the problem is the domain and not the script: see **SPF, DKIM and DMARC: why your e-mail lands in spam**. If the database user or password changes, the script fails silently and the e-mail simply stops arriving. That is one more reason to notice when it is missing.

Make the script report when there is nothing
: “today, zero orders”. If a day’s e-mail goes missing, you know at once the problem is the job and not the business.

RECOMMENDED
Need a plan with cPanel, cron and mailboxes? See the hosting plans.
See the plans →

SEE ALSO

- Sending e-mail from your own code with PHPMailer →
- Running a PHP script from a cron job →
- Cron jobs: what they are for and how to create one →

Hosting plans →

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