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Hotlink protection: stop others using your bandwidth

Images, Files & Front-End

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Hotlink protection: stop others using your bandwidth

Images, Files & Front-End Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



Hotlinking is when another website displays an image of yours *straight from your server*, instead of keeping a copy on theirs. To their visitor it looks like an ordinary image; to you, every one of those visits is a request to your hosting account, with the usage that brings, and nothing in return. Protection does one simple thing: when a request comes from a page that is not yours, it refuses.

Switching it on in cPanel

1. **Log in to cPanel** (**how to get in**) and, in the **Security** section, open “Hotlink Protection”.

2. **Check the list of allowed addresses.** cPanel fills it in with the domains on the account. Add any variants that are missing: with and without `www`, on `http` and `https`, subdomains, and any other sites of yours that use these images.

3. **Pick the extensions to protect.** Images are the usual case (jpg, jpeg, png, gif, webp). Add others (pdf, mp4, zip) only if that is what is being taken.

4. **Leave the option that allows direct requests ticked.** Without it, anyone who opens the image by typing the address into the browser is refused too, and some programs that do not send the referring page stop working.

5. **Optional: set a replacement image.** Instead of an error, whoever hotlinks sees, say, a picture with your web address on it. Put whichever you like there.

6. **Test it.** Open the image directly (it should open), then place it on a page on another domain of yours (it should not show). Clear your browser cache before testing: see **clearing the cache**.

Three ways to do it

Way	When it fits	Watch out for
cPanel Hotlink Protection	The simplest: no files to edit.	Confirm the option exists on your account and that the list includes all your domains.
Rules in `.htaccess`	When you want fine control (per folder, per file type).	A syntax error gives a 500 error. Make a copy first.
Cloudflare's option	If the domain already goes through Cloudflare.	It is a Cloudflare setting, in your Cloudflare account, under Cloudflare's terms.

The hand-written rule for `.htaccess` is this (swap in your own domain and add the extensions you want):

```
RewriteEngine On
RewriteCond %{HTTP_REFERER} !^$
RewriteCond %{HTTP_REFERER} !^https?://(www\.)?asuaempresa.ao [NC]
RewriteRule \.(jpg|jpeg|png|gif|webp)$ - [F,NC]
```

Protection can also refuse people it should not.
Social network previews, image search engines, feed readers and mail programs may request images in a way the rule treats as hotlinking. After switching it on, share a link to your site and check the preview (**wrong preview on Facebook and WhatsApp**). If you use the images in an e-mail newsletter, test that too.

If the aim is only to save resources,
first check that the images are the right size: **image optimisation and WebP**. And to understand the traffic on your site, start with the **visitor statistics**.

NEED A HAND?

Switched protection on and a legitimate image stopped showing, or you still see requests from other sites? Send us the image address.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- **Image optimisation and WebP** →

- Visitor statistics: where they are and what they mean
- How to access cPanel Control Panel?

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