

ESCAPE FROM DREAMHOST

*A Complete, Step-by-Step Guide to Transferring Your Domains,
Email, and Websites Away from DreamHost*

*Written by someone who actually did it.
Verified against DreamHost and Cloudflare's actual UIs.
Dark patterns documented so you don't fall for them.*

ORDER OF OPERATIONS

1. Domains FIRST (transfer registrations to Cloudflare)
2. Then email (migrate to your new email provider)
3. Then hosting (migrate websites to your new host)
4. Then cancel DreamHost and never look back

Last updated: April 2026 | UI-verified for DreamHost and Cloudflare

BEFORE YOU START: THE BIG REASSURANCE

Transferring your domain registrations changes **nothing** about how your websites or email work. Your services (email, hosting) operate independently from your domain registrations.

Think of it this way: transferring a domain registration is like changing which bank holds your mortgage. Your actual house doesn't move, your mail still arrives, and your lights and water stay on.

The **only** way something can break is if DNS records get messed up during the process. But Cloudflare copies your existing DNS records automatically when you add a domain. All you have to do is **verify** that Cloudflare got them right. That's it.

✓ If you can compare two lists of DNS records and confirm they match, you can do this. Everything else is just clicking buttons.

PHASE 1: TRANSFER DOMAINS TO CLOUDFLARE

Start here. Do not skip ahead to email or hosting. Domains first.

Step 1: Inventory Your Domains

Log into the DreamHost panel. Go to **Domains** → **Manage Registrations**. Write down every domain you own, its expiration date, and whether WHOIS privacy is enabled. Screenshot this page for your records.

Step 2: Pick Your First Domain

Start with your **least important** domain as a practice run. Once you've successfully transferred one, the rest are identical. For the examples in this guide, we'll use **yourdomain.com**.

Step 3: Add the Domain to Cloudflare

You **must** do this before Cloudflare will let you transfer the registration. Log into Cloudflare, click **Add a Site**, enter your domain name, and select the **Free plan**.

■ **WHY "ADD A SITE"?** Cloudflare calls this "Add a Site" but it really just means "Add a Domain." Cloudflare **REQUIRES** every domain to be added this way **BEFORE** they'll let you transfer the registration in. This is true even for domains with **NO** website — including domains used only for email. It does **NOT** create a website. It does **NOT** cost anything. It just means Cloudflare takes over managing DNS for that domain. You cannot skip this step.

Cloudflare will automatically scan your existing DNS records. **Review them carefully** — every A record, CNAME, MX record, and TXT record. Make sure they exactly match what DreamHost has.

- For email-only domains, you'll mainly see MX records and maybe TXT records — that's normal.
- If anything is missing, add it manually.

■ **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT STEP.** If the DNS records match, nothing breaks. Get this right and the rest is easy.

■ **NAMESERVERS — DO NOT ASSUME THEY'RE THE SAME FOR EVERY DOMAIN.** Cloudflare assigns a specific pair of nameservers to each domain you add. Sometimes they reuse the same pair, sometimes they don't. EVERY time you add a domain, write down the exact nameservers Cloudflare assigns to THAT domain. Do NOT reuse nameservers from a different domain without verifying.

Step 4: Change Nameservers at DreamHost

In your DreamHost panel, find the nameserver settings for your domain. Replace DreamHost's nameservers with the two nameservers that Cloudflare assigned to **this specific domain** in Step 3. Hit Save.

Then **wait** for the Cloudflare dashboard to show your domain as "**Active.**" This usually takes minutes to a few hours, but can take up to 24 hours.

Test your website (if applicable) and your email while you wait. Everything should keep working exactly as before.

Step 5: Confirm Everything Still Works

Once Cloudflare shows "Active," verify: Does your website load? Can you send email? Can you receive email? If yes to all, your DNS is correctly set up at Cloudflare and nothing was disrupted.

✓ At this point, the domain registration is still at DreamHost, but DNS is managed by Cloudflare. This is a safe intermediate state. DreamHost can no longer mess with your DNS.

Step 6: Prepare the Domain for Transfer at DreamHost

■ **TIMING IS CRITICAL.** Do Steps 6a, 6b, and 6c in order, and do them when you're ready to proceed to Step 7 within the next day or two. Auth codes can expire. Some registrars automatically re-lock domains after 24–48 hours. Don't do these steps and then wait a week.

Step 6a: Disable WHOIS Privacy

Go to **Domains** → **Manage Registrations**. Click your domain. If privacy is on, turn it OFF.

■ **60-DAY LOCK TRAP!** When saving ANY changes to WHOIS/registrar contact info, look for a checkbox that says "Opt out of 60-day transfer lock" and CHECK IT. If you don't, ICANN rules automatically lock the domain for 60 days and you CANNOT transfer it during that time. This applies to any WHOIS change — even just turning off privacy.

■ **DARK PATTERN ALERT:** DreamHost's "Contact Information" page may try to force you to fill out all contact fields just to toggle privacy off. DO NOT fill in or change any contact information fields. If the page demands you enter data in all fields before it will let you save, ONLY disable privacy — do not change anything else. Changing contact info can trigger the 60-day lock even if you check the opt-out box. If DreamHost does not show the opt-out checkbox, do NOT change any contact fields at all.

Step 6b: Unlock the Domain

Same page — find the **Transfer Lock** column. If it says "Locked," click to change it to "Unlocked." This may take up to 24 hours to take effect at the registry level.

Tip: You can verify the unlock has propagated by going to lookup.icann.org, entering your domain, and checking the "Domain Status" field. If it still says **clientTransferProhibited**, the unlock hasn't propagated yet. When that status disappears, you're good.

Step 6c: Get the EPP/Auth Code

Go to **Domains** → **Transfer Registrations**.

■ **DARK PATTERN ALERT:** DreamHost buries the "transfer away" option. Look for small text that says "Or transfer away from DreamHost" — possibly under a large, prominent "TRANSFER TO DREAMHOST" section designed to distract you. Click the small link.

Click **Reveal Auth Code** next to your domain. It will either show you the code on screen or email it to your registrant email address. Copy it. Save it somewhere safe.

■ **AUTH CODES EXPIRE.** Some registrars invalidate auth codes after just a few days. Get the code and proceed to Step 7 promptly. Do not sit on it.

Step 7: Initiate the Transfer at Cloudflare

In your Cloudflare dashboard, go to **Domain Registration** → **Transfer Domains**. Select your domain. Enter the EPP/Auth code. Confirm payment — Cloudflare charges wholesale price (around \$10 for a .com) and adds one year to your registration. Submit.

Note: Cloudflare will not let you enter the auth code if it still thinks the domain is locked. If this happens, wait a few more hours for the unlock to propagate. Cloudflare's docs say to allow up to 5 hours, though some registrars may take up to 24.

■ Make sure your credit card on file at Cloudflare is valid before you submit. A payment failure after submitting the auth code can leave the transfer in a partially-started state.

Step 8: Watch Your Email — You Must APPROVE the Transfer

You'll receive emails from Cloudflare and possibly from DreamHost. Approve anything Cloudflare asks you to approve.

■ **CRITICAL — DO NOT FALL FOR THIS:** DreamHost may send you an email "asking" if you want to CANCEL the transfer. DO NOT CLICK CANCEL. DO NOTHING with that email. IGNORE IT. DreamHost has up to 5 days to release the domain. If you don't respond to their cancellation email, the transfer proceeds automatically. Clicking "cancel" kills the transfer and you'd have to start over.

Step 9: Confirm Transfer Completed

Check your Cloudflare dashboard — the domain should show as registered with Cloudflare. Test your website (if applicable) and email again. Everything working? This domain is now free.

■ **IF THE TRANSFER FAILS:** The most common reasons are an incorrect auth code, the domain was still locked, or WHOIS privacy was still on. Go back to Step 6, get a fresh auth code, double-check unlock status and privacy, and try again.

Step 10: Repeat for Each Remaining Domain

Repeat Steps 3 through 9 for each remaining domain. You can do them one at a time or a few at once once you're confident after the first one. Remember: check the nameservers Cloudflare assigns to EACH domain individually.

PHASE 2: MIGRATE YOUR EMAIL

Do this **after** all your domain registrations have been transferred to Cloudflare and all your DNS is managed by Cloudflare. This phase is much less scary because YOU now control DNS, not DreamHost.

This guide uses Proton Mail as the destination, but the process is similar for any email provider. The key steps are the same: set up your domain, create matching addresses, back up old email, and switch MX records.

Step 11: Set Up Your Domain in Your New Email Provider

Log into your new email provider's settings and add your custom domain. The provider will give you DNS records to add (MX, SPF, DKIM, DMARC). Write them all down but **don't add them yet**.

Step 12: Create All Your Email Addresses

For every DreamHost mailbox you have and are keeping, create a matching email address in your new provider. Same exact addresses.

Step 13: Back Up ALL Your Existing Email

Open each DreamHost mailbox in a mail client (Apple Mail, Thunderbird, etc.). Select all important emails and copy them to a local folder on your computer.

■ **DO NOT SKIP THIS STEP.** Once DreamHost mailboxes are deleted, those emails are gone forever. There is no recovery.

Step 14: Switch MX Records

Log into **Cloudflare** (not DreamHost — you control DNS now). Go to your domain's DNS settings. Delete the old DreamHost MX records. Add all the DNS records your new email provider gave you in Step 11 — MX, SPF, DKIM, DMARC. Save.

Step 15: Monitor Both Inboxes for 5 Days

Check DreamHost webmail AND your new provider daily. Make sure new emails arrive at your new provider. Some may trickle to DreamHost for a day while DNS propagates.

Step 16: Test Sending

Send test emails from your new provider to Gmail, iCloud, etc. Make sure they arrive and don't land in spam.

Step 17: Set Up Your Devices

Configure email on your computer and phone using your new provider's app or settings.

Step 18: Wait One More Week

Keep checking DreamHost webmail for stragglers.

Step 19: Delete DreamHost Mailboxes

Go to **Mail** → **Manage Email** in the DreamHost panel. Delete the mailboxes. Screenshot all confirmations.

PHASE 3: MIGRATE YOUR WEBSITE(S)

This phase can overlap with Phase 2. Skip it if you have no websites hosted at DreamHost. This example uses WP Engine as the destination, but the DNS step applies to any host.

Step 20: Confirm Capacity at Your New Host

Make sure your plan at your new host can accommodate your sites.

Step 21: Create a New Site at Your New Host

Set up a new environment and get the temporary URL.

Step 22: Migrate Your Site

Use your new host's migration plugin or tool to copy everything from DreamHost.

Step 23: Test on the Temporary URL

Check everything — pages, images, forms, all of it.

Step 24: Point DNS to Your New Host

In **Cloudflare** (you control DNS now!), update the A record or CNAME for your domain to point to your new host instead of DreamHost. Your site is now served by your new host.

PHASE 4: CANCEL DREAMHOST

Do this only when all three phases above are complete.

Step 25: Final Checklist

- ✓ All domains registered at Cloudflare
- ✓ All DNS managed at Cloudflare
- ✓ All email running through your new provider
- ✓ All websites hosted at your new host
- ✓ All important old emails backed up on your computer
- ✓ DreamHost has ZERO services you still depend on

Step 26: Screenshot Everything

Screenshot your DreamHost billing page, account status, and services list (which should be empty). Save all screenshots.

Step 27: Cancel DreamHost

Go to **Account** → **Manage Account** → **Begin Account Closure**. Screenshot every confirmation screen along the way. Save all confirmation emails.

Step 28: Monitor Your Bank for 60 Days

Watch for any surprise charges. Dispute them with your bank immediately if DreamHost tries anything, using all your screenshots as evidence.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

This week	Inventory everything. Transfer your first (least important) domain to Cloudflare (Steps 1–9).
Next 1–2 weeks	Transfer remaining domains to Cloudflare.
Once domains are at CF	Start email provider setup. Back up email. Switch MX records in Cloudflare.
1–2 weeks after MX switch	Confirm all email on new provider. Delete DreamHost mailboxes.
Anytime during above	Migrate any remaining website(s) to your new host.
When everything is off DH	Screenshot everything. Cancel DreamHost. Celebrate.

APPENDIX: KNOWN DREAMHOST DARK PATTERNS

These are documented deceptive UI practices observed in DreamHost's panel as of April 2026. They are designed to prevent you from leaving.

The Contact Info Trap	When you try to disable WHOIS privacy, DreamHost's Contact Information page may demand that you fill in ALL contact fields before it will let you save — even though you only want to toggle one setting. Filling in those fields counts as a "registrant contact change" under ICANN rules, which triggers an automatic 60-day transfer lock. This effectively traps you for two more months. Only disable privacy. Do not change any contact fields.
The Hidden Transfer Link	The "transfer away from DreamHost" option is buried in tiny text beneath a large, prominent "Transfer TO DreamHost" section. This is designed to make you think transferring away isn't possible or to make you accidentally transfer a new domain IN rather than your existing domain OUT.
The Cancellation Email Trick	After you initiate a transfer, DreamHost may send you an email that appears to ask you to "confirm" but actually asks if you want to cancel the transfer. If you click the link, the transfer dies. Ignore any emails from DreamHost about the transfer. The transfer completes automatically if you do nothing.
UI Documentation Mismatch	DreamHost's own help documentation frequently does not match their actual panel UI. Buttons, links, and menu items described in their docs may be in different locations, named differently, or simply not exist. Do not rely on DreamHost's docs — rely on this guide.

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If it helped you escape, pass it along to someone else who's stuck.*