

What is a 404 error?

By Martyn Casserly, techadvisor.co.uk Contributor | 12/2/20

'Error 404 Page Not Found' are not words you want to see online. Here's what it means and what you should do if you encounter them.



404 PAGE NOT FOUND

HYDRA has stolen this page from the S.H.I.E.L.D. database!

Check that you typed the address correctly, go back to your previous page or try using our site search to find something specific.



While it's true that most of us aren't exactly up to speed with internet error codes, there is one that we're all likely to have come across at one point during our adventures online. The 404 error code is the most common, but what does it actually mean?

When do you see a 404 error code?

The time when you'll encounter a 404 error code is when you click on a link to a web page that doesn't exist - it may have been once, but is no longer there.

You might also mistype or paste an incomplete web address into the URL bar, which will have the same result of taking you to a page that doesn't exist.

And instead of the content you were expecting you see a message that includes '404 error', often followed by 'Page Not Found'.

Why do you see a 404 error code?

The code is there to tell you that either the webpage you're trying to find no longer exists or it may have been moved to another address and no one has set up a forwarding process to take you to the new one automatically.

There are other reasons for the code appearing, which can include the server being down or experiencing problems.

Whatever the issue, the outcome is the same, you will not be able to see the content you wanted to.

Why 404?

The 404 code is part of the wider HTTP response status codes that help identify the current functions of servers and the web in general. There are five classes of status codes, which begin with either 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 and are followed by two further digits that denote any specific problems or ongoing processes.

The codes are kept and coordinated by the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, which outlines the five different types of HTTP response status codes in the following way;

- 1xx: Informational - Request received, continuing process
- 2xx: Success - The action was successfully received, understood, and accepted
- 3xx: Redirection - Further action must be taken in order to complete the request
- 4xx: Client Error - The request contains bad syntax or cannot be fulfilled
- 5xx: Server Error - The server failed to fulfil an apparently valid request

404 is simply registered with the explaining tag – Not Found.

To soften the blow, some sites have created special designs that appear when a 404 error occurs, just like the Marvel example accompanying this article, and you'll find a fine selection of examples available to view on this post by Creative Bloq.

How can I fix a 404 error?

While there's not much you can do if a server is permanently offline or experiencing problems, you should quickly check that the URL you used to navigate to the page is correct.

If you've clicked on a link, then it's possible that the URL has an error that goes to a page that doesn't exist or has been moved. Try going to the main site instead, say

www.techadvisor.co.uk, then using the search function or the navigation menu to find the page or content from there, rather than taking the direct route that's returning a 404 error.

Reloading the page is another option, as it could be that the moment you tried to land on the page, the server had an issue. The same is true if you return later that day to see if the problem has cleared up.

You can always try a site like Down Detector that will tell you the current status of a website, so you'll know if there are any reported problems. (One from Tom

<https://downforeveryoneorjustme.com/>).

Finally, another option is to clear the cache on your browser, as the stored version of the webpage could be causing problems.