Choosing a Web Host

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One of the questions I get all the time is which Web Host should host their web site.   My standard answer is "it depends". It depends on a lot of things.   Before you pick a Web Host you need to know what kind of site you need. I recommend you read *What Kind of Website Does Your Organization Need?* And then come back to this post. Once you know what kind of site your organization needs and what kind of user you will have you are ready to pick your Web Host.

Types of Host

There are three general types of servers offered by web hosting companies: Shared servers, virtual servers, and dedicated servers.

Shared Servers

- If your website is on a shared server, it will share server resources with other websites on the same server. This is often the most affordable solution, but can lead to the worst performance if other sites are hogging your resources. These are generally not recommended if you are trying to run an eCommerce site.

Virtual Servers

- Virtual servers are virtual dedicated servers, and can provide a lot more stability and greater resources. These are highly recommended for small businesses that run an eCommerce store or have a decent number of monthly visitors.

Dedicated Servers

- Dedicated servers are entire physical servers dedicated to just your website. These are typically used for corporate websites or small businesses that do a lot of business or have very high traffic. Dedicated servers are the most expensive option, but have the least downtime and most resources.

Dedicated Servers

Now that you know what kind of Hosts are out there you can make an educated decision which type of host you will need for your website. Here are a few more things you need to consider

Services

 Knowing what kind of website you want will also help you determine what services and tools you will need. Ensure that the web host you choose has the tools and services that you need to best manage your site. This includes cPanel, WordPress or other blog integration, FTP access, analytics, and a variety of other back-end tools.

- Check to ensure that the host allows you to configure an email address using the domain name that you register.

- If you are using your site for ecommerce make sure you can set up a store, handle inventory and take and process transactions.

Reliability

You should think about how important it is for your website to be up all the time.   No one out there in Web-Host-land is up 100% of the time. If they claim that they are – RUN. Reliability is important and you should look for a web host with a 98% or better uptime. Things happen, power outages occur, floods do take down data centers and hardware fails. All the major Web Hosts have redundancy built in where your site is mirrored on other web servers so uptime should be very high. You also want to look into how the host handles scheduled down time and how their customers are notified.

Technical Support

This is HUGE for me. I DON'T want to be talking to someone who is reading off a script or googling a database. I can do that myself. If I'm calling Tech Support you can bet that I've done my homework and tried to resolve whatever it is before I call them. I want a live, competent person on the other end of the phone who actually has a background in Technical issues or Watson but I heard IBM has Watson way too busy playing Jeopardy.

I also want to be able to access technical support by more than one method such as email, instant messenger, and web submission.   If my site is down and it's mission critical I want to know that I can pick up the phone and call and get a real person who can help me get the job done.

Customer Service

Not to be confused with Tech Support because they are NOT Tech Support. Customer Service should be people who can help with picking a plan, registering a Domain name, add more email accounts and explaining all the plans they offer.   I want someone who is friendly that I can understand. I want someone who can tell me how much everything I want is going to cost me and I don't want to wait on hold forever.

Company Stability

This one is important. I don't want to give a company my credit card number to host my site for 3 years and they go out of business in three months. I don't want to learn that they are off-shoring jobs to the lowest bidder so their CEO can get a million dollar bonus. I want to see stability. How long have they been in business for? Is it 3 years, 5 years, 25 years? Will they still be around when my contract is up? Companies come and go and the web hosting industry can be particularly prone to fly-by-night companies. Added to that is the prevalence of resellers that have bulk accounts through a major host and resell their services. If you deal with a reseller, make sure you research the reputation of the reseller as well as the primary company. Longevity is often an indication of stability. If your host is established in the industry you have a better chance of them being there long term so you won't have to move to another company down the line.

Space and Bandwidth

I don't like restriction. Heck, I grew up in a state that its motto is *Live Free or Die!* So don't hold me back with crappy slow bandwidth and space limitations. If I'm supplying videos and music I don't want my users to have to buffer every 30 seconds because they won't visit my site if they can't access the content. I prefer unlimited on both but do your research. This is where know if you have a shared server, virtual server or dedicated server comes in handy. Also, knowing what you can afford and what you can live helps with your decision making as well.

Pricing

How important is price. Be careful. Some sites will give you a "free" website but charge you $50-100+ a month to host your site. Some sites will give you the first year at $4 a month and then jack the price up to $20 a month after that.   I tend to feel $10 a month for what I do is reasonable.

With that said I recommend x10hosting.com for my students. It's really a no brainer.   They only need a little bit of space and most of them are broke. Seriously, have you seen the price of tuition these days? This company message is Free Hosting for the masses. They are located in Tilton, New Hampshire and being born in the Granite State I am very fond of them. They are a local company employing local technical people keeps a small town alive by providing good paying jobs. To me this is a win/win situation.

Yes, there are other bigger players out there but here is why I tell my students they need an account with x10hosting.

X10hosting provides unmetered bandwidth and unlimited disk space. You get cPanel, FPT, e-mail and MySQL. If you are a student with limited funds and big tuition bills this is a sweet deal. If you are a starving Web Designer (like me) you have a place to create your ePortfolio because, let's face it, in today's world you can't even get a response to an application if you don't have an ePortfolio that demonstrates what you know and what you can do.

So there is a lot of stuff to think over. Do your own research and then choose a host you can grow with.