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Why is Your Website Host so Important?

Your web site lives and dies by your web site host. It is important to find out some things up-front, so that there are no surprises later.

Do Your Homework

Part of web site design is figuring out which services and features you wish to offer through your, or your customer's, site. You will need to know things like the following.

1) **Web Site Footprint**

This is the total disk space that all of your web files and folders take up. You should also plan for the future. If you see expanding what you offer, or you are intent on growing the popularity of your site, make sure you sign-up for a plan that can expand with you.

2) **Website Traffic**

Though is it sometimes called transfer, bandwidth, etc., what it really means is the sum of total size of all the files on your website that are transferred to a visitor's browser over a given time period (usually a month). As you can imagine, popular web sites will have more traffic. Also, if you are serving heavy or media-rich pages, such as movies, pod casts, or large files, your traffic will be higher.

3) **Features**

You need to figure out what features your host will need to provide. For example, if you intend to have a form that sends you an email (without opening a local mail client), you will need access to a server-side script. If you plan to stream videos, your host will need to offer streaming protocols.

What to Ask Your Hosting

Hosts generally post most of this information on their site, along with the prices. However, it is always better to get the answers up-front if there is any doubt. Any host should be happy to provide this information.

Domain

The owner of a domain is the Registrant. If you are not the Registrant, it is not your domain. If it is not your domain, you cannot change hosting providers without the consent of the Registrant.

Any Domain you purchase should be owned by you, or your customer (even if you purchase it for them), not by the hosting provider. Many hosting providers offer incredibly low domain registration charges, but do not tell you that they own the domain. If you read the *fine print* with some of these hosts, you can move to another provider, but you have to pay a *relocation* fee. Often this fee more than offsets you initial savings.

As of this writing, if you register a domain with GoDaddy.com and do not renew your registration when it expires, GoDaddy has the first option to take the domain. In the past GoDaddy has been accused of *taking* domains, but they seem to be putting forth great effort to dispel this issue.

If you register a domain through a web hosting service, you must ask, "Who is the Registrant?"

Costs

In the web hosting world, you really tend to get what you pay for. Great hardware and service do not come cheap.

These are the basic questions you need to ask a hosting provider.

- 1) What is the monthly hosting fee?
- 2) Is there an initial setup fee, separate from the monthly fee?
- 3) How much disk space do I get?
 - a) Is there a surcharge for going over the space limit?
 - b) How much for more?
- 4) How much traffic is my site allowed?
 - a) Is there a surcharge for extra data transfer?

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- b) How much for more?
- 5) Technical Support
 - a) What are the support hours?
 - b) If not, what is the cost
 - c) Is the support via telephone, email or chat?

Features

Many hosts offer features listed below. Sometimes these features are available in packages, or tiers of service, and sometimes they are *a la carte*. Be sure to ask if there is an associated cost with each feature. Expect some features to have a set-up cost in addition to monthly costs.

- 1) Email
 - a) Accounts
 - b) Email Security
 - c) Anti-spam
 - d) Virus Protection
- 2) Database Support
 - a) Microsoft SQL
 - b) MySQL
- 3) Common Gateway Interface (CGI) Support
 - a) What scripts are provided?
 - b) Can you upload you own scripts?
- 4) Server-side Scripting Support
 - a) ASP.NET
 - b) ASP
 - c) PHP
 - d) JSP
 - e) Other
- 5) Guest FTP
- 6) Streaming Protocol Support
- a) How many connections?
- 7) SSL Support
 - a) Shared certificate
 - b) Domain specific Certificate
- 8) Password Protected Areas
- 9) Web Site Statistics
- 10) Shopping Cart
 - a) Gateway Provider
 - i) Innovative Merchant Services (IMS),
 - ii) PayPal®,
 - iii) VeloCT
 - iv) Authorize.net
 - b) Payment Types
 - i) American Express
 - ii) Discovery
 - iii) MasterCard
 - iv) Visa
 - v) Debt Card
 - vi) Collect on Delivery (COD)
 - c) Reporting
 - d) Payment Schedules

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Technical

Though this is the most esoteric of the sections of this document, it may be helpful to those in administrative roles, when choosing a host.

- 1) Up-Time
 - a) 99% up-time means you are down 3.65 days per year
 - b) 99.9% up-time means you are down 8 hours and forty-five minutes per year
 - c) 99.99% up-time means you are down 52.56 minutes per year
 - d) *Five Nines* or 99.999% up-time means you are down only 5 minutes and fifteen seconds per year (consider this a minimum standard for top-notch business sites)
 - e) Is there a schedule of planned outages
- 2) Computer Hardware
 - a) 24/7 Monitoring
 - b) Redundant
 - c) Fail-over
 - d) Back-up Generator
 - e) Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS)
 - f) Co-Location
- 3) Network
 - a) Bandwidth
 - b) 24/7 Monitoring
 - c) Redundant
 - d) Fail-over
- e) Back-up Generator
- f) UPS
- 4) Operating System
 - a) Unix
 - b) Linux
 - c) Windows
 - d) Mac/OS
- 5) Web Server (Netcraft: Web Server Survey Archives http://news.netcraft.com/archives/web_server_survey.html)
 - a) Apache
 - b) Microsoft
 - c) Google
 - d) Sun
 - e) LightTPD
 - f) Zeus
- 6) About how many virtual hosts per server?
- 7) How often is my web site backed up?
- 8) Are DNS services provided?
- 9) What are the Security provisions?
 - a) Internet
 - b) On-site