

# “Don't Buy Web Hosting!”



.....Until you read this first!

Simple Techniques to **Save** Time, Energy and **Money** on Web Hosting!

## Introduction

Don't buy web hosting without reading this first!

Yes, its true, you are going to find some HUGE money saving tips and resources. I guarantee you will earn back the money you paid for this guide with the money you will have saved, and then some!!!!

You are going to save money with [Hosting Rebates and Coupons](#), DIY tips, techniques and resources that will help you choose a better provider (not just based on looks!) so you get the best bang for your buck.

Ok, you have your web site built and are now confused as to all the choices you have in order to find a home for your site.

It is good to make a right choice the first time, because if you have to move to another hosting service, it will cost you time and you will lose some of your valued customers due to the downtime setting up with another host.

You will also have to pay set up and hosting fees for a new account.

## Choosing the best solution can be more of a challenge

Normally you get what you pay for when it comes to web hosting. Ask yourself a few questions about your needs. Do you aim for a business or personal website?

What kind of customer service and technical support do you want? What about security and privacy? When your business grows will the provider be able to handle your needs?

Is support for e-commerce, domain name registration included? What kind of website tools, control panel, and user interface are offered?

## Evaluate the features of each web hosting provider

Find one that fits your needs to support your small business website or personal site. If it's not clear what the services are, call or email to get clarification.

A good web hosting provider will be glad to spend time with you in order to get your questions answered and possibly gain your trust. Reliability in terms of uptime and performance is crucial for your web hosting provider.

Make sure that the companies you are evaluating have 100% uptime (or close to), and that their performance is fast and consistent.

## **Ask for references**

Email the references, ask them about their experience with the particular provider. Search the Net for comments regarding reliability and support.

Check out where the company is located. This may affect performance and technical support capabilities. Security and privacy are important especially if you going to use your website for a business.

Make sure that high security and privacy features are included. Spam and virus filtering must be part of the basic service. Your website will be important for you, so take your time and compare the features, capabilities, and costs from several different web service companies.

You are more likely to succeed the first time around if you do your homework and consider more than just the cost. To find the right affordable web hosting, you need to find one that offer what you really need. Don't sign up with a web hosting provider who offers you extra services and add ons you won't need.

Here's short list off what you'll absolutely need to have, no matter what web host package you choose.

## **The most important is top notch support**

To evaluate if the support is good, try them out! Do they answer your questions quickly and thoroughly, and are the answers in an understandable "language"? Are they available 24 hours?

Is it easy to get in touch with them? Test them out over a few days or a week to make sure they really are available. Let them prove that they can address your concerns quickly and effectively.

## **Your web site must be available**

You do need guarantees for the uptime - how often will your website be functioning properly? Having no uptime, is like buying a car with out fuel tank - it's useless.

Even with affordable web hosting, you must aim for 99.9% uptime. Your site must be up and running smoothly. Just like a car without fuel tank, a website that crashes 2% of the time is worthless.

If you see 98% uptime, it's not good enough. Look for another business web hosting.

## **User interface**

Another key ingredient in finding the best affordable web hosting is to make sure the control panel is simple to use. Especially if you're not a skilled programmer.

The web hosting company must provide you with an easy to use program that allows you to manage your site. If available, watch a demo. That is the best way to really get a feel for the control panel.

It's comparable to take a new car for a test drive. See how your web site look sitting behind "the wheel".

## Domain name

Does the small business web site hosting you're looking at include a domain name? If you need to purchase your domain name, keep in mind that most companies don't offer you any help here.

Some companies charge you a small fee to register your domain name with them. A few companies actually throw it in for free.

You can find the web hosting package you're looking for. Just make sure that you first determine your needs. Then go out and find the web hosting company that matches.

## Here are some basic things to consider when you take the dive and you finally choose a Web Hosting Service:

### **IMPORTANT before choosing a HOST:**

These days you will find hundreds of thousands of web hosting providers on the net, everything from a 16 year old running it from his bedroom, to a smaller ma 'n pa home biz to a huge corporate organization. So with all these options, which is YOUR best option? There's a great site called [16hosts](http://16hosts.com) that does all the work for you, they have web hosting specialists that work around the clock researching all different types of web hosting providers. They've narrowed it down to only the most reputable and most reliable hosts on the net. Not only is this a free service that they provide for anyone looking for hosting services, but they also **PAY YOU** to try the hosts that they recommend by offering their own hosting rebates! Coupons are available as well on various hosting plans.

So for anyone who is looking to choose a web hosting provider - go to [www.16hosts.com](http://www.16hosts.com). You'll have all the research done for you and you're going to save yourself a **TON** of money with coupons and rebate's that only they offer. They offer this service for any web hosting need you may have, including shared, reseller, dedicated and VPS!

### **Choosing a Commercial Web Host**

#### **Reliability and speed of access**

Not only should the web host be reliable and fast, it should guarantee its uptime (the time when it is functional). Look for a minimum uptime of 99%. In fact, even 99% is actually too low - it really should be 99.5% or higher. The host should provide some sort of refund (eg prorated refund or discount) if it falls below that figure. Note though that guarantees are often hard to enforce from your end - the host usually requires all sorts of documentation. However, without that guarantee, the web host will have little incentive to ensure that its servers are running all the time.

## **Data Transfer (Traffic/Bandwidth)**

Data transfer (sometimes loosely referred to as "traffic" or "bandwidth") is the amount of bytes transferred from your site to visitors when they browse your site.

Don't believe any commercial web host that advertises "unlimited bandwidth". The host has to pay for the bandwidth, and if you consume a lot of it, they will not silently bear your costs. Many high bandwidth websites have found this out the hard way when they suddenly receive an exorbitant bill for having "exceeded" the "unlimited bandwidth". Always look for details on how much traffic the package allows. I personally always stay clear of any host that advertises "unlimited transfer", even if the exact amount is specified somewhere else (sometimes buried in their policy statements). Usually you will find that they redefine "unlimited" to be limited in some way.

To give you a rough idea of the typical traffic requirements of a website, most new sites that are not software archives or the like use less than 3GB of bandwidth per month. Your traffic requirements will grow over time, as your site becomes more well-known (and well-linked), so you will need to also check their policy for overages: is there a published charge per GB over the allowed bandwidth? Is the charge made according to actual usage or are you expected to pre-pay for a potential overage? It is better not to go for hosts that expect you to prepay for overages, since it is very hard to foresee when your site will exceed its bandwidth and by how much.

## **Disk space**

For the same reason as bandwidth, watch out also for those "unlimited disk space" schemes. Most sites need less than 5MB of web space, so even if you are provided with a host that tempts you with 200MB or 500MB (or "unlimited space"), be aware that you are unlikely to use that space, so don't let the 500MB space be too big a factor in your consideration when comparing with other web hosts. The hosting company is also aware of that, which is why they feel free to offer you that as a means of enticing you to host there. As a rough gauge, thefreecountry.com, which had about 150 pages when this article was first written, used less than 5MB for its pages and associated files.

## **Technical support**

Does its technical support function 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (often abbreviated 24/7), all year around? Note that I will not accept a host which does not have staff working on weekends or public holidays. You will be surprised at how often things go wrong at the most inconvenient of times. Incidentally, just because a host advertises that it has 24/7 support does not necessarily mean that it really has that kind of support. Test them out by emailing at midnight and on Saturday nights, Sunday mornings, etc. Check out how long they take to respond. Besides speed of responses, check to see if they are technically competent. You wouldn't want to sign up for a

host that is run by a bunch of salesmen who only know how to sell and not fix problems.

### **FTP, PHP, Perl CGI-BIN access, SSI, .htaccess, telnet, SSH crontabs**

If you are paying for a site, you really should make sure you have all of these. Note that some commercial hosts do not allow you to install PHP or CGI scripts without their approval. This is not desirable since it means that you have to wait for them before you can implement a feature on your site. ".htaccess" is needed if you are to customise your error pages (pages that display when, say, a user requests for a non-existent page on your site) or to protect your site in various ways (such as to prevent bandwidth theft and hot linking, etc). Telnet or SSH access is useful for certain things, including testing CGI scripts, maintaining databases, etc. Cron jobs may be needed for programs that you need to be run periodically (eg once a day). Check to see if these facilities are provided.

### **SSL (secure server), MySQL, Shopping Cart**

If you are planning on doing any sort of business through your website, you might want to look out to see if the host provides these facilities. These facilities normally involve a higher priced package or additional charges. The main thing is to check to see if they are available at all before you commit to the host. You will definitely need SSL if you plan to collect credit card information on your site.

### **Email, Autoresponders, POP3, Mail Forwarding**

If you have your own site, you would probably want to have email addresses at your own domain, like sales@yourdomain.com, etc. Does the host provide this with the package? Does it allow you to have a catch-all email account that allows anyone@yourdomain.com to wind up being routed to you? Can you set an email address to automatically reply to the sender with a preset message (called an autoresponder)? Can you retrieve your mail with your email software? Can it be automatically forwarded to your current email address?

### **Control Panel**

This is called various names by different hosts, but essentially, they all allow you to manage different aspects of your web account yourself. Typically, and at the very minimum, it should allow you to do things like add, delete, and manage your email addresses, and change passwords for your account. I would not go for a host where I have to go through their technical support each time I want to change a password or add/delete an email account. Such chores are common maintenance chores that every webmaster performs time and time again, and it would be a great hassle if you had to wait for their technical support to make the changes for you.

## **Subdomains, virtual hosting**

For those who are thinking of selling web space or having multiple domains or subdomains hosted in your account, you should look to see if they provide this, and the amount extra that they charge for this (whether it is a one-time or monthly charge, etc).

## **Server**

Is the type of operating system and server important? Whether you think so or not on the theoretical level, there are a few practical reasons for looking out for the type of server.

In general, if you want to use things like ASP, you have no choice but to look for a Windows NT/2000/XP machine for your server.

Otherwise my preference is to sign up for accounts using the often cheaper, more stable and feature-laden Unix systems running the Apache server. In fact, if dynamically generated pages that can access databases (etc) is what you want, you can always use the more portable (and popular) PHP instead of tying yourself down to ASP. Another reason to prefer Unix-based web hosts (which include web hosts using systems like Linux, FreeBSD, OpenBSD, Solaris, etc) using the Apache web server is that these servers allow you to configure a lot of facilities that you typically need on your site (error pages, protecting your images, blocking email harvesters, blocking IP addresses, etc) without having to ask your web host to implement them.

## **Price**

I was actually hesitant to list this, but I guess it's futile not to. However, I would caution that while price is always a factor, you should realise that you often get what you pay for, although it's not necessarily true that the most expensive hosts are the best.

## **Monthly/Quarterly/Annual Payment Plans**

Most web hosts allow you to select an annual payment plan that gives you a cheaper rate than if you were to pay monthly. My current personal preference is to pay monthly with all new web hosts until I'm assured of their reliability and honesty. Paying monthly allows me to switch web hosts quickly when I find that the current host does not meet my requirements: this way, I'm not tied down to a bad web host because I have prepaid for an entire year. I do this even if the new web host guarantees that they will refund the balance if I'm dissatisfied, since at the point I sign up, I have no assurance that they will honour their guarantee. Later (usually after many months or even more than a year), when I'm satisfied with the host, I often change payment plans to the discounted annual plans. However, these days almost ALL web host providers offer 30 days money back guarantee, some times more. This is a MUST for hosts that only have annual billing cycles. Therefore, if you like the host but they only offer annual, try them out IF they have a

money back guarantee. Don't let a few months come between you and a good hosting provider.

### Where's the Catch?

We've tried to list here some of the "Gotchas" you need to be aware of when looking for a webhosting company to host your site. Some of these are tricks, some are business practices, others are just minor issues. Reading carefully the webhost's terms of use and acceptable use policies you will be able to find these. Anyway it is always better to know what to look for. So here are some of the most common "catches".

- Unlimited space, transfer, etc. Actually it is not possible. Almost all hosts that have "unlimited" plans, specify in their Acceptable Use Policies that no site can use an "excessive" amount of resources. So if your site is using too much disk space, bandwidth, or CPU time, these "unlimited" hosts will ask you to upgrade, pay for the resources used or just host your site elsewhere. We do not recommend using "unlimited" webhosts so you know exactly what you're getting.
- Daily transfer limits or limits on the number of hits per day. Very few hosts have these, but you should be aware that you can't just multiply by 30 to get the monthly transfer limit because transfer usage is uneven.
- Setup fees. Some hosts have setup fees some do not. Usually when you go for monthly contract, there is a setup fee. If you for an year contract the setup fee is waived. Also some hosts will hide the fact that there is a setup fee until you get to the payment page. So, be careful. Always check what you are paying for.
- Limits on file size or on the number of files you can have on your site. Yes some host have such limits, really. Well, we recommend that you choose a company where there are no such limits.
- FTP transfer limit. Few hosts have limits on FTP use.
- Limit on database size that is only listed in the terms of use.
- High extra space and additional transfer fees. It is normal for extra space and transfer to cost more than they do for the initial account, but check if these are not too high.
- No 24/7 support. If you own a personal site, you will be most probably working on it in the evenings or over the weekend. So 24/7 support is a must.
- No control panel. This may be OK for experienced webmasters but many new users need a

control panel.

- Limit on monthly site hits. Few hosts do that in addition to transfer limits.
- No money back guarantee. What if you do not like the service? Or if your plans change and you no longer need a webhost? Most webhosting companies do have 30 days moneyback guarantee.

### Resellers?

Not all hosting companies own or lease their own web servers. Some of them are actually resellers for some other hosting company. The disadvantage of using a reseller is the possibility that you are dealing with people who don't know much about the system they are selling and who take longer to help you (they have to transmit your technical support request to the actual hosting company for it to be acted upon). However, this also depends on both the reseller and the underlying hosting company. It is thus wise not to rule out all resellers; there are a number of reliable and fast ones who are actually quite good and cheap. In fact, a number of resellers sell the same packages cheaper than their original hosting company. If you find out that a particular company is a reseller, you will need to investigate **both** the reseller and the real hosting company.

### International

If you don't live in the USA, you have the option of hosting your site with some local provider. The advantage here is their familiarity with the local laws and easy resources to those laws should it be necessary. It should be your choice if your target audience is local (eg a local fast food delivery service). On the other hand, hosting it in USA has the advantage of faster access for what is probably the largest number of your overseas visitors (particularly if you have an English-speaking audience). You also have a large number of hosting companies to choose from, and as a result, cheaper prices too.

### Others' Reviews

You should make it a point to check out what others have to say about the web host. Some of the places you can do this include forums where people rant and rave good and bad about various web hosts they've chosen throughout their experiences. Don't skip this step, or you might find yourself being suckered by a host that everyone else is steering clear of.

Some **hot hosting** forums include:



[www.webhostingtalk.com](http://www.webhostingtalk.com)

[www.hostingforum.ca](http://www.hostingforum.ca)

[www.webhostingforum.com](http://www.webhostingforum.com)

[www.hosthideout.com](http://www.hosthideout.com)

[www.hostbidder.com](http://www.hostbidder.com)

[www.webtalkforums.com](http://www.webtalkforums.com)

[www.web-hostinginfo.com](http://www.web-hostinginfo.com)

### The Myth of the Perfect Commercial Host

In general, I doubt that there are any "perfect" web hosting companies around. Note that even if you are prepared to pay a huge price for your hosting needs, it does not guarantee that your host is any good. This is an interesting industry where a high price does not necessarily yield quality hosting and support.

On the other hand, one thing you can probably be sure of is that you will not get top-notch support if you only pay (say) \$10 a month. At that price, which company can afford to hire enough good help to cater to all its users?

Like me, you'll probably wind up settling for a trade-off between price, reliability and features that you're willing to live with.

**How much space do you really need??** – You must read this. Lots of BAD hosts offer the moon and the stars and to the average Joe, it seems like a great deal! – Be aware of hosts with offers that are too good to be true! Here's how:

Many web hosts try to sell you a large amount of web hosting space that then costs you a lot each month. However, you may not need this much space. Have you ever calculated just how much disc space (MB) your web site uses? Do you really need an expensive hosting solution for your web site?

For my first web site, I purchased 20mb of disc space and wondered if this would be enough as I added pages to it. Well, recently I checked the size of this site which had grown to over 20 pages. To my surprise the size was only 3,269KB. This means it only uses a little over 3Mb of disk space.

Most of my friends sites also only use 2-3Mb for their sites. Therefore it is not necessary to purchase a large amount of space for a small site (if 20 pages = 3Mb, then 20Mb = 140 pages

approx). Are you paying TOO much for the actual space you need?

### How Do You Calculate The File Size Of Your Web Site?

1. First you need to understand how file size is measured. The smallest unit on a computer is a bit. One bit is one electronic on or off pulse. 8 bits strung together make one byte. One byte of information can put a letter, such as "B" on your screen.

If you put 1024 bytes together and then you have one unit of information called a kilobyte. Put 1024 kilobytes together and you have a megabyte. (Most floppy disks hold around 1.4 megabytes of information). Most of your graphics and web pages are measured in bytes or kilobytes.

2. To determine your total site file size, right click on the root folder where your web site is housed – this will not only give you the total site size but also how many files and folders are contained in your site.

3. If you use an editor, such as FrontPage, go to the reports view, click on the site summary and you will get a reading of the total site file size. In Dreamweaver, just use the method in No 2.

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### Prepare To Expand Your Hosting Plan

You may want to add pages, graphics, features eg scripts, databases etc, to your site in the future. Begin with a small hosting plan at first (even 5mb is enough to start out with), and then expand it as you add new features.

Check with your web host, if you can easily upgrade your hosting plan as you grow your site. You don't want to go through the hassle of changing hosts every few months.

Once you have determined your total site file size, check what hosting plan you have purchased and how much disc space has been allocated for your site. If you are only using 3mb of disc space but are paying for 100mb, then you may want to switch hosting plans and save yourself a ton of money each year.

Remember, When you are looking for small business web hosting service you will find many web hosting providers that at the first glance seem to offer similar services and products.

But beware! What they actually deliver is not equal.

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