



Choosing a Hosting Provider for Your Website

Finding the right host for your website can be a tedious and at times confusing process. Believe me, I know...

What is a Hosting Company/Provider?

If you have a website on the internet and pay the bills you know who the hosting provider is and what they do, for everyone else the hosting company is an organization that rents space on a computer called a server for your use. You setup your website and their computers serve the website to your visitors. So, basically you are paying for hard drive space on someone else's computer. This is important because if the computer you are renting breaks then your website is not visible. Many hosting companies advertise 99.99% up-time guarantee, sadly this is far from the truth. Between regular updates, "noisy" neighbors and malicious software keeping your website Live can be a tedious experience with the wrong hosting company.



Types of Hosting?

Before I tell you about some of the Hosting Companies I have dealt with personally, please allow me to shed some light on some of the different hosting types out there.

Shared Hosting:



This is the “beginner” type of hosting. This hosting can and usually comes in several tiers such as beginner, standard and pro for example. Shared hosting is space on a hard drive on a single machine, just like you there are many more people renting space on the same machine. Hence the name “Shared Hosting”. Some companies will offer “Business Class” or “Professional Grade” hosting which may have a few advantages to the basic plans, remember this is shared hosting nonetheless, you are still renting space next to someone else on a server. There are advantages and disadvantages to shared hosting just like everything else in life. First the good stuff:

Pros of Shared Hosting:

Cheap:

Its really, really cheap, sometime so cheap it's free and the company offering hosting will hope and pray you buy some add-ons so they can put food on their tables that night. This shared hosting depending on the level that you choose to purchase will allow you to host your website and others, from 1 to unlimited number. If you are just starting out in the Hosting game you are probably thinking: this is awesome! I can get a free plan load it up with 100 websites and sell more website space while filling the unlimited well and get rich quickly. Sadly this was my exact thought 15 years ago when I started managing my first website. You get what you pay for is one of those transcendental phrases that touches every industry, tech included. Because the Hard Drive that your website is on, that you are also sharing with others, has finite space, most of the time unknown to you on shared hosting. Even though the company that is hosting your website is advertising unlimited space and bandwidth in most cases this is simply not true.



Deceptive? Not really, not any more than the Hard Drives you buy at the store. The advertised capacity is incorrect because of the number of bit in a byte, but the industry has accepted the standard and we all came down.

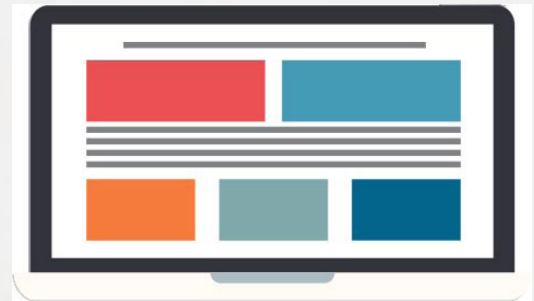
Fully Managed:

In all cases the server you are renting when you are purchasing shared hosting will be managed by the company you are purchasing from. There is no unmanaged hosting and you don't have to worry about setting up any extra software to start building your website that you would in some cases with a VPS (Virtual Private Server) or a DS (Dedicated Server) that I will mention later. In most cases you will still be persuaded into purchasing a few add-ons such as a spam protector or a malicious program scan. If you ask me shared hosting should include these services because the company hosting these servers should be interested in their health and longevity, but sadly this is not so and you will be persuaded into purchasing these services on a monthly basis. Don't get sad, they are cheap too, a few bucks a month in most cases. Maintenance is what you can avoid when choosing shared hosting.

Cons of Shared Hosting:

The Neighborhood:

If your neighbors are loud, this will affect the overall health of your website. This is why you should pay a little more with a professional host, its like living in a nicer neighborhood. People who are malicious choose cheap hosting because the security is easier to get around and not as many people are monitoring their activities. There are many examples of bad behavior from using too much bandwidth, setting up too many websites or being downright malicious. In shared hosting your neighbors matter, which is why free and cheaper hosting tends to be less reliable, especially if you are trying to run a business.



Restrictions:

In a shared environment you are limited to the software that is installed on your system and customization is not allowed. So if you are a seasoned pro or need to run something custom, shared hosting is not your cup of tea.

So now that you have seen through all of the lingo and sales lies of the company you are considering why should you even purchase the shared hosting plan when I scared the living crap out of you. Well because some trustworthy hosting companies run a quality operation. They will not overload the server with too many accounts, they will charge a bit more for their service and perform more maintenance so your neighbors are kept in check and your website is fast and virus free. Shared hosting is where you should start if you are not sure of what to do. Some shared hosting can handle quite a bit of traffic so even if your business blows up tomorrow you won't have to upgrade for a while. SiteGround for example offers shared hosting that is suitable for up to 100,000 visits per month, that's quite a few visitors. Some of our clients now can easily save money with shared hosting, but it's the prestige of your own hardware that drives hosting company profits. Biggest mistake people who are looking for hosting make is that they purchase a plan that is too large for their needs and therefore too expensive. Shared hosting is what most people need, so don't be afraid, I am sorry for trying to scare you, get shared hosting with a good company and sleep soundly at night.



Reseller Hosting:

This type of hosting is very similar to shared hosting, because it pretty much is with one important distinction. This type of hosting allows you to become your own host provider. You can set prices and sell hosting space and of course make money from every customer who buys your hosting plan, which in turn you are buying from the company of your choice, hence the name Reseller Hosting. This type of hosting is aimed at agencies and professionals who want to host third party websites and software. This type of hosting, just like Shared Hosting does not require an extensive knowledge of protocol or server etiquette. All of the technical aspects are handled by the company of your choice and you get a nice looking control panel to control your domain, or Hard Drive space allotted to your Reseller Account. If you want to be your own host, be my guest – the competition is stiff and the profits are low. You would be competing with the Giants of the industry while renting and no one can live on that margin. Enough said about reseller hosting, this will be the most rare type of hosting you or I encounter in all likelihood.

Virtual Dedicated Server:

This type of hosting has many names: VPS or Virtual Private Server, Virtual Dedicate Server, Cloud VPS, Instance, VM and many others. Some of the names actually differ slightly in their structure, but the main premise remains. This type of hosting is a space on a virtual machine with it's own operating system. Kind of like partitioning a disk into separate parts that don't talk to each other. This allows you a certain level of isolation from your neighbors and access as well. You can run custom software or restart your instance of the operating system you are running without disturbing anyone else. The names are confusing enough and every company you encounter will have a slightly different explanation of this service to further enrage and confuse you in your search for a perfect hosting company. Before you get enraged and upset let me shed some light on the different types of a VPS you can get.



Types and Configuration of VPS

You can get a managed or an un-managed plan in most cases. Unmanaged plans will require some basic knowledge of Unix and a comfort level with a command prompt. If Unix scares you like it scares me get the managed plan and don't tell your friends.

Traditional or Cloud?

Another decision you will have to make is whether you want Cloud VPS or a Traditional Set of Hardware. Often a hosting company will offer one or the other, but there are those devilish few whose intentions are not good, that offer you both. Cloud VPS is something fairly new and attractive because of the reliability and scalability of the system. Your instance will be able to be changed at runtime, additional hardware like the CPU or RAM can be added, the whole server can be moved while it's running without having to move all of the files of your website to another host or a larger configuration. Cloud VPS is easy to start, easy to restart and easy to upgrade. The only downside is cost. This type of hosting will cost you \$25+ per month. It's a bit more expensive, but this type of hosting will allow you to host larger more robust websites with a higher visit count.

Hardware for your VPS

This will be the toughest area to make a decision. Many different levels are available and differ from company to company. Some even allow you to customize each specific element of your VPS. The three most important factors are the number of CPU, RAM allocated to your VPS and Space. You will need to know your current stats in order to make an educated decision to VPS or save some money. Often I see this question on the internet: “How fast will my website be on a VPS”. That’s the whole question, then I see many more answers stating the obvious: “It depends”. It depends on the size of the website, your clientele, where your customers are, how fast your server is and how fast their servers is as well as many others. There are too many factors involved here. If you do not have concrete data about what your needs will be in terms of traffic and data delivered then purchase the second cheapest VPS and if you encounter an issue you can always upgrade.



Dedicated Server:

This is the higher level of security and isolation you can achieve in the hosting world, with the highest price tag. This is not something everyone will be able to afford or handle from a technical standpoint. These servers are rented in a similar fashion as the VPS with one exception that you get access to the whole server as well as root. You can run any type of software on these machines, operating system compatible of course and restart them at your whim.

These are expensive pieces of equipment and require time and money. If have read this far you are probably not looking for one of these, but just in case you are, call me at 408-825-3257 we can discuss the details and see if you really need a server or just really really want one like me.

**Please keep in mind that there other types of hosting such as grid hosting, home server, clustered, colocation hosting and others that I omitted simply because I found my article to be a bit longer than anticipated so I decided to address the widest variety that was commercially viable. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you are interested in a specific hosting plan or an aspect of plan that you would like to explore in greater detail.*

Which Hosting is Right for You?

This question is more one of taste and stature rather than the need of your business. If you are deciding on type of hosting you need, in all likelihood you need to get the second cheapest shared hosting plan with a quality company. I can almost hear the snickers and the raised eyebrows on the other side of the screen. How can a man or a woman of your stature be caught alive with a cheap shared hosting plan. This decision should be financially based. Get the second cheapest plan you can afford. Remember you are not purchasing a piece of real estate, you can move quickly if your host is acting badly or you underestimated your growing business, just remember to back up your files often. One piece of advice when it comes to a host, pay month to month to leave quickly if you need to.



Which Company is right for you.

This is perhaps the most important question in the whole article and the one that prompted me to write it. The company you choose is infinitely more important than the plan, because in dire situation the right company will offer good advice and assistance and point you in the right direction. Here I will discuss the Good, Bad and the Ugly of the hosting community. Of course statements below are only opinions of a single individual and do not reflect the general mood of our company, since I didn't ask anyone their opinion prior to writing this.

There thousands of hosting companies available on the internet for your hosting needs. From big like GoDaddy to small like my friend Nate. Nate runs his own server and so does GoDaddy. GoDaddy just has more space. I chose Nate in the past when my hosting requirements were modest. Why? Because of personal experience. Personal experience is the only one that counts. I personally experience Nate while being his friend throughout college and personally experience GoDaddy while being their customer since 2004.

I chose Nate because he was nicer even though I knew full well that he was less reliable. Your host should be nice and not snooty. I did not write this to “host bash” anyone so lets list some reputable companies out there and pick the best ones for your to look at. No, I was not paid for this – I wish!

I hosted my first website in 1995 and at that time the choice was clear. Cruzio in Santa Cruz. They were the only ones that had hosting I was aware of, unless you count AOL sites which was my first website. Now if you type in hosting into Google you will get 718 million results, even if you narrow your results to actual legitimate companies out there, the number will be so staggering you want to blow up the internet rather sift through the masses. Please don't, that's how I make money, this is why I wrote this piece, to make it easier to choose an already established, tested reputable company I have personally experienced.



SiteGround

My website right now is being hosted with a company out of GB – SiteGround. Their customer support and technology won me over in the short time I have been with these guys. They answer to a ticket with-in 15 minutes and are actually helpful during online chat, rather than clueless and abrasive. I have not had a lot of issues here and all of the issues I had here were due to another host which shall remain nameless, suffice it to say I still have Daddy issues. SiteGround has all of the hosting solution types we discussed and very decent shared hosting plan. I cannot promise, but I heard that they don't overload their servers and I have been personally able to run a fairly large website with heavy traffic load at under 3 sec for the homepage load time. Admittedly I employed the assistance of Caching software, Google and Amazon CloudFront, I was nevertheless impressed with the speed of their server. I have recently purchased another hosting package from them and will provide a review of their other services in the near future. Currently I have a VPS and a Geek Pro shared hosting plan with these guys and am pretty happy with the service and technology they provide. You get lots of extras with any account level you choose and their domain tools are some of the best I have had with others.

BlueHost

BlueHost is based in US and has a very large HQ office. They have a variety of hosting plans with decent pricing, especially during the times that you can get a break. This is the only time I recommend locking in hosting for a longer period than a month. If you can save a considerable amount of money the risk is worth it. Especially if you can save a couple of hundred dollars a year with their VPS services, that are actually pretty fast and decent. Customer service is good and they do answer very quickly when you dial their toll free. BlueHost advertises 30-second wait times on their website. I was impressed just hearing someone voice after a few prompts. Most hosting companies will either make you wait or will not provide phone support. BlueHost houses good technology and is fairly reliable. I currently have a VPS and a shared hosting plan with them as well.



A Small Orange

This is a small company, or at least they used to be, and they offer superior support with decently priced hosting services. They have many satisfied customers and will address your issues in a more personal and pleasant manner. My experience with them was short lived, through no fault of theirs, and I had to speak with support a few dozen times. Each time they were knowledgeable and courteous. My issue was not resolved and only later I found my mistake, so I am planning on coming back to these guys and will post a more in-depth review once I have a few months under my belt with their services.

Arvixe

I have not personally used these guys, but was very close to. I have read a ton of great publicity and their prices are very reasonable when compared to other higher end hosting companies. They offer a complete hosting solution from shared to dedicated and will not nickel and dime you on the add-ons. Most of the things you need are already included. A few of my colleagues have used their service in the past and were happy with the outcome.

GoDaddy

GoDaddy is the largest domain register in North America. As far as domain registration goes, these guys are great. Do not make the mistake of getting your domain and your hosting from the same place. If the company you are using has a technical issue, there is little you can do if they control your hosting and url at the same time. Besides, there much better hosts out there. If you buy a lot of Domains get their Domain Club and buy a domain for \$8.29 a year. I am happy with their domain service and can recommend them.

I am not affiliated with this website - <http://www.whoishostingthis.com>, but I have found them to be helpful in terms of other reviews from consumers. Here you can compare hosting reviews from a few more companies I did not mention.

I hope I have been able to shed some light on the dark forest of hosting companies and your decision will be easier to make. In my next guide in January I will be addressing Google Computer Engine and Amazon EC2 as a hosting solution.

