

WHAT IS WEB HOSTING AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Building a website is one of the three ways to strengthen your online presence and helps build credibility with your brand.

It's not necessary to know all the technical intricacies of building your site, but knowing the differences between basic terms, such as "Web page," "Web host" and "Web server," can help you understand, at a high level, the role of these necessary components in creating and running your site.

BASIC TERMS TO KNOW

Consider the process of renting a home as being analogous to that of having a website. Here's how it breaks down:



YOUR POSSESSIONS

Web page: a simple page of information online.



STUFF IN YOUR HOME

Website: a collection of linked Web pages that share a unique domain name, the hub of your online presence.



PEOPLE WHO STOP BY

Visitor: your clients and prospective clients.



MODE OF TRANSPORTATION

Web browser: the software application on a computer or mobile device that visitors use to reach your site and view your Web pages – Firefox, Chrome, Safari or IE.



PATHWAYS TO YOUR FRONT DOOR

Internet: a global system of computer networks that connects several billion devices worldwide.



THE HOUSE YOU'RE RENTING

Web server: the physical computer that stores and serves up your website to visitors on the Internet.



THE LANDLORD

Web host: the provider who leases space to you on the Web server.

TYPES OF WEB HOSTING

Consider these four types of Web hosting services to choose from with typical pros and cons associated with each one.

1

FREE HOSTING:

Probably a suitable choice if you have a static site and are budget conscious. This type of service may also be good for a private/personal/family website or blog.

PROS

- No monthly cost
- No contract
- Easy to use

CONS

- Unable to use your domain name
- Slow connection speed and frequent downtime
- Limited disk space, bandwidth and features
- Advertising banner ads, pop ups or pop unders
- Little to no technical support

SHARED HOSTING (Virtual hosting):

If your website has lower traffic volumes and doesn't need to run special software, a shared hosting solution may meet the needs of your business. You share resources (email and applications) on one server with other websites, and split the cost.

2

PROS

- Low monthly cost
- Most providers offer tools to help optimize your site
- Use your own domain name
- Customer support
- Provider handles technical issues and maintenance of server

CONS

- Website performance can be affected by other sites
- Fewer software and database support options

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VIRTUAL PRIVATE SERVER (VPS):

A shared hosting plan that acts like dedicated hosting. A physical server in a data center is divided into multiple virtual servers, with each server running its own operating system. This allows it to look and act like a dedicated server to the user. This hosting solution may be good for businesses experiencing rapid growth and heavy traffic, but aren't ready to commit to dedicated hosting.

PROS

- Less expensive than a true dedicated environment
- Technical support
- No hardware maintenance
- Easily scalable

CONS

- More expensive than shared hosting
- Some hosts may not assign resources appropriately which may cause server issues

DEDICATED HOSTING:

A dedicated environment is when you have the entire server to yourself with full control of how it's monitored, maintained and managed. Large ecommerce enterprises, businesses with significant traffic or sites using intensive applications often utilize this option.

4

PROS

- Unlimited bandwidth and disk space
- Faster connectivity and performance
- Full control of server

CONS

- More expensive than VPS
- Need strong IT expertise to maintain server

HOW TO CHOOSE A WEB HOST PROVIDER

For most small businesses, a shared hosting solution works fine. So, which provider should you go with? Consider these five factors:



Uptime: Look for a host with a minimum uptime of 99%, but preferably one that guarantees 99.9%. Confirm there are multiple back-up servers just in case your server goes down.



cPanel/Plesk: Try to avoid hosts with their own custom control panel, just in case you need to move to another provider in the future. Two commonly-used Web control panels are cPanel and Plesk¹ that may make transferring your site easier.



Customer service support: Make sure technical help is available 24/7 via phone, live chat or email. Confirm if they charge any additional fees for assistance.



Terms and conditions: As with any contract, read the fine print to understand what's included and what's not, and know what the cancellation policy is all about.



Customer reviews: References and reviews go a long way. Reach out to other business colleagues/partners to get their opinions, and read what other companies have experienced with their web providers.

Read our tips for evaluating domain name registrars.

