

Website Basics — Hosting Your Site

Intro: What is 'hosting'.

When a computer user would like to look at your website on their computer they must have a way of accessing the files/pages that make up your site. They send out a request over the world wide web for those pages when they type your domain name (for example: www.yourname.com) into the address line of their browser or click a link to your website. The pages they would like to view must reside on a computer that is always connected to the internet. The computer that your webpages reside on is usually referred to as a server and maintaining your pages on the server is called 'hosting a website'. In essence, you are renting space on a computer that is set up specifically to distribute your website to the outside world.

TIP: Your domain name is 'pointed at' the server that is hosting your website. For more information on domain names please view our tutorial [Website Basics — How To Obtain a Domain Name](#).

A Checklist of Considerations When Looking For a Host

- **reliability:**
How much capacity does the host company's pipelines have to host your site?
Will people have trouble seeing your site during heavy internet traffic times?
Will the server be out of service at times?
How secure are the servers from outside mischief and hacking?
- **storage space:**
How much space will you have to accommodate your website? A typical starter size for hosting is 20 megabits. That is enough to host a craftsperson's site made up of text and quite a number of images. Remember you are going to post low resolution images on your website so they are quickly downloaded by others.
- **traffic bandwidth:**
Each time someone looks at your site on their computer they must download all the files that make up your site, typically text and images, to their computer. This means that there is a constant flow of data along the host company's communication pipelines. They measure this flow and allow you a certain amount of data flow/ traffic per month. You would rarely need more bandwidth than most hosting plans come with unless you have some chunky files such as videos on your site.
- **statistics:**
There is an amazing amount you can learn about the traffic to your website, for example, how many people visit, how long they stay, what are they most interested in seeing on your site. Different plans and companies offer a variety of options for viewing your statistics.
- **CGI scripts, forms, templates:**
Some hosting plans offer you 'extras' to help you develop your website. CGI scripts refer to programs that run on the server and allow you to have interactive forms etc. on your site. Some plans even offer you templates to start your website design process.
- **email alias:**
When you have a domain name you can receive email via that domain name. For example, a typical address is **anyword@yourdomainname.com**. Inquire with your hosting company how many alias they allow and whether they are easy to set up.
- **POP accounts:**
A POP account is used to send and retrieve emails. You will have one POP account per hosting plan but you may be allowed a few. This would mean that different people could access email through

your domain name. Once again, find out how many POP accounts you can have and how to set them up.

- **technical support:**

Do they answer the phone! Some hosting plans are very inexpensive but you can only communicate with them through email. Assess your needs on the technical frontier — it might be better to pay a little more for service.

- **access to the server:**

You will want to have an easy way to transfer files from your computer to the server. You design your site on your own computer then upload those pages and images to your host's server. You will also want to modify the site from time to time. Most people use a method to upload their files called **FTP**. Find out what provisions your host has made for you to access your site.

- **price:**

Most of the time the bottom line is the deciding factor when you are choosing a host. The price will naturally depend on the level of service you require. You even can choose to host your site for free if you are willing to accept the conditions for doing so — usually you are required to carry advertising banners on your home page. A place to find free hosting is at <http://geocities.yahoo.com/home>. There is a huge number of companies that host websites. To get you started looking here are three with a variety of services and plans — <http://www.netatlantic.com>, <http://www.easyhosting.com> & <http://www.dollarhost.com>. Detailed information about their services are posted on their websites.

TIP: Make a note of the password and user ID you choose or is given to you. This might be a different user ID and password than the one you received when choosing a domain name, depending on where you registered your domain name. This information plus a directory path will be necessary to upload and maintain your site on the host server.

Conclusion: Next Steps

Once your site is designed and hosted you will have to register the site with search engines. Please see our tutorial on Website Basics — Registering with Search Engines for more information.

-