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HOST WITH THE MOST
CHOOSING A RELIABLE WEB HOST

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

HOSTING TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED 1

BANDWIDTH: 1

DISK SPACE: 1

DATA TRANSFER (TRAFFIC): 1

SERVER LOGS: 1

E-MAIL FORWARDING: 1

AUTORESPONDER: 2

POP3 E-MAIL ACCOUNTS: 2

IMAP E-MAIL 2

MYSQL: 2

PARKED DOMAIN: 2

SUBDOMAIN: 3

PRICING AND SERVICES 3

FINDING THE PERFECT WEB HOST 3

THINGS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE WEB HOST 4

ABOUT THE AUTHOR 4

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HOST WITH THE MOST: CHOOSING A RELIABLE WEB HOST

With the economy in its current slump and the net a quick and easy way to set up online shop, more and more people are looking for viable web hosting solutions. We'll show you what to look for (and what to look out for) when choosing a web host for your online business.

HOSTING TERMINOLOGY EXPLAINED

In order to intelligently shop for web hosting, you need to get the "lay of the land", to "speak the language." Here are some common terms used in the web hosting industry and their meanings.

BANDWIDTH:

Bandwidth refers to how much data you can send through a network or modem connection. It is usually measured in bits per second, or "bps." You can think of bandwidth as a highway with cars travelling on it. The highway is the network connection and the cars are the data. The wider the highway, the more cars can travel on it at one time. Therefore more cars can get to their destinations faster. The same principle applies to computer data — the more bandwidth, the more information that can be transferred within a given amount of time.[1] *See also* "data transfer," *supra*.

DISK SPACE:

Disk space (usually expressed in gigabytes or GB) generally refers to the amount of server disk storage allocated to your account. This space is used to store your HTML files, graphics, audio clips, log files, and all other files that make up your Web site, as well as email messages.

DATA TRANSFER (TRAFFIC):

[T]he amount of data downloaded from a Web site. This information can be useful, particularly for measuring the number of visitors to a Web site.[2] *See also* "Bandwidth," *infra*.

SERVER LOGS:

Files stored on a web server that records every item downloaded by users. These include web (.php, .html) files and images files.[3]

E-MAIL FORWARDING:

Email forwarding can … redirect mail going to one address and send it to one or several other addresses. Vice versa, email items going to several different addresses can converge via forwarding to end up in a single address inbox.[4]

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[1] http://www.techterms.com/definition/bandwidth

[2] http://dictionary.bnet.com/definition/data+transfer.html

[3] http://www.davechaffey.com/E-marketing-Glossary/Server-log-files.htm

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AUTORESPONDER:

A program that responds to an e-mail or other inquiry without human intervention. For example, if an e-mail address is no longer valid, an auto-responder in the mail server sends an "undeliverable message" automatically to the sender. If the recipient has a new e-mail address or is on vacation, an auto-responder can be set up to reply with an appropriate message.[5]

POP3 E-MAIL ACCOUNTS:

POP stands for "Post Office Protocol" and is a simple, standardized method of delivering e-mail messages. A POP3 mail server receives e-mails and filters them into the appropriate user folders. When a user connects to the mail server to retrieve his mail, the messages are downloaded from mail server to the user's hard disk.[6] *See also* "IMAP," *supra*.

IMAP E-MAIL

Stands for "Internet Message Access Protocol" and is pronounced "eye-map." It is a method of accessing e-mail messages on a server without having to download them to your local hard drive. This is the main difference between IMAP and another popular e-mail protocol called "POP3." POP3 requires users to download messages to their hard drive before reading them. The advantage of using an IMAP mail server is that users can check their mail from multiple computers and always see the same messages. This is because the messages stay on the server until the user chooses to download them to his or her local drive. Most webmail systems are IMAP based, which allows people to access to both their sent and received messages no matter what computer they use to check their mail.[7] *See also* "POP3," *infra*.

MYSQL:

A very popular open source, relational DBMS for both Web and embedded applications from MySQL AB, Uppsala, Sweden (www.mysql.com), which was acquired by Sun in 2008. Pronounced "my S-Q-L," it runs under Linux/Unix, Windows and Mac. The free MySQL Community Edition is available under the GNU license, and more than 100 million copies have been downloaded worldwide. MySQL Enterprise is the more comprehensive, paid version. Applications using MySQL are written in PHP, Perl, Python, Ruby, Java, C/C++, C# and Visual Basic.[8]

PARKED DOMAIN:

Domain parking refers to the registration of an Internet domain name without that domain being used to provide services such as e-mail or a website. This may have been done to reserve the domain name for future development, and to protect against the possibility of cybersquatting.[9]

SUBDOMAIN:

A domain that is part of a larger domain name in DNS hierarchy. DNS hierarchy consists of the root-level domain at the top, underneath which are the top-level domains (*e.g.*, *.com, *.net, *.org)

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[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email_forwarding
[5] http://www.pcmag.com/encyclopedia_term/0,2542,t=auto-responder&i=38228,00.asp
[6] http://www.techterms.com/definition/pop3
[7] http://www.techterms.com/definition/imap
[8] http://dictionary.zdnet.com/definition/MySQL.html
[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domain_parking

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followed by second-level domains and finally subdomains. For example, in the domain name blog.pixelita.com, "blog" is a subdomain of the larger second-level domain "pixelita.com." Subdomains appear as folders when viewed in an FTP client, but the server treats them as if they were domains.[10]

PRICING AND SERVICES

In the United States, web hosting packages range from as little as $5/month to as much as $1,000/month or even more. Any good Web hosting plan should offer a certain amount of disk storage space and traffic (bandwidth) for a fixed price. It should also come with an overage feature to automatically bill you (rather than suspend your account/web site) if the site exceeds its bandwidth limits. The web hosting company should also be able to upgrade you should you at any time during your contract decide that you have outgrown your current web hosting package.

In our experience, a small business or professional requires between 500-1000MB of disk space and approximately 1-3GB of bandwidth to run efficiently and to allow for growth. However, if your web site is content rich — that is, if you provide a lot of media content, podcasts, videos, etc., then your disk space and bandwidth requirements increase exponentially. But there is generally a web hosting plan that will suit even a very high profile/high traffic site. Also, if you do your homework and choose a web host who is flexible enough to offer upgrades before the expiration of your current plan, you should never have to worry about your site being down due to excessive bandwidth or lack of disk space.

FINDING THE PERFECT WEB HOST

Nothing beats word of mouth as a way to find that perfect web hosting company. But if no such recommendations are forthcoming, there are several online sources to help you separate the wheat from the chaff, the signal from the noise with regard to web hosts.

- TopHosts.com
- HostingReview.com
- WebHostingGeeks.com
- HostCritique.net
- WebHostingSearch.com
- WordPress-friendly web hosts
- CMS Made Simple-friendly web hosts

THINGS TO ASK A PROSPECTIVE WEB HOST

Here's a quick and dirty checklist of things to ask when shopping around for a web host. Most web hosts have an online forum that contains a summary of their most popular packages and features. But nothing beats an email to their sales department — or better yet, a phone call to their toll-free number — to find out if they have the minimum requirements you'll need.

[10] http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/S/subdomain.html

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How many MySQL databases can I have?

Nowadays there isn't any reason to limited a user's ability to install scripts in their own database. This saves one from having to configure the script to share a database with an existing program. And some scripts don't run well this way in any case.

What happens if I exceed my allotted bandwidth in any given month?

A good web host will recognize that this can happen and offer you the opportunity to purchase additional bandwidth or upgrade your hosting package without shutting the site down first.

How do you handle CGI? (Most let scripts run in a CGI-bin folder, but others use what is known as a suex or CGI wrap. This may be important depending on which scripts you plan to run.)

Do you have month-to-month plans?

This might be helpful if you want to try out the web host before committing six months or a year in advance payments.

Do you give discounts for paying six months/one year/two years in advance?

What is your adult content policy?

This may be relevant if you plan to run an adult-content web site as some web hosts, such as GoDaddy.com, have clauses in their Terms of Service which prohibit sexually-oriented web site content.

You should know that Pixelita Designs offers web hosting as a convenience to its clients and there are several packages that might be just right for you. Visit our web site at http://www.pixelita.com/services/hosting and see if we've got a plan that fits your needs and budget!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joni Mueller is one half of Pixelita Designs. She has been designing web pages professionally since 2003 and has been designing and coding for WordPress since March 2004. Along with her web design partner, **Ivan Minić**, who is Pixelita Designs' graphic artist and SEO specialist, they create beautiful, accessible, validating web sites using WordPress, CMS Made Simple, Expression Engine, Textpattern, sNews and Pixelpost. Visit them on the web at http://www.pixelita.com.

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