

Web Hosting Guide For Beginners

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Chapter 1

Introduction, and a Hosting Glossary

The world of modern web technology is growing incredibly fast. While we have more possibilities before us than ever, we do not always make the best use of them— getting around basic terminology seems to be one of the biggest challenges.

The same thing happens when we try to understand hosting services: new words and terms can be intimidating. We have prepared a brief glossary to guide you in those first steps towards building your confidence and understanding of web hosting.

Web hosting - a complex of different services and functions that allow you to allocate a website and all related files on the web.

Shared hosting - the cheapest and the most popular type of web hosting. When purchasing a shared plan, you get a part of a server that can be used for allocating a relatively small website. Shared plans are great for startups.

VPS hosting - the golden mean. VPS hosting awards you with a bigger part of a server. In fact, this gives you better performance and smaller risk of getting your website(s) blocked because of bad server neighborhood.

Dedicated hosting – the most advanced solution. You get a whole server—or even a number of servers—for allocating your website. Dedicated servers are strictly advised if your website works with big databases or hosts a lot of media files.

Cloud Hosting - a network of servers that host the same information which can be used for increasing the performance of your websites or for adjusting servers without getting your website offline.

Server - a combination of hardware and software that is used for allocating your website on the web. Every server has a basic set of characteristics: hardware capacity, bandwidth, operating system, RAM, etc.

Datacenter – a room where your web hosting company keeps all (or a big part) of their servers. Good datacenters are secure, fire-protected, and have good ventilation.

SEO – an abbreviation of Search Engine Optimization, which is a combination of services used for raising the rank of your website in the lists of search results. SEO quality often depends on hosting, e.g. on the geographical location of your servers.

Live chat - the easiest way to contact the support agents of your web host. Most reliable hosting companies offer live chat; with live chat, you can resolve immediate problems that may arise.

Disk space - hard drives volume that can be used for allocating your website and all related files.

Bandwidth / Traffic capacity - the characteristics that define traffic speed and the amount of incoming and outgoing information that can be processed by your hosting plan.

CPU / Core – a piece of hardware that processes large amounts of information and tasks. Normally, CPU only matters when you purchase a dedicated or a cloud plan. In such cases, the more productive cores you get, the better they are.

Control panel (cPanel) - software used for managing your hosting software and hardware (if possible). A control panel lets you create a website from scratch or host an existing website with higher efficiency.

Operating system — an environment used for installing multiple developer tools that allow you to administer your hosting and its features.

RAID - a security system used for protecting the data on your hard drives by means of complicated multi-layer storage.

Server uptime - the amount of time when your server is running well and without any failures. The better the uptime rate, the more users will be able to browse your website without any problems.

vServer - a term mostly used by cloud hosts for identifying a virtual server. A vServer functions like a dedicated server due to special technologies that split a real server into a number of virtual racks.

Public cloud - a cloud that uses real servers and can share a series of web projects. Public clouds are cheaper, but cannot be finely adjusted to the needs of your web project.

Private cloud - a cloud built with servers that do not share any other web projects but yours. Private clouds are expensive, but they can be set specially to meet your personal needs.

eCommerce - a segment of web that works with online trade. E-commerce projects include eShops, online auctions, etc. Many web hosts include different services for eCommerce projects.

These are the most popular terms. Hopefully, they can make the beginning of your web hosting journey life easier and help you understand the principles of website functioning better.

Chapter 2

Hosting Types.

The Difference Between Shared, VPS and Dedicated

In the modern world, if your project doesn't have a website, it simply doesn't exist. One of the basic issues you face when working on starting a website is good web hosting. You might find yourself overwhelmed by the tremendous amount of web hosting choices on the market, which makes deciding difficult. In order to avoid making a mistake, it's always good to turn to an expert.

The three most popular hosting packages offered by web host companies globally are Shared, VPS and Dedicated. All of them have their advantages and disadvantages, so in our article we have prepared a detailed description of each web hosting type so you can have a clear understanding of how it all works.

Shared Hosting — Pros and Cons

Most likely, Shared Hosting is what you need if you have a startup project. Shared plans normally have low prices and some basic features included. In fact, if you purchase this type of web hosting, you will share one server with many other websites. That may cause some problems as you never know who your "neighbors are". However, the possibility of bad neighborhood is probably the biggest disadvantage of shared plans.

The rest is perfect if you have a startup project and do not have an incredible amount of data going through your website. In other words, Shared plans are perfect for:

- Promo websites
- Professional portfolio
- Startup project
- Blog or writer's website

- Early stages of photo gallery
- Simple eCommerce websites

Usually web hosts offer some unlimited features in their Shared packages. Be aware that some of them have underwater stones, so you make sure you read the Terms and Conditions carefully.

You will also find a bunch of hosting companies suggesting many additional features included in the package, like eCommerce tools, CMS platforms, plugins for developers. These features are fine, but pay attention only to the features you will really need. Consult a web master before choosing a particular web host company.

Key Facts about VPS Hosting

VPS plans are the golden mean of web hosting services. Such offers will normally have good neighborhood security and strong customers support services. VPS also means you get a higher capacity (compared to Shared plans).

The biggest disadvantage of VPS is that you have no control over many important server functions, (which is available in Dedicated plans). As your project grows, your webmasters will need more and more options for managing the website(s) effectively. This is where you see the limits of VPS: everything is predetermined by the web host, because, again, you get only a part of server — even though that part of server is rather big.

So, what is VPS hosting good for? Well, VPS is great for average web projects that don't require fine, personalized server adjustments. This may be a large photo stock, a media-rich website, an eCommerce project, or even a number of simple websites hosted under the same hosting plan.

Follow the load of your current Shared hosting, and if it's close to the limit, you may consider moving to a VPS or Dedicated package. Why VPS or Dedicated? Because the market of VPS hosting is rather big, so some VPS plans will cost you even more than a basic Dedicated server. Be aware of that, and know your priorities when choosing between VPS and Dedicated.

All You Need to Know about Dedicated Hosting

When the time comes that your online business grows to truly huge dimensions and the world is not enough, welcome Dedicated Hosting. This kind of plan will award you control over the whole server. This, of course, has both pros and cons. On one hand, you can adjust your servers according to your needs; on the other hand, purchasing a dedicated server means you'll have extra costs for managing it.

When ordering a dedicated plan, examine all features well and consult your web masters. Many hosting companies provide managed dedicated solutions, which means you will pay the company's workers to manage the server for you. However, web host teams offer a fairly standardized approach, so you won't have a chance to make customized adjustments.

Certainly, Dedicated servers are all about huge capacity. You get impressive bandwidth and disk space, as well as lots of FTPs, email accounts, and databases. Most web host companies will let you choose the operating system that will be installed on your rack. Add to this the special attention of customer support and high security standards, and you will get the best kind of hosting solutions available on the market.

As you can see, each type of web hosting plan has its advantages and disadvantages. When you're wondering which one to choose, you have to look at your needs. Don't forget research before purchasing any hosting plan, and you will find the solution that meets all of your requirements.

Chapter 3

The Most Important Features of Shared Web Hosting

Shared web hosting is the most popular hosting solution purchased from hundreds of web host companies all over the world. The sheer size of the huge market of shared solutions often causes problems to customers since most people purchasing shared plans are new to web technologies, and usually do not know what to pay look for when choosing a good hosting package.

How to Choose Proper Web Hosting Package

Web hosting is a complex of functions and hardware features; thus, you need to understand some technical processes in order to find for a proper solution. The system is not complicated at all—you just have to keep in mind that the abundance of unlimited features awarded by a certain web host does not mean that their shared plan is exactly what you need.

Of course, it would be great if you could just consult a web master who would explain what features you will need for this or that online project. If you don't have that option, read on to understand some key facts about shared hosting plans and choose a proper solution.

Key Features of Shared Hosting

Here are five most relevant features included into shared hosting packages:

a. The Essentials: Disk Space & Traffic

Let's start with the basics. When you want to host a website on the web, you need some disk space that will be used for things like different code files, databases, and media. That's when you need a certain amount of disk space. Logically, the smaller your website is, the less importance this feature has.

Now that you have hosted some files and made them into a website, you will want users to access that data. That's when bandwidth comes in. Imagine a tunnel: the wider the tunnel is, the more information can pass through it. Bandwidth works the same way. Many web hosts offer unlimited bandwidth but restrict traffic speed, which can also influence the performance of your website.

Pay attention to bandwidth and traffic speed when searching for a good shared plan. Again, the bigger your website will be, the more disk space you will need. Additional hard drive security is very good, but typically this feature is not included in shared packages.

b. Uptime

Uptime is the time when your website works online and when users can access the site without any problems. It is usually measured in percentages from the total expected uptime (twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week). Of course, it depends if your website has to be online one hundred percent of the time. Normally, if you purchase shared hosting, your project is not too big, so you don't really need 100% uptime. In such cases, the level of 98% is common.

When choosing a hosting plan, do not pay much attention to what companies say about their uptime- they only use best servers for their company website while you may get a worse one. Still, if you want to know the actual online rate, use some independent web projects to measure this number for you; likewise, you can check out some forums or ask you friends for advice.

You also have to pay attention to different security features included in the plan, which will ensure better safety for your server. Be aware that most web host companies do not include pricey security options into cheap shared plans (for example, your server will be more secure if the package includes RAID, server backup, manual server restart, advanced network architecture, or other similar services).

c. Support

Support is extremely important. If you are new to web hosting, support will be your eyes, hands, and everything else. That's why we advise that you browse the web and check different reviews for information about support of your web host candidates. Also browse through forums where users discuss web hosting to give you an insider's review.

Why is support so important? When making your first steps in hosting management, you will have many questions, and many of them will require immediate answers— that’s why the working speed of customer support is so crucial.

d. Pre-Installed Apps

Many web host companies include so many additional features into their shared plans that it’s become a giant mess. They will offer some unlimited options, pre- installed apps, extra-fee services, and the like. Concentrate on the pre-installed apps, which are special widgets that help you create a website quickly and manage it more efficiently.

One of the most basic apps is the control panel. If your shared plan includes a control panel, you can breathe a sigh of relief. Life gets much easier with one, as you will be able to control the most complicated server processes through a very convenient interface. The most popular control panel is cPanel, but some web hosts will offer you an alternative — Zpanel, Webmin, Virtualmin, or even their own customized control panel (which is not always so good as it sounds).

Now, most control panels have some apps and add-ons pre-installed, so you can switch some important functions on with only one click, like eCommerce tools such as payment instruments or shopping carts. You can also have a CMS like WordPress or Joomla available for quick automatic installation. Note that all those extras are only reasonable if you need them. If you have someone make you a promo website or a portfolio, most of those features are not necessary.

e. Free Bonuses

Finally, we get to the sweetest thing about shared plans. Since the market of shared web hosting is so big, different companies try to attract more clients by offering free bonuses. Some of them will offer a free domain name, website transfer, site-building tools, or some other nice features. Of course, this is great and convenient, so the more free bonuses you get, the better the deal.

When it comes to free bonuses, the main item that needs your attention is the so-called “renewal fees.” What happens here is that the company will grant you the first year of domain usage free, but later on you will have to pay yearly fees. As always, examine the user agreement thoroughly if a company offers you free features.

Choosing a shared package is very subjective. You have to spend some time considering the requirements for your website so that you know what features are priorities and what features are non-essentials.

Remember to keep pricing and reliability at the forefront. Your web host must have a good reliability-price ratio. To get more info about the companies, you check relevant reviews and forums.

Chapter 4

The Most Common Tricks of Web Host Companies, and How to Avoid Them

Web hosting — it's the phrase of the hour nowadays, and it's what you really need to create a website. The process of choosing a web host company is not that easy. The market of these services has grown a lot in the last few years. You will have a ton of options to choose from.

The severe competition on this market makes different companies provide free bonuses to attract more customers. Now, not all companies can afford to offer such conditions and use some tricks that show themselves in better light—and some web hosts just play dirty.

Tips for Choosing Proper Web Host

Protect yourself from the most common tricks by following our tips. You will know what features to pay attention to and what requires more research when looking for a truly reliable web host. With that said, keep in mind that we are presenting the most widely-used tricks and scams, but there are plenty more out there. Thus, checking the web for web host reliability info is a must.

Traffic Speed and Capacity

Many web host companies will tell you they have unlimited bandwidth/traffic/whatever. Some truly have that great feature, but other will provide you "limited unlimited" bandwidth. How does it work? There are several options.

In most cases, you will be offered unlimited volume of traffic, but the transfer speed will be restricted to something like 1Mb/s. If your project is brand new, that restriction will not affect you, but you will definitely see the effects of this restriction as your project grows.

Some other web hosts will give you great traffic speed, but with some capacity limits, while a small group of web hosts will really provide you with no limits for traffic speed and

capacity, but will set a definite number of users who can access your website monthly. Make sure you examine your user agreement closely— especially the paragraphs regarding traffic speed.

Extra Fees

Extra fees or hidden fees can cost you a pretty penny. At the sign-up stage, some companies offer additional services for extra fees, which is quite normal — you may really need some of those features. The problem is that some web hosts have those extras pre-ticked for you—the only thing you can do in this case is to be careful when going through the sign-up process.

Uptime Percentage

Uptime is the time your website stay online and functions well. Most web hosts will provide you with a certain uptime guarantee. While some do fulfill their promises, most don't.

You will also find some websites on the web that offer independent uptime measurements. Their data, however, is not to be taken seriously: to acquire those measurements, they count the uptime of web hosts' home pages. The providers understand that and use their best servers for hosting their company websites, though some other servers they have may give worse performance. Tricky, ain't it?

Yearly Renewal Prices

The system is as simple as ABC — you are offered some services at no fee when you sign up, but after a year or so you have to pay a lot for renewing the services that were free.

This generally applies to domain names. Many web host companies offer a free domain for the first year only. Rarely will service providers use this system with hosting plans themselves: you will be offered a nice discount for the first year and double fees the second year. That's why , it's critically important that you read the user agreement very well—we can't stress this enough.

Clients per Server

Shared plan users, watch for this scheme: when you purchase a shared package, that means you get only a part of a server. Thus, you may get bad neighborhood and your website will get blocked.

To prevent such a scenario, some service providers state that they have only a limited number of clients on one server (e.g. 100 or 150). Here comes the trick: insiders say that most web host companies do not really meet that standard.

You may be asking yourself, how can this info help you when choosing this or that shared plan? The answer is clear: first, you shouldn't count that "advantage" in; secondly, you will know that the providers offering this feature are probably unfair. Additionally, they may be unfair regarding other issues, too. Consider your host well.

Now that you know what tricks web host companies have in store for you, you can filter through it all and get better services. Remember that these are only a few tricks out there . And always remember that many companies you may suspect are truly reliable, but thorough research and close examination of user agreements always pay off.

Chapter 5

VPS or Dedicated Hosting - Which is better for you?

Internet technologies develop very fast, and that gives you a chance to create something really unique and become popular as short as time as one year.

The web has its own rules, and it likes great ideas. When your project starts growing, you have to meet ever-higher quality standards, so choosing a good hosting package is very important.

Logically, as you get more website visitors, shared packages won't be enough. That's when you have to consider if you should opt for VPS, which is the golden mean, or for a dedicated server, which is the top solution. Both options have their pros and cons, so we've decided to compare VPS and Dedicated plans for you to understand what you really need at this or that stage of project growth.

Pros and Cons of VPS Hosting

VPS hosting technically is very similar to shared plans but with higher performance. You get impressive traffic capacity, disk space, CPU productivity, and loads more, which is great for well-developed projects. In most cases, VPS is the middle stage between shared and dedicated hosting, as it combines their features in perfect balance.

Another big advantage of VPS plans is their price. As compared to dedicated servers, VPS offers are much more affordable. It often happens that your project grows and many parts will require additional investments. When this is the case, VPS is the best solution — it will enable better website performance and won't cost you a pretty penny.

You also have to know that VPS hosting has a range of disadvantages when contrasted to dedicated servers. First of all, you still get only a part of a server, so many fine adjustments are still impossible. Also, VPS plans are not too "prestigious," so most web host do not provide VPS customers with the privileged support as often happens with dedicated plans.

Why Choose Dedicated Servers?

Dedicated hosting, beyond any doubt, is the highest market standard. If you want your website to be secure and speedy, you have to think well of opting for a dedicated solution. With such a plan you get a whole server, so you can manage it

the way you like. Even if you don't need any fine adjustments, many providers offer Managed Dedicated solutions, which means you pay and relax.

Purchasing dedicated hosting means getting great resources, such as any OS you like and special treatment from customer support. Extended security is another advantage of such plans — you have no neighbors, thus you get no malware, server reboots, RAID protection (in many cases), and more.

The biggest disadvantage of dedicated servers is the price. Indeed, VPS solutions can cost you half the price of a dedicated server. Still, if that solution will improve the performance of your project, which also means attracting new clients, then why not?

VPS vs Dedicated — What Is Better?

Again, it's up to you to decide. Decide if spending that much money on a dedicated server is reasonable — maybe there is point in investing it to some other parts of the project.

Secondly, consult your webmaster on server adjustments. If he says it'd be great to have extended possibilities for server management, opt for a dedicated solution. If not, VPS is the best option for an expanding website.

Finally, consider performance. Try to predict the growth of website load for the next 6-12 months, and determine if it would be more logical to purchase a dedicated server at once, rather than getting a VPS plan and shifting to a dedicated solution in half a year (which can also be problematic, as many web host companies ask for a 1- year contract when you purchase VPS hosting).

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