

Are you getting the most from your host?

By Bruce A. Love

There are many good reasons for having a web site. Personal web pages can be used to post information and pictures relating to family trees, reunions, births, or anything else you want to share with friends and family. If you are an artist, you can use your web page as a virtual portfolio. Of course, if you have a business, you can use a web site to promote services and sell merchandise. The possibilities are endless!

When you decide to establish a web presence, one of the first things to do is find a host for your site. Web servers are computers that “host” web sites and make them available for viewing 24/7. Many Internet Service Providers (ISPs), including AOL and some cable modem companies, offer a limited amount of free space on their servers for customers to post web pages. This free space is often a good place to start while learning to create web pages. I recently discovered that my 16-year-old daughter has her own web site on a free hosting service. When I asked if any of her friends had web sites, she said, “everyone does!”

There are several drawbacks to free hosting. One is the relatively limited amount of allocated disk space. But even 10MB of free space will enable you to post numerous pages containing text and photographs. Another disadvantage of free hosting is that real domain names (such as www.myweb.com) are not an option. Free hosting plans also lack adequate technical support, and usually display advertisements on web sites.

If you are serious about having a “real” web site, register a domain name. Next, find a server to host the site, and point your domain name registrar toward your host’s two Name Servers (your host can help you through this process). Depending upon the purpose, size, and complexity of your web, you should be able to find shared hosting

plans for under \$10/month. If you are conducting online sales, expect to pay \$25 - \$85 /month for shared hosting plans.

Shared hosting refers to servers configured to host multiple web sites. By doing this, hosting companies distribute costs and keep services affordable. The downside of shared hosting is slower web access speeds, and slightly less reliability than you would have with a “dedicated host.” But, with dedicated servers costing \$100 - \$200 /month, the shortcomings of shared hosting can often be disregarded.

There are many performance-related issues to consider when evaluating hosts. Disk storage space is the amount of space web sites use on the server. With increased competition, it is not unusual to see hosts offering basic hosting plans with 200MB – 800MB of disk storage space. Data transfer, or “bandwidth,” refers to the amount of information that is downloaded from, or uploaded to, a web site. Every time a page is viewed, information is transferred from the web server to the computer that requested the information. Typical basic plans limit bandwidth to 5 – 20GB. Unless your web site features a lot of multimedia, or gets A LOT of visitors, you will never approach these transfer limits.

Perhaps the most important consideration when choosing a host is the host’s reputation for providing dependable service and assistance. Reliable hosts report “uptimes” of 99% and higher. This is the percent of time your web page is online. While web hosts do not have to be local (mine aren’t), they should be very accessible since web site problems can occur at any time. Reputable hosts offer a variety of ways to access assistance, including 24-hour toll-free support. To get the most from your host, choose a reputable one that offers the features your webs require.

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