

FACT SHEET: CHOOSE YOUR WEB HOSTING

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Having invested in the development of your website it would be a mistake to choose a hosting service purely on price. Picking the cheapest may work out more expensive in the long term if you lose business due to downtime, and the damage it does to your business' reputation.

What it all means

Open any Internet magazine and you're guaranteed to find an advert for a hosting provider on the inside cover. Unless you're a professional, the range of features on offer can be overwhelming.

Web space - The amount of web space you require will depend on the complexity of your site, more data, large or numerous images and audio or video files will require the most space. A typical business brochure site will require around 20 Megabytes (Mb), whereas an image intensive or content driven site may require hundreds of Mbs.

Control Panel - This is a tool that allows you to configure options for your hosting. Typical options are setting the amount of space individual users have, and user administration, adding, editing and removing users and their email aliases.

Support - Unless you are very familiar with the setup and running of the hardware and software required to support your website, you will probably need some form of technical support. Most hosting providers provide telephone and email support, but it's worth checking the response times and ensuring that they are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Web Statistics - Web statistics allow you to see the number of hits your site is getting. Advanced statistics tools provide the number of unique visitors, the average time each visitor spends viewing your site, and how they found your site. This kind of information is valuable to help you to determine if the visitors you are getting are relevant to your business, and how you can attract more of the right sort of visitors.

Bandwidth - Most brochure sites will be adequately served by 5 Gigabits (GB) per month, larger sites might need hosting that provides 10 or more GB per month, but confirm that you can upgrade as demand increases

Scripting - If your site requires dynamic content, or is a full ecommerce solution, you may require server side scripting support. This means scripts written by your web developer will run on the server, generating your web pages on the fly depending on what the site user requests.

Databases - Provide the powerful foundations upon which we can build advanced features such as search engines, shopping carts and forums. Your web developer should be able to advise you here.

Email - Many hosting providers offer integrated email and web server packages, and it usually makes sense to have both with one provider.

Domain Name Services - If you buy email, domain name and web hosting separately you will need to know how to configure the DNS yourself.

Security - If you collect any private or confidential information from your users you will need to use a hosting provider that can provide SSL support.

Uptime - If you are selling online, or expect to have a high number of visitors it may be crucial that your site is rarely if ever unavailable. While no service provider can guarantee it will be 100% available, many offer services that will provide 99.99% uptime (in other words the server will be available for all but one hour a year), however this is not a cast iron guarantee, it just means that you are often able to get compensation if they can not achieve this.

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This fact sheet is based on extracts of the book
"DOT NOT, Getting Your Business Online"
by John Crickett.
For more information see: www.dotnot.co.uk