

# What is Web Hosting

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What is web hosting?

If you want to take part in the internet as a business, information resource, directory, or as a hobbyist wanting to share data, information and knowledge with the many people and communities on the internet, you have to contain this in a central spot on the internet. You have to own a piece of space in cyberspace.

Web hosting empowers you and anyone with a computer and internet connection to own a piece of cyberspace. In your space, you can have news, bulletins, documents, data, files (your web site) and your own post office (mail server) to accept mail, all in the context of you or your business. This is your space and to get this space you either have to own a piece of the physical internet with a network connection to the internet backbone and computer(s) operating as server(s) offering access to your files and post office, for people on the internet to view your web site or send and receive email with you.

The cost of owning a direct connection to the backbone and a server dedicated to a web site and email is out of reach for the average business and especially general members of the internet. Even running a web site and mail server on your own computer when it is connected to the internet requires a lot of technical ability and knowledge. The internet itself has to be your business for either of these options to be viable.

In our modern society, for every person in business or with a career in most industries today, it is imperative to have a place in cyberspace, not just to be competitive but to survive. Web hosting companies were born out of this great need to provide an environment for the masses to own a piece of cyberspace, to offer an environment where people could have their piece of cyberspace on the internet 24/7 without the great cost. Web hosting companies developed a model where they could split up areas on the servers connected to the backbone and 'rent' this space, cutting the costs across many people sharing the server and backbone connection to the internet.

In a web-hosting environment, you are offered a web site to place your files, data, documents, and bulletins for people to access with their web browser and an email server for you to send and receive email messages. The web host will also provide you a means to get an address for people to get to your web site with a web browser and post email to you.

To obtain space in a web hosting environment you become a member and agree to terms and conditions of renting the space - just as if you were to rent a house or commercial premises for your business. Once you agree and become a member, you are given an access code, a key, to your piece of cyberspace. This key, in the form of a login and password, allows you to connect to the web hosting server and up-load (transfer to) your web site so it can be accessed on the internet. Your login and password is also used to connect to a mail server to create and administer mailboxes to send and receive email for you, your staff, or family members.

Just like when you rent a house or commercial premises for your business, you have so many

rooms, bathrooms, and floor space to use. In a web-hosting environment, your area is defined as disk space and network transfer.

Disk space is measured in Megabytes (MB) or Gigabytes (GB). Megabyte roughly means 1,024,000 characters and Gigabyte roughly means 1,024 Million characters. Imagine a character as one key on your key board. These amounts determine how many files, documents, or data you can have on your web site.

Network Transfer is also measured in Megabytes or gigabytes which determines how much data (how many of your files, documents or data) can be downloaded (transferred to) people accessing your web site. The more people, or the more data each person accesses on your web site the more data is transferred on the network.

The more disk space and network transfer you use the greater percentage of the web-hosting environment you are using - therefore the higher the rent.

Just as no office building and home is the same, neither is every web-hosting environment. Some offices have stairs, others have lifts, some houses have ensuites, swimming pools, and gardens, - and others do not. Web-hosting environments are much the same, some offer bare structures to do just the basics and others offer an array of features and facilities to help you do just about everything you could ever need or want. Some of the features and facilities likely to be offered are ranges of software to use, components, databases, and server side script processing.

The similarity of renting an office or home to renting space in a web-hosting environment is even more similar. With some buildings a gardener and/or a guard is available to look after the gardening or provide security. In a web-hosting environment, you have support people to help you do what you need to do on your web site to make it grow and there are server administrators to protect and secure your web-hosting space.

When you rent a building there are key parts needed to work or live in the space, like rooms, offices, kitchens, toilets, and bathrooms. In your web-hosting environment, you will find equally important components that are required to make the space workable. The core components in a web-hosting environment are:

#### Web Server

The web server is a relatively simple piece of software that accepts requests over HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol) and delivers HTML pages and Image files.

#### FTP Server

FTP is the means of which a web master can transfer files to and from the server. To put your HTML and image files on a server you will generally use FTP to upload (transfer to) your files to the server running the web server.

#### Mail Server

The mail server consists of two parts POP (Post Office Protocol) and SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol). POP is where email is received into your mailbox and SMTP is what is used to send and receive email between mail servers.

#### Database Server

If you are using server side scripting on your web server (you use something like Microsoft Internet Information Server) then instead of providing 'static' data only on web pages you can provide data from a database allowing your users to search and view the data in different and dynamic way. Also, a Database server is used to gather data from visitors to your site; orders, feedback, discussions and the like.

Each one of the above components are software programs running on servers in the web-hosting environment. You can interact with each of these with special software programs you use on your computer. The main ones being:

#### Web Browser

When viewing the web you use a web browser like Internet Explorer. Many web hosting companies provide a 'Control Panel' to administer your web host account, which you use with your web browser. Most allow you to configure most aspects of your account using a simple web browser.

#### Web site/page editor

Today many web servers allow editing of WebPages over HTTP (hypertext transfer protocol) based

on Microsoft FrontPage technology. These special editors allow you to essentially look at your web site as if you were using a web browser and edit the pages directly as you see them using WYSIWIG (What you see is what you get) technology. Most web hosting environments support this, and if you are starting out, make sure it is available. One tip: make sure the web host providing this really does understand this technology - it is the main area of which many hacks and security intrusions occur.

#### FTP Client

This is a very simple piece of software that allows you to view the server folders and files in your web host account as if they were files and folders on your own computer. You can then drag and drop files between your computer and your web host account.

#### Email Client

If you are on the internet you would already be using an email client to send and receive your email. The most common are Outlook Express, Eudora and Web based mail clients like Hotmail.

#### Database Administration Client

The most common databases used with web servers are Microsoft SQL Server (available only on Windows) and MySQL (commonly found on Linux and UNIX but also available on Windows). SQL Server comes with its own administration client where you can view your databases, edit them, backup data and do all the administration functions you need. MySQL has an active online community where there is a range of administration clients available.

Choosing a web host is, again, similar to choosing a house to live in or commercial premises to do business. You need to define what it is you require: how much space you need and what features and facilities you need.

If you have been reading this article because this is new to you, then it is likely at this stage you only need minimal space and basic facilities. Once you have worked with the basic facilities you will learn more and become aware of greater facilities and features and then you can simply move from one web-hosting environment to another - paying more or paying less. Moving in cyberspace is much easier, faster, and more seamless than physically moving house or commercial premises.

Initially you may use the web-hosting environment offered by your ISP (internet Service provider), the company you use to connect to the internet. But remember these companies main business is connecting many thousands of people to the internet - not managing web hosting environments. You will generally find they offer less than basic facilities and minimal space.

If you are just starting out with your first web site the first major choice you will be faced with is "Unix" or "Windows". For a person just starting out on the internet, both are equally capable and will offer the facilities you need to have your place in cyberspace.

If you have a web designer or technical person to help you, you only need to consider how much space you really need. With this simple idea in mind, when you are just starting out, owning your piece of cyberspace will not cost anymore than \$8 per month. Many web-hosting companies will offer what you need for as little as \$3 per month (usually paid yearly).

If you are going alone and doing it all yourself you may want to consider an account with a web hosting company that offers and prides itself on its support and customer service, 24/7 support access and the experience, knowledge and skill of its server administrators. Remember, these are the gardeners and the guards who take care of your environment.

Web hosting is very simple and straightforward and once you obtain your space in cyberspace you will never want to let it go and you can easily move it where you want as a turtle carries its shell on its back. Always remember you are not stuck in the first web-hosting environment you choose.

Web hosting is your space in cyberspace and it is imperative to have a place in cyberspace in our modern society, just as it is to have an office to do business.

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<http://www.m6.net/>

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