

Are your Web Hosting costs too high?

By Candice Humbley

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Choosing the right host is an important aspect in lowering your web hosting costs. The web hosting industry, boasting several thousand web hosts, is still young and growing at a remarkable pace; hence finding the right host is not only difficult, but very time consuming; fortunately though it is worth the time and effort.

There are a few things to keep in mind when exploring; when deciding to form a partnership with the host. Below are just a few things to consider, which directly attribute to final cost.

Disk Space - Knowing how much web space your web site needs and compensating for a bit extra, for growth. For example, if your web site needs 200 MB of disk space, look for the plan which offers at least 250 to 300 MB of web space; this will prevent a large unexpected bill at the end of the month when high priced costs, charged by most web hosts for extra disk space usage, are added on to your bill. As a rule of thumb, an average web site should cost you no more than \$1 per 10 MB

Bandwidth - Figure out how much bandwidth (data transfer) your web site uses. As above, ensure you get more bandwidth than your site uses. For example, if your website uses 8GB bandwidth per month, then choose a plan, which offers at least 8 or 10GB bandwidth per month. This again will prevent 'spikes' of over usage, leading to higher extra costs. As a reference, an average web site should pay no more than \$3 per GB for bandwidth usage.

Block buying - Ask the web host if they have "block buying" facilities for purchasing projected extra disk space or bandwidth. But, be careful, if your web site needs only 2 GB extra bandwidth, you may have to buy an extra package in blocks of 5GB bandwidth; in this case, look for the host which will allow you to purchase extra disk space and bandwidth allowance as per your needs, this is crucial to cost savings.

Note: Ensure that you know the over-usage allowance rules; you need to know what happens if your web site uses more disk space or bandwidth than you have been allocated. The web host who informs you of possible over-usage well in advance, allowing you to take measures to reduce or budget for extra usage, is 'worth their weight in gold'.

Number of web sites - if you have more than one web site, sign up an account with a web host who provides multiple domains hosted on one account; this will work out a lot cheaper than an account per website.

A good tip would be to ask your friends and colleagues if they want to host their websites with you

on one account. For example at M6.net - <http://www.m6.net> a person or persons with 4 websites can save roughly \$20 per month by signing up an M6-2, multiple hosting account.

Applications and databases - Ensure that all the applications your web site uses (FrontPage, ASP pages, databases, cgi, PHP, etc.), are supported within the chosen account type. Find out if there are any extra fees for particular applications or associated database support. For example allot of hosts charge extra set-up fees to install FrontPage, which may be avoided by choosing another host offering the same features with no extra costs.

Mail Server - Emails are the lifeblood of your online business. Ensure that you get a sufficient number of email addresses with your own domain name (preferably unlimited); these are necessary for other email features like forwarders, and auto responders, etc. There is no need to pay an extra fee for use of a mail server as many hosts offer this service now for free, within the hosting plan.

Avoid long-term contracts - Many web hosts offer huge discounts on yearly or half yearly payments in advance, this may appear a good way to go, but note how long you are locked in. If possible avoid long-term contracts until you are sure about the services and reliability offered by that particular host. Paying on a monthly basis obviously has its benefits. If there are concerns with your service encouraging you to seek a new host elsewhere, you may lose out on many months of hosting fees when breaking a yearly or half-yearly contract; but, if the necessity arises, a loss of only a few days to close a troublesome account, is preferable.

Thinking ahead with reference to an established plan of action will help you avoid most surprises, and definitely help towards cutting costs, short term or long-term. Work out your growth rate and project future expansions. Keep a good record of past and present bandwidth and web space usage, this will help to project future needs.

Savings are mostly a matter of common sense, but in this industry of high technology most people forget this rule and try to look for the best, most efficient and most expensive technical programs and software to save them a buck or two. As in most businesses good cost effective groundwork is the best start to cutting costs.

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