

Choosing a Web-Hosting Company

Expert knowledge means success

Contents

1. Introduction
 1. Types of hosting
 2. Understanding your requirements
 2. Selecting your hosting ISP
 4. Internet Service Providers Association
 4. Useful Links
 4. Further Information
-

Note: This publication has not been updated since it was last published. Some of the hyperlinks may have changed and may need updating. In addition, some of the information in this publication may be out of date.

Introduction

A website needs to be hosted on a web server in order to make it available on the Internet. Hosting involves housing, serving and maintaining files so that visitors are able to view the content of the website.

The hosting industry has been subject to much fluctuation in recent years. With the end of the “dot.com boom,” both new and established hosting companies collapsed merged or were taken over. However, with websites now an integral part of a business marketing strategy, the number of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) providing hosting services and the offerings they provide is again on the increase.

Your website is the public face of your business, so the hosting solution selected must be able to provide a fast, secure and reliable service. You can opt for an in-house hosting solution or go to an external ISP. The size of your business and the number of concurrent sessions your website needs to support will influence your choice of hosting options.

Estimates suggest that there are over 500 ISPs in the UK. It is a very competitive market with lots of different offerings and deals. Even household names, such as banks and retailers, provide ISP services.

All ISPs essentially offer the same basic facilities, such as a choice of connection to the Internet, access to the World Wide Web, email and newsgroups, and web space for hosting your own website. Most tend to offer a range of packages aimed at different levels of users, based usually upon factors such as the speed of connection, the number of email addresses you require or the amount of free web space. Many ISPs also act as registration agents and register domain names for their customers. Some offer services such as website design or development of e-commerce facilities.

The costs and quality of the services you require may well be the deciding factors in making your selection. But you should also bear in mind the need for flexible services that will be able to cope as your business

grows and your requirements change.

Types of hosting

Before you select your ISP, you need to understand the different types of hosting available.

Shared hosting

Shared hosting is the typical hosting choice for small companies. Your business will share a server with other businesses, which allows the host to keep the costs to a minimum. However, this also means that you share the resources of that server and the performance of your site could be impacted by heavy traffic to other sites that share the server.

Co-located hosting

In co-located hosting, your business purchases a server from a hardware vendor, and supplies it to the host who plugs it into its network and its power systems. The host is responsible for making sure its network is available, and your business is responsible for all support and maintenance of your server. Some co-location hosts will take on the support of your server at a cost, thereby making this a similar arrangement to managed dedicated hosting.

Unmanaged dedicated hosting

In unmanaged dedicated hosting your business leases a server from a host. The level of support included varies between hosters and is often limited to Web-based support. It may not be suitable if your business requires a reactive service.

Managed dedicated hosting

In managed dedicated hosting your business leases a server from a host who provides a responsive level of support and maintenance on the server that is backed by quality guarantees. This maintenance typically includes services such as server uptime monitoring, a hardware warranty, security patch updates and more.

Hosting with email

Most hosting companies offer integrated email services with website hosting which may supplement or replace any existing email facility your business has. Often this service is marketed the other way as email services with website space. This publication deals primarily with the considerations in selecting an ISP to host

Internet sales continue to rise

Around £1 in every £8 spent on retail is now spent online, according to stats from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released on 15 December 2011.

In November 2011, the value of internet retail sales was estimated at £787.9m - or approximately 12.2 per cent of all UK retail sales - the ONS figures show, rising from £593.4m or 9.5 per cent of sales in November 2010.

The ONS has charted a steady rise in online retail spending over the past five years: in November 2006 around £1 in every £33 was spent online.

your website. If you are also making a selection for email purposes and general internet access most of the considerations remain the same. However, you will also wish to consider the Internet access methods and costs. This is covered in more detail in our publication: *IP85-INTERNET*.

Understanding your requirements

Ensure that you understand your requirements from the outset, perhaps by doing a brief analysis of your anticipated Internet usage. For example, you should consider:

- how many users will need an Internet connection;
- where users are physically located;
- whether users have network access;
- whether users will require email or other web-based features;
- who will publish and update your website;
- whether you are likely to need any e-commerce facilities either now or in the future;
- whether you will need to use an online database;
- whether you will need to host more than one website.

Selecting your hosting ISP

An Internet service provider (ISP) provides connectivity for your business' computers to the Internet. The service that the ISP provides affects everything that you do online, from surfing the web to the performance of your website, so choosing the right one is an important part of an Internet and e-commerce strategy.

Understanding the range of services offered and the right questions to ask will play an important part in ensuring that the choice of ISP meets your needs.

When considering an ISP, always check that it is an ISPA member. ISPA operates a complaints procedure and a code of practice that members must commit to.

Prioritise the facilities and services that are important to your business. There are many ISPs providing hosting services particularly

at the low-end of the marketplace and offer invitingly cheap access. However, a low-cost service may not offer the reliability and flexibility of service and offerings that your business needs. Consider the following factors before making your decision.

Stability

Find out how long the hosting provider has been in business and its ownership structure. Ask about its growth and profitability. What profile of clients does it currently host? Don't presume that size means stability.

Performance

Your website will need a fast connection to the Internet. This is determined by the bandwidth available - the amount of data that can be transmitted and received by an Internet connection. If your connection is not fast enough, users will only be able to access your webpages slowly - particularly if many users are trying to access your site at the same time. Most external hosting services refer to this as the 'backbone' - the speed of connection into their servers.

The ISP hosting your website will have bandwidth limitations imposed so you will need to ensure that the limitations are feasible. Find out what the rates are for exceeding the bandwidth - if the website would be taken offline, for example - and how the ISP will inform you that you are close to exceeding your bandwidth.

Ask the ISP about its access speeds and the average utilisation of its connections. (If it is high they may not have sufficient capacity to maintain acceptable access speeds). Your customers will become frustrated if it takes a long time to access your web site. Similarly, if you have a bundled email option, you want fast delivery of information. Check whether you need to change your modem/router to achieve certain connection speeds.

Reliability

Your business must be able to rely on the availability of service, 24 hours a day. The more you rely on your website, the less you can afford to wait until the following morning until critical problems are fixed.

Ask the ISP for their uptime statistics (the percentage of time the service is running properly and if they have any service level guarantees. Will your account be discounted if the connection fails?

Check that the ISP has their own data centres with fail-safe load balanced servers supported by fully redundant power and connectivity. Redundancy refers to the number of connections that an ISP has to the Internet. High redundancy means more connections, which means if part of its system fails the ISP will simply be able to switch over without your connection being affected.

Ask the ISP about their connection to the Internet, whether they are a Tier 1, 2 or 3 provider. Tier 1 ISPs are those that own or control their own portion of the Internet, while Tier 2 and 3 providers lease bandwidth from them. A Tier 1 provider may be more expensive, but this is offset by the fact that they also tend to be more reliable.

Security

Security is an ongoing concern on the Internet, so any solution you opt for should demonstrate that it is secure and able to withstand hackers, fraudsters and denial-of-service attacks.

If taking email as part of the hosting package, ask what virus scanning and spam filtering the ISP provides.

If your website will include an on-line shop check if a secure server is supported for the receipt of payment information such as credit card details.

Support

Assess at the sales stage whether the company has the knowledge and experience to support your business. Ask whether you will be supported directly by skilled system administrators or whether your support calls will be routed through a non-technical "customer service" department. Ask for written details of the support they offer so that you can have an understanding of what is supported for free, what is supported at a charge, and whether any of your requirements are not supported. If the ISP provides the facilities to manage your own account online, ask if you can see this facility and assess it for ease of use.

If you are using specific Web scripting tools, design software, extensions or databases you must make sure that your selected IP supports these products. If the ISP does support your configuration, check its level of expertise in these areas. For example, some ISPs require specific

browsers and some services may not be available if you use a Mac. Others may not support all the features of your website design software.

Flexibility

Check that the ISP has a broad range of services that can be tailored to meet both your current and future requirements.

Facilities

There are a wide range of facilities on offer including website tools to allow you to:

- display digital pictures;
- create and manage your content;
- view website statistics;
- add password protection;
- provide a visitors' book on your site;
- add a chat room;
- create an on-line forum; and
- create an on-line shop.

Some of these tools may come free. If not, check that you are not paying for something you don't need.

If your website will include an on-line shop that requires online access to database applications establish which database technologies the ISP supports, the volume of information they can hold and the web traffic that they can support. Ensure that additional facilities such as shopping cart and e-catalogue software are available.

Understanding more about the visitors to your website can help you develop new marketing campaigns and identifying which parts of the site are particularly popular. Check that the ISP can provide you with a range of statistics including the number of visitors, the web pages viewed, how long they viewed each page for, and details of the search engine they used to find your site.

Price

Don't make a decision purely on price. It could be a false economy to select a low price option but end up paying more in support costs or in time lost due to slow access to a busy network. Select a competitively priced ISP that offers the services and support your business needs. Check that the package you are buying offers sufficient webspace and traffic capacity to handle your growth plans. Some offerings include the hosting of multiple domain names sharing webspace and traffic

allowances. Ask whether the ISP offers a discounted annual charge.

Reference Sites

Ask for details of contactable clients with similar requirements to yours.

Customer screening

Ask the ISP if it has any restrictions on the type of sites it will host. If it is prepared to host spammers or pornographic sites the associated network IP addresses run the risk of being blacklisted. These tainted IP addresses could then be redistributed to new clients.

Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA)

The ISPA is the UK's Trade Association for providers of Internet services. Established in 1995 it promotes competition, self-regulation and the development of the Internet industry. It has over 100 members and operates a complaints procedure and a code of practice that members must commit to.

To view the list of members and their contact details visit www.ispa.org.uk

Useful Links

Find out about website hosting at the Web Hosting Information website
www.webhostinginformation.net/category/resources

Find the latest news on ISPs in the UK at the ISP Review website
www.ispreview.co.uk

Compare service providers on the thinkbroadband website
www.thinkbroadband.com/archive/1.html?q=compare+isp

Find the latest news from the UK's broadband service providers at the thinkbroadband website
www.thinkbroadband.com

Compare broadband services from UK ISPs at the Broadband Checker website
www.broadbandchecker.co.uk

Get the latest news on wireless broadband at the Broadband Wireless Association website
www.broadband-wireless.org

Find details of how to change your registration agent at the Nominet website
www.nominet.org.uk

Further Information

This guide is for general interest - it is always essential to take advice on specific issues. We believe that the facts are correct as at the date of publication, but there may be certain errors and omissions for which we cannot be responsible.

Important Notice

© Copyright 2019, Martin Pollins, All Rights Reserved

This publication is published by **Bizezia Limited**. It is protected by copyright law and reproduction in whole or in part without the publisher's written permission is strictly prohibited. The publisher may be contacted at info@bizezia.com

Some images in this publication are taken from Creative Commons – such images may be subject to copyright. **Creative Commons** is a non-profit organisation that enables the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools.

Articles and information contained herein are published without responsibility by us, the publisher or any contributing author for any loss howsoever occurring as a consequence of any action which you take, or action which you choose not to take, as a result of this publication or any view expressed herein. Whilst it is believed that the information contained in this publication is correct at the time of publication, it is not a substitute for obtaining specific professional advice and no representation or warranty, expressed or implied, is made as to its accuracy or completeness.

The information is relevant within the United Kingdom. These disclaimers and exclusions are governed by and construed in accordance with English Law.

Publication issued or updated on: 27 January 2012

Ref: 687



Acknowledgement

¹ Some information in this publication is derived from Government sources and Crown Copyright therein is duly acknowledged.