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How to Choose the Right Web Host To Ensure Online Success

By C S Wurzberger and Pam Foster

Choosing your Web host is one of the most important decisions you'll make because you need to make sure your host can keep your site "live."

A Web host is a server (a special computer) that holds your Web site's code and images and makes them continually viewable on the Internet. Think of it as your headquarters in the Internet Jungle—the place that serves as your base where customers can see, browse and buy your products and services.

You need to be able to trust that your site is functioning the way it should at all times! With the wrong host, you could end up with disastrous downtime, overpay for services, pay for features you don't need, or worse yet, pay more than you expected for functionality that you required but failed to discuss up front.

There are three main types of hosts or hosting services:

Free Host—Yes, this host costs nothing, but there's a trade-off: your visitors will be subject to pop-up ads, which are distracting for your customers and a nightmare for your business.

Shared Host—This is the most affordable at about \$20.00 per month or more. You share the host with many other sites, but your customers won't know that. Your site will run as a separate entity. Many small-to-mid-size businesses share a host and are quite satisfied with the service and reliability.

Dedicated Host—Businesses buy their own dedicated servers because they need a lot of file space and anticipate a large volume of site traffic. This can cost \$300 to \$1,000 per month.

To find hosts to consider using for your business, ask people you know and trust because there's a lot of confusion on the Web—it's hard to tell who's a legitimate, high-quality host and who isn't. Another option is to rely on your Web team to recommend a host. Or better yet, many Web development companies have their own dedicated host and they offer hosting services to their clients.

During your search for the right host, you'll find that most Web hosting companies offer packages based on what you need. Be sure to ask them:

- **Do you have enough data storage space for your site?** (Enough disk space to hold your pages, images, sound clips, etc.)
- **Do you have enough data transfer (bandwidth)?** This is the data transfer activity your contract supports—what's going back and forth between your site and your customers'. "Bandwidth" is the total of all activity related to your site in a given month. If you go over that amount, you will be upgraded to a higher-level plan, which costs more.

- **Do you offer individual sign-in to upload your Web site?** Will they assign you a unique user ID and password for your site?
- **Do you deliver 24/7 “uptime?”** Your site should be up and running at least 99.9% of the time. (When the server is down, your Web site is down.)
- **Can you provide more e-mail accounts?** You’ll need more e-mails as you grow and add staff.

Always examine a host contract before you sign it, so there are no surprises down the road when you need more space or added services.

These are just some of the ways you can boost your success on the Internet. To learn more, you’ll want to attend the three-part Web development seminars that Score offers.

You will also want to get your hands on the new Internet Jungle Guide book, *9 Easy Steps to Planning a Profitable Web Site: Your complete guide to navigating the Web development jungle and launching a site that sells!* This mini-course and workbook will help you launch a site that truly attracts prospects and customers who are ready to make purchases!

You can order this book online at www.internetjungleguide.com. *The Internet Jungle Guide is a division of Premiere Visions, LLC.*

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The national SCORE Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to entrepreneur education and the formation, growth and success of small business nationwide. SCORE Portland is one of 389 chapters throughout the United States, with over 11,000 volunteers nationwide. SCORE is a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration.

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