

## Top 10 Things to Look For in a Web Host

Although this is a "top 10" list, most of the following things could easily be listed as the #1 most important consideration, so take them all seriously. It doesn't matter if you are a large company, a small one, or just a hobbyist who wants to display photos of hand-painted electric trains. Everyone needs to consider the same things, just to different degrees.

Now, remembering that there is really no firm order to these, let us consider the top 10 things to look for in a web host:

1. Reliability ("uptime") – Your host should be reliable, stable and fast, and should guarantee its uptime, the minimum figure for which should be 99%. A straight 99% is actually considered low these days, as 99.5% or higher is rapidly becoming the new standard. Check to see if the host provides a prorated refund if uptime falls below the stated benchmark. With how much business a company can lose any time their website is down this crucial aspect of web hosting probably does deserve to be in the #1 spot, but read on for other important info.
2. Data transfer (traffic or "bandwidth")?– Data transfer mean the number of bytes delivered from your site to its visitors as they browse. If a web host advertises "unlimited bandwidth," find out how much traffic the particular deal you're considering really allows. Most new sites that are not archives, storage or "drop-send" sites normally use less than 3GB of bandwidth per month. If you expect your traffic requirements to increase over time, check the host's policy for "overages." If there is a charge (usually per additional GB) over the allowed bandwidth, you need to determine if it's cheaper to pay it once in a while (if it will not be ongoing) or to upgrade your service level.
3. Disk space?– Be on guard against the "unlimited disk space" deals, too, and view them with the same skepticism as you just observed being applied to data transfer. The vast majority of sites need no more than 10-20MB of web space, so don't fall prey to enticements like 500MB, or "unlimited space." To get an idea of relative size, a site with about 200 pages and the usual assortment of text, pictures and motion graphics will use only about 10-15 MB for all of the pages and supporting files.
4. Technical support?– Is the tech support 24/7/365? You should probably avoid a host that has no staff working weekends or holidays since things have a habit of breaking down at the worst possible times. A claim of "24/7 support" is not always true, so test the sales pitch by e-mailing or calling on a Friday night or holiday. Measure how long it takes for you to connect with a human being on the other end. In addition response time, ensure that the support personnel are technically proficient. Believe it or not, some tech support personnel are converted sales people "learning on the job," which is not the kind of help you need in an emergency that threatens your business.
5. Technical features (FTP, PHP, CGI-BIN access, SSI, etc.) –?What once were luxuries are now necessities. Fact is, you simply must have all of these. There are many commercial hosts that require getting their approval to install PHP or CGI scripts, which means that you cannot implement a feature on your site when you so desire. You need these functions if you want to customize error pages, maintain databases, set up additional security measures and so forth. Make sure you have full access to these tools, and find out about any restrictions on their use.
6. Server type?– The operating system and server can be very important, and there are good, practical reasons for choosing one server over another. If you intend to take advantage of ASP, for example, it is available only on a Windows NT/2000/XP server. However, it is often cheaper to go with a Unix system running the Apache server software, which is stable and dependable. Another advantage of Unix-based hosts –using Linux, FreeBSD, etc. – is that an Apache web server lets you create and manage error pages, block IP addresses, stop email harvesters and more, without needing your host to install or approve a thing. Finally, if you plan to do some e-commerce on your site, find out if you get SSL (Secure Socket Layer), MySQL and a shopping cart. At the very least, you will need SSL if you plan to get credit card information from your customers over the Internet.
7. Email services – You have your own domain now, so you probably want e-mail addresses with the domain name. Although the vast majority of plans include e-mail services, find out about the quality and level of auto-responders, mail forwarding? and list management. Ensure that you also have web access to your mail ("webmail") and investigate the spam tools that are provided.
8. Control panel?– It may be called this, it may be called your "Net Tool Kit," but all hosts give you a set of utilities to manage the particulars of your web account, and a web page from which to do it, too. You need to be able to manage your e-mail, change passwords, block spammers and so on. These are all standard maintenance chores for webmasters and if you have to wait on your host's tech support to take care of things, you will lose important control over your business.
9. Price and payment plans –?Naturally, price is always a consideration, but remember that the most expensive hosts are not necessarily the best. Factor in price, and be wary of great price differentials on similar plans. Most web hosts offer annual or even quarterly payment plans that discount the monthly rate, but if you are using a new or less-well-known host, you should consider paying monthly until you establish their reliability. When you are

satisfied with the host, you can change your payment plan and grab that discount.

10. Reviews – What do others say about the hosts? Use Google to track down both complaints and congratulations, and consider the source of each comment.

There's a lot to do, but with your business possibly at stake – or at least the fate of those model train photos – you can't be too careful. Get the information you need to make an informed decision, and weigh things carefully. You will save yourself a good deal of frustration if you do.

### About the Author

Lunarpages is a leader in [affordable web hosting](#) and dedicated server solutions. With their great pricing, excellent [web hosting affiliate program](#) and top-notch support, they are the obvious choice for your website and your online business identity.

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