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Question: *My current web hosting provider is expensive, and the service is unreliable. My website currently has about 50 pages. How can I find a good service that includes email accounts and spam filtering?*

Charges for web hosting can vary significantly from $5 to $50 per month, depending upon what you actually need to buy from the service provider. The following are the key considerations to keep in mind when you shop for a web hosting service (and evaluate their hosting package options):

Storage space

How much storage space does your website require? Most web hosting services offer several packages. More storage space for a website costs more money.   The good news is that a number of reliable services will provide 50 megabytes to 1 gigabyte of storage space at rates of $5 to $15 per month. A website that consists of 50 to 100 pages of text will occupy well under 50 megabytes, leaving plenty of room for expansion.

Reliability.

You want your website to be accessible at all hours. All web hosting services occasionally experience downtime, but some are more reliable than others. A number of consumer resources offer periodic reviews of web hosting services. Here are several that we used in evaluating the services we're recommending to you: http://whreviews.com, http://www.hostbuyersguide.com, http://www.webhostmagazine.com.

Bandwidth:

How much traffic do you estimate that your website will attract? 100 visits to a site per month is a modest number; 5000 per month is heavy traffic. Web hosting packages are priced by the amount of Internet bandwidth they provide as well as by storage space. Monthly bandwidth is usually sold in gigabytes.

Monthly Bandwidth =Average Daily Visitors x Average Page Views x Average Page Size (in kilobytes) x 31 (days in a month). If your site allows people to download files, this additional bandwidth consumption should also be factored in. You can find a rough-and-ready wizard to calculate bandwidth requirements for a website at: http://www.findmyhosting.com/webhosting-guide.htm. This useful site also includes instructions for making more precise bandwidth calculations at http://www.findmyhosting.com/bandwidth.htm

Typically, many small business websites require less than 500 megabytes per month of Internet bandwidth. Websites that include large graphics, support interactive user transactions, or multimedia presentations will consume more bandwidth, depending upon the average number of daily visitors.

Server type and scripting support

These options are important if your website uses interactive forms -- or requires internal support for financial transactions and database searches. Websites that use Microsoft's Active Server Pages (ASP) or Microsoft .NET technology need to run on a Windows host rather than a Linux host. If the website includes pages with other automated scripting functions, the host package must include support for the appropriate scripting language -- such as Perl, CGI, or PHP. If the website is managed by a specific application, such as Microsoft Front Page, the hosting package must include Microsoft Front Page server extensions.

Miscellaneous

The support pages for individual service providers will include details on the type of spam filtering they provide, the number of free email accounts offered in the package, and support for other important features. Referrer logs record the Internet addresses of visitors to the site and can also indicate the website URLs that visitors are coming from before reaching your site. Referrer logs are a valuable feature for market analysis on commercial websites.

Recommended Web Hosting Services:

We recommend the following web hosting services:

Lunarpages: http://www.lunarpages.com/plan1.php
This is a feature-packed bargain service with a good reputation. The basic package is $7.95/month. It includes unlimited email accounts, 3 gigabytes of storage space, 40 gigabytes per month of bandwidth, standard scripting support, and Microsoft Frontpage Extensions. They claim that their spam filtering service stops 98% of all Internet spam and viruses. The package also includes SSL (Secure Socket Layer) support for accepting user-sensitive data and conducting financial transactions.

Hostingmatters.com http://hostingmatters.com/plans.html
This is a big league, industrial strength service provider with good customer reviews. Their basic hosting plan, at $6 per month, offers less storage space (50 megabytes), and 5 gigabytes of monthly bandwidth, with 10 free email accounts. Enhanced packages at $11 to $26 per month offer more storage space, more email accounts, and support for multiple subdomains on a website. All Hosting Matters packages include spam and virus filtering, scripting support, and full-featured referrer logs, as well as SSL support for secure web transactions. Hosting Matters servers run on the Red Hat Linux operating system and do not offer Microsoft ASP and .NET support. Many reviewers consider this service to be as close to bullet-proof as they come, but Hosting Matters does not offer live telephone support.

Ipowerweb.com, http://ipowerweb.com/products/webhosting/index.html
This web-hosting service has been in business since 1998 and currently hosts over 128,000 sites. The monthly fee for their Business Pro package is $7.95, including free setup with a 12-month subscription. This package provides 3 gigabytes of storage space, 50 gigabytes of monthly bandwidth, 500 email accounts, email filtering, full scripting and Microsoft Frontpage support plus SSL support and shopping carts for financial transactions.