



Creo Communico LLC

Create. Communicate.

Getting Started Online How to Choose Your Website Host



Finding the right company to host your website can be overwhelming. Where should you begin?

Let's start with the basics. A website is "hosted" on a server. A server is the computer that holds the files for your website. When a web surfer wants to view your website the server sends the web surfer's computer your website page and their computer displays it in their browser.

What Do You Need in a Server?

- ✓ Do you need a gigabyte of storage space?
- ✓ What IS a gigabyte, anyway?
- ✓ Do you need add-on domains?
- ✓ A shopping cart?
- ✓ Multiple email addresses?



Don't base your decision on price or features alone. Reliability and support are important, too. So many things to consider!

You need to know what you need and what to look for before you start shopping. The information that follows will help you become an informed shopper!

Server Uptime

A cheap host won't be worth the price if your website goes down frequently. Don't hesitate to contact a potential hosting company to request their uptime stats.

Server Speed

Overloaded servers or servers without adequate connections to the internet will be s-l-o-w. This means your site will not load quickly and you will lose visitors (and sales). How can you check a host's server speed? First, don't judge a company by its own website because many hosts have their main site hosted on a different server for good reason (if their own servers go down, their website will still be available so their clients can contact them for support and updates). Instead, you need to check their client sites. Most hosts will be happy to provide references if they aren't listed on their website already.

Price and Payment Options

A good, reliable host can be found for a reasonable price. It will vary depending on your exact needs, but expect anywhere from \$5 to \$25/month.

What options are available for payments? Consider looking for a host who offers multiple payment methods and has a true merchant account to accept credit cards, instead of just PayPal, 2Checkout, Worldpay, or other third party payment methods. These are great additional payment methods to provide but the process of approval for a merchant account to accept Visa, Mastercard or other credit cards directly requires a company to provide a substantial amount of documentation and verification and thus provides you with an extra level of security in the company's legitimacy. It's not scam-proof, but it helps. If you choose to pay with a credit card you can also do a charge-back in the event the company doesn't provide the service they agreed to.

Look for a company who offers 24/7 access to billing online. This will make your life easier in case you want to pay your bill at 3 am or need to update your information on the weekend.

Storage Space

How much storage space do you really need? The majority of small business websites take less than 100 MB of storage space. If you have your website already designed, you can add up the file sizes of the files to see how much space it will take. Remember to consider that you need additional space for email storage and more files as your site grows.

Bandwidth

Bandwidth is how much data transfer or traffic hits your website. You can get a rough idea of how much you'll need like this:

- ✓ Average page size of 5 kb plus 10 kb of graphics.
- ✓ You expect 100 visitors per day.
- ✓ Each visitor views 4 pages of your website.
- ✓ $15 \text{ kb total per page } (5 \text{ kb} + 10 \text{ kb}) * 100 \text{ visitors} * 4 \text{ pages} * 30 \text{ days in a month} = 180 \text{ MB of bandwidth per month}$

Find out what the procedure is if you go over your storage space limit or bandwidth limit. There should be an easy way to add more of either to your account for an additional fee.

Basic Features

Here are some of the basic features to look for in a website host:

- ✓ An Online Control Panel (CPanel is a very popular control panel with extensive support documentation available, and includes Fantastico) so you can manage your site and email
- ✓ FTP Access to Upload Your Files
- ✓ Email Accounts and Email Forwarding Features
- ✓ Web based email system and POP mail available
- ✓ A Reliable Backup System (more on this below)

If you plan to build your own website you might also look for a host that includes site builder software bundled with their hosting packages. If it's included you can save some money on your initial website costs.

Advanced Features

Depending on your needs, you might also look for the following features:

- ✓ Multiple Domain Names: Many hosts are setup to allow you to host multiple domains under one hosting package. You can either point additional domains to your main website, or you can set up additional websites at additional domain names. If you plan to purchase more than one domain name this feature can save you money since you won't have to purchase additional hosting packages for each domain.
- ✓ Secure Server: If you will be accepting payments online, you'll likely need a secured server (the exception being if you use a payment processor like

PayPal). Most hosts offer what's called a "shared SSL certificate" at no additional charge. This works well for businesses just getting started. But be sure to also check if you can later upgrade to your own unique IP address with your own SSL certificate, and what the charges are for it. Expect to pay a few dollars more a month for a unique IP, and anywhere from \$30 to \$300 or more for an SSL certificate.

- ✓ MySQL Databases with phpMyAdmin access: If you plan to run an e-commerce shopping cart, newsletter, or forum on your site, you'll most likely need a host who supports these features.

There are many other advanced features. So just be sure that if you're planning to use some specific shopping cart or editing software (such as Front Page) that you verify it will work with the host you are considering.

Backup Procedures

Industry standard is to make nightly backups. This way if a server or hard drive fails, or if you accidentally delete your entire website, your host can restore a recent copy. Do NOT host somewhere without nightly backups.

You may also ask your host if you can request a backup restore, as well as if backups are enabled for you to make and save your own. Some hosts disable complete backups so you aren't able to run one to keep a copy of everything safely on your home computer.

Keep in mind that as with any computer equipment, hardware failure is not a question of IF, it's a question of WHEN (all hardware will eventually fail). Is the host you're considering prepared for this event? See if the host you're considering has RAID enabled on their servers. RAID stands for "redundant array of independent disks." In a RAID configuration, all files on the server are mirrored. This means there's a real-time second copy of everything. If one drive crashes, no data is lost and it takes only minutes to get back online.

Support Options

One of the most important things to research about a potential website host is their support system. What options do you have when you need help?

Look for self-help options like flash (video) tutorials that walk you through basic tasks like creating an email address, and for an online knowledgebase that you can search for help.

Check to see what type of support system they offer when you need to contact a tech for help. Do you send an email or is there a trouble-ticket system? A trouble-

ticket system is a better option since it reduces the chances of lost email, and allows you to track responses online in case your email is down or blocking mail from reaching you.

Also look to see what the general response time is. You don't want to spend 48 hours waiting for a response from support if something goes wrong with your website. Send a test message through the hosts support system and see how quickly they reply.

Does the host offer an off-server emergency site? If your website is down, that means the company's server is down. If their website (and email, and support system) are hosted on the same server as yours, you won't be able to contact them when it matters.

Customer Testimonials and Experience

New hosting companies pop up daily on the internet. Some are fantastic. Others aren't so fantastic. Look for a company with a good track record. Take time to read the testimonials offered on their website (and find out how long those customers have been with the host). Or, better yet, if you've got a friend or colleague who's online, ask if they're happy with their host. Find out how quick and helpful support responses are, and whether they've had extensive down time or any other problems. A reliable host will have satisfied customers.

These 10 points will help you make an informed decision when shopping for a website host.

Thank you for downloading this guide from the *Getting Started Online* series. I hope this quick guide has been helpful in learning the basic features and options to look for in a host, and I'd be honored if you'd consider Creo Communico LLC for your website host. You'll find we offer reliable servers packed with features including a choice of site builders, ecommerce options, and more.



Michelle Shaeffer

CEO, Creo Communico LLC

www.creocommunico.com

P.S. Sign up now and use code *GETTINGSTARTED* for 10% off your website hosting order!