



*Blog Basics: Finding the Perfect Web Host*

Copyright © 2008 by Shaun W. Taylor

[www.wordpressforbeginners.com](http://www.wordpressforbeginners.com)

[publisher@wordpressforbeginners.com](mailto:publisher@wordpressforbeginners.com)

Some rights reserved. You may republish excerpts from this book as long as they are accompanied by an attribution link back to [www.wordpressforbeginners.com](http://www.wordpressforbeginners.com).

Revision 2007-11 ([Check for updates](#))

## About This Book

The content in this book is an expanded version of a section in the *Your WordPress Blog in 1 Hour* book, which discusses how to get WordPress installed and configured on a web host's server.

This is a Quick Take Book. It is intended to offer quick information and advice on a very specific topic.

This book was produced in booklet form. For optimal readability, it will be printed in landscape view.

Finally, I'm here to help. Really. I want to help you. If you have questions, visit the [WordPress for Beginners](#) companion site. It is newcomer-friendly!

# 1

---

## Types of Hosting

Hosting plans can be divided into four categories, each having its own unique considerations: dedicated hosting, virtual private hosting, specialty hosting, and shared hosting. We're going to briefly look at each, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each choice.

### *Dedicated Web Hosting*

With dedicated web hosting, you lease a complete server from a web host, and you have complete control over how that server is configured, what software is installed, and how the server is used.

This is often referred to as "root" access, meaning you have access to the master administrator account on the server. Dedicated servers offer maximum flexibility for demanding web sites and applications.

Many companies advertise dedicated servers for as low as \$100 per month, but even low-cost plans end up costing \$150 to \$200 after adding essential hardware or support options. These lower-priced plans are really only good for small workgroups. A good, entry-level dedicated server will run at least \$300 to \$400 per month.

## Advantages

- Maximum flexibility: it's your server, do what you please
- High performance if you choose a powerful server
- You don't share server resources with other accounts
- You can host all services on your server (e.g. your own name-server, SSL)
- Technical support is generally top-notch
- Favorable upgrade paths, meaning you can scale (increase the power of your server, or number of servers) very quickly

## Disadvantages

- They can be expensive
- They take quite some time to setup. I generally spend the better part of a week patching and upgrading software, tweaking the system, and documenting setup and establishing relationships.
- You must keep the software patched
- You are responsible for the security of your data

## Virtual Private Hosting

A Virtual Private Server (VPS) is a hybrid of shared hosting (discussed next) and dedicated hosting. You typically share a server with 30 to 40 other people, and you have complete administrative control over your segregated area of that server.

VPS plans are intended to provide all of the flexibility of a dedicated server, while being much less costly, and requiring less system administration on your part.

These plans sound great in concept, but in reality, the entry level VPS plans generally perform atrociously, because you are often allocated only a small portion of the server's processor, and you are competing with 30 to 40 users of this same server.

The problem is intensified due to the nature of VPS customers—they are looking for more control over their servers, and more power on the backend, meaning that by definition they are likely to eat a significant portion of a server's resources.

I once “upgraded” from a shared hosting account to a VPS account at the host's request because my web site was receiving a large amount of greedy traffic, only to see my page response times jump to 5 to 6 seconds per page from the under 1-second response times I was getting on the shared platform.

VPS plans will range anywhere from \$30 to \$100, depending on your needs, the number of accounts on a server, the size of the server, and your requirements for server resources.

## Advantages

- They have the control and configurability of dedicated platforms
- They are reasonably priced
- Very easy to upgrade to a dedicated server if it's ever needed

## Disadvantages

- Entry level plans often perform atrociously
- They require more effort to administer than shared hosting plans

## Shared Web Hosting

In a shared web hosting account, you are typically placed on a high-powered server, but you are sharing that server with 300 or more other people. Sounds terrible, right? It's actually much better than it appears on paper. It's the 80/20 rule in effect, except in this case, it's probably closer to 95/5.

Applied to shared hosting, the 80/20 rule says that 20 percent of web sites account for 80 percent of the traffic. Shared hosting clients generally don't require much in the way of server resources, so you're sharing with quite a few people who use very few resources. To boot, these shared hosting servers are usually powerhouses. A dedicated plan with the same server could cost well over \$1000 per month.

Because shared hosting platforms are very popular, hosts usually provide a very rich toolset that can be used to administer your account and your web site. A good portion of it is junk, but you quickly learn to ignore the dogs and find the gems.

Shared hosting accounts are great until you want to do something out of the norm on your server. Because the host handles all patches and security, they are usually very careful with what you can and can't do on the server. After all, you could potentially knock 300 clients offline at any time!

### Advantages

- Plans are very cost-effective
- Performance (at *good* hosts) is usually very good
- Rich administrative toolset

### Disadvantages

- Limited configuration flexibility
- You can only install approved software products

## Specialty Hosting

Two similar types of specialty hosting I'd like to point out are grid service and cloud hosting.

Grid computing and cloud computing spread processing load over hundreds of different servers working in tandem for your site, applications, and email. They eliminate the single points of failure and the eventual service interruptions that will be experienced in most any hosting account.

In essence, your server's computing power can expand and contract at will to meet the demands placed on it. A great concept, but comparably untested.

### Which is Best?

The perfect plan for you depends on your needs. Because this book is on blogging basics, I can unequivocally say that you belong on a shared hosting platform, provided that you use a host that offers a well-equipped account. By well-equipped, I mean that you can host multiple domains under one account, you get a large amount of storage and bandwidth, you are provided with good support, and your server is equipped with popular software packages.

High-traffic blogs might be well suited for an entry-level specialty host, as well. But no blog starts out at a high traffic level!

# 2

## Technology Platforms

---

I'm only going to briefly touch on technology platforms in this section. There are so many variants, and which is best to use largely depends on having intimate knowledge of a project. More importantly, the technology platform is probably not immediately applicable to your task at hand. However, it is important to keep in mind so that if in the future you decide that you want to make customizations, your platform makes it easy for you to do so.

When I talk about technology platforms, it's important to understand that I'm referring primarily to the server-side portion. All platforms have a client side and a server side. The client side is what is downloaded into your web browser (Firefox, Internet Explorer) and interpreted by the browser. This includes HTML for markup, CSS for layout and display, and JavaScript for basic logic and interactivity. All hosts will support the same client side environment.

The server side contains the code that is processed on the server. The server does its processing, maybe querying a database or another web site for input, and then packages that information into HTML that is sent to the browser. The three primary server side environments you might have an interest in are:

- ASP
- Java / JSP
- PHP, Perl, Python

ASP is a dying technology, and I would ignore it (I can say that, because I used to code in ASP). Java / JSP is my preference for coding, but I would recommend PHP for anyone new to scripting.

PHP is much easier to learn, much easier to code, and there are many, many good examples of PHP applications in the wild. Plus, WordPress is built on PHP, so if you decide to tackle PHP in the future, not only will it help you make a more functional site, it will also help you extend and customize WordPress in unique ways.

The good news here is that almost every host supports PHP out of the box. But plans with both ASP and PHP support, or plans with both JSP and PHP support will likely be more expensive, and could also perform a bit more slowly (mainly in the case of Java plans) than pure PHP solutions. So when looking at plans, don't pay extra for support that you don't need.

## 3

## Choosing the Perfect Host

---

Finding a good host can be a challenge. Google any terms that are related to hosting accounts and you'll get pages of results describing the "top web hosts." The problem is that most of these types of sites are run by web hosts, or by people affiliated with web hosts. Or independent third-parties who rank top hosts by the size of the referral fee they receive for sending business. Getting an unbiased opinion about which services are best requires a lot more digging.

One way to determine which hosts are worth investigating is to review those aggregate sites to determine a list of suitors. Then find out what their customers say. You can do this by finding out which message boards their customers frequent (including the host's own boards), and using their posts and the hosts' responses to gauge sentiment and satisfaction. Combine that information with independent verification of hosts' network uptime and throughput, and you'll have a good list of candidates.

And that's just what I did when looking for shared hosting, VPS hosting, and dedicated hosting!

For most of my hosting needs, I use shared hosting accounts at either [Lunar Pages](#) or [BlueHost](#) exclusively. I prefer Lunar Pages over BlueHost because I have used them for years on dozens of sites (I even set up my folks with their Lunar Pages account), and because they have terrific support resources. Their forums alone contain more than 300,000 posts – this is a treasure trove of information!

But you can't go wrong with either of them. Their plans are very similar (and exceptional), they receive plenty of good customer feedback, and their network performance and availability are very good. Not spectacular, but very consistent.

Their introductory plans are comparably priced and comparably equipped, and they are packed with features. Here's what you get:

- \$8 per month hosting with free setup (they say \$7 per month, but it requires a two-year commitment)
- Free domain name for the life of your hosting account (I prefer to spend extra and use Go-Daddy)
- 1,500 GB Storage (I challenge you to try to fill this)
- 15,000 GB bandwidth per month (if your bandwidth approaches even 5 percent of this, you are a huge success)
- CPanel administrative panel with Fantastico
- Unlimited MySQL databases
- Subdomains and add-on domains (enables you to host more than one domain on one account; I have 8 low-traffic domains on one of my accounts, for a cost of \$1 per month per domain!)
- Unlimited e-mail accounts
- Polls, surveys, forums, PHP, shopping carts, CMS, etc.
- Automated backups

Essentially, you get everything you could ever possibly need. It's a no-brainer.

For VPS hosting, I use [Spry Hosting](#). But a word of warning: I have no active Spry accounts currently, so I can only make that recommendation based on past experience.

## *Choosing the Perfect Host*

For grid service hosting, take a look at [Media Temple](#), or for cloud computing, try [Mosso](#). I've only used them for one hosting account, and that account hasn't received enough traffic to fully test their services, but it looks promising.

For dedicated hosting, I chose [iWeb](#) over Lunar Pages, although Lunar Pages has a very attractive dedicated plan. In the end, the decision was based on the fact that iWeb specializes in dedicated hosting, whereas Lunar Pages specializes in shared hosting. iWeb's support team is fantastic and fast. Their data centers are located in Montreal.

Another good dedicated hosting option is [Liquid Web](#). I don't have a Liquid Web account, but two colleagues use them for dedicated hosting. They rave about excellent support. Their hardware prices are slightly less expensive than iWeb, they provide a touch more bandwidth, and they offer more setup and configuration options for free. Both iWeb and Liquid Web are good choices for hosting.