

Website Hosting Guide

Your website needs a place to live where it can be visited and viewed - this is called web hosting.

Websites are hosted at data centres which can be anywhere in the world.

Good data centres maintain constant:

1. power supply
2. security
3. temperature
4. humidity
5. engineer support

A server looks very much like the PC that sits under your desk at work but businesses would be taking a big risk by hosting their website on their own premises as they are usually unable to meet all of the criteria above.

There are many levels of website hosting - all with advantages and disadvantages. This article looks at three key types of hosting.

Shared hosting

With shared hosting your site sits on a server with possibly hundreds of other websites - if one site gets infected then yours may also be at risk.

If your site shares a server with hundreds of others it will most likely have an impact on the speed that your web pages and images load up for your visitors. This is because if one or more sites on a shared server have high amounts of traffic it will use more resources up and leave fewer resources for the remaining sites.

Remember that selling website hosting space is a commercial venture so hosting companies will tend to oversell shared hosting which means the lack of resources is always a going to be a problem for anything but small sites.



Many servers have moving hard drives which can fail. Newer servers may have solid state drives which differ to hard drivers as they have no moving parts and are therefore less prone to mechanical failure. When you choose your web hosting it pays to consider the worst case scenarios which include mechanical hard drive failure.

Your server will be remote from your company for the reasons stated earlier and only accessible via an internet connection. If there is only one hard drive in your server and this fails it means down time when your website will not appear. This is not a good experience for your customers and prospects and potentially a loss of business for you.

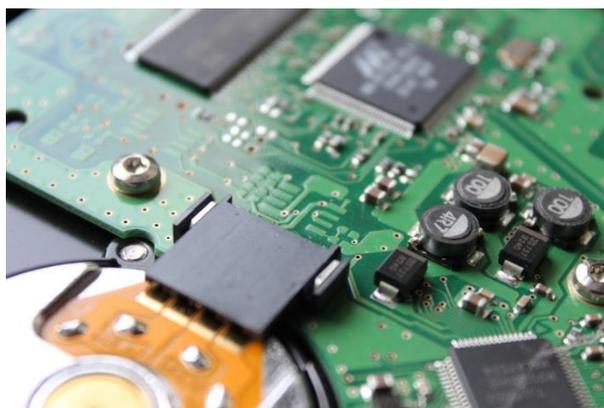
If this happens, an engineer has to replace the failed hard drive which could take many hours. It's critical at the outset of choosing web hosting to determine the emergency support response time. It can take up to 24 hours to replace a hard drive, so you have to ask the question "is cheap hosting better than losing my website for a day?"

Generally, more expensive hosting means a lower response time and a more robust configuration which we will cover later in this article.

Dedicated hosting

With dedicated hosting your site sits on its own on just one server - you don't share the server with any other websites. This immediately has a benefit in terms of the resources available and for this reason dedicated hosting tends to be more expensive than shared hosting.

However, exactly the same principles apply as shared hosting when it comes to failure. If there is only one hard drive in your dedicated server and this fails then you are only as good as the support engineer at the other end.



More robust dedicated hosting usually means dual hard drives. In simplistic terms having two hard drives means that if one hard drive fails then the other one continues and your website doesn't go down.

It's a bit like having a car with 2 engines. However, there are instances when a dedicated server with dual hard drives could still fail e.g. power supply unit or mother board failure.

As a general rule of thumb two hard drives are better than one.

Gold Standard hosting

You can expect Gold Standard hosting to be set up to offer multiple failsafe systems. The web hosting industry refers to this as "redundancy".

Towards the top end of the hosting spectrum it's not uncommon to see servers with three hard drives instead of the normal one hard drive. This means that even if two hard drives failed simultaneously then your site should not go down.

Even further up the spectrum you could expect to see two twinned servers instead of just one server. Twinned servers are directly connected to each other and mirror one another 24 hours a day. If one of the twinned servers goes down it means the other will continue to serve your website. This is referred to as a dual array.



With a dual array of twinned servers that each has three hard drives the chances of down time are greatly minimised.

Overseas or UK hosting

Although Google and other search engines are a lot more sophisticated at detecting which country sites "belong to" there's still a school of thought that believes UK websites should be hosted within the UK.

Back ups

It's worth mentioning backups. You need to find out if and how often back-ups of websites on servers are made. If infrequent backups are made of your website and there is a failure you may lose all the recent changes made to your website when it is restored. The more frequent the backup is made the better.

For a belt and braces approach you should consider making your own backup of your website every day as well.



Conclusion

Most UK businesses would be wise to take a good look at the hosting package they have opted for to make sure their initial decision was not just based on price.

Cheaper hosting usually means a small amount of storage, slower speed and long waits if there is a serious failure.

If your website is vital to the way your business functions then the peace of mind Gold Standard Hosting brings is worth the additional investment.