

Do I Need Web Hosting?

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If you're thinking about starting a website, then you may have come across the term "web hosting" without entirely understanding what that means. When you see that web hosting usually comes at a cost, you may start to wonder, "Do I need web hosting?"

The short answer is: yes. If you want to have a website, you need web hosting.

But you may feel better about the expense involved if you understand what website hosting is all about.

What is Web Hosting?

We talk about the web like it's something that exists outside of physical space. Terms like "cyberspace" and "the cloud" reinforce the idea that the many sites we access on our devices don't live anywhere physical – they're floating out there somewhere, as if on the air.

In fact, every website that exists on the internet takes up physical space on a web server somewhere. But those web servers are out of sight for most of us—kept in storage facilities around the world that few web users have cause to visit.

Even though we don't see or think about those servers much, they're a necessary part of our internet experience. And the service they provide for websites—storing them and making the site's content accessible to people around the world online—is what we call web hosting.

In a nutshell, that's how web hosting works.

Why Do Websites Need Web Hosting?

When you learn **how to build a website** on a specific device (or a couple), it lives on those devices. When you're ready to publish it for the larger world to see, it has to move beyond the specific devices you own that only you have access to. But it still needs to live somewhere.

Web hosting servers are the space where your website can live and be stored while being accessible on the larger web. If you want your website to be live online—in other words, if you want anyone other than you to see it—then a website hosting package is a necessary part of the equation.

Do I Need a Web Hosting Service?

For most websites, web hosting is provided by a web hosting company that owns and maintains many servers and allows customers to essentially rent space on them. You pay the web hosting provider either monthly or annually for that space and, in return, they keep your website up and running.

If the idea of spending money on a continual basis for your website is frustrating, you may wonder if there's a way to get around having to pay someone else for web hosting services. While it's technically possible for a business or individual to purchase and maintain their own private web server, it's expensive and impractical for the vast majority of website owners. Servers require maintenance, proper climate control, and advanced skills to manage.

Plus, the amount of bandwidth required to host your own website on a server launches you far beyond what most internet plans will allow for an individual or SMB business. Since bandwidth relates directly to speed and uptime, having enough of it is an important part of keeping your website accessible to visitors.

A web hosting company has already made the investment in:

- The servers themselves
- The space required to store them
- The precautions necessary to protect the servers from overheating or inclement weather
- The amount of bandwidth required to keep the servers functioning consistently and speedily
- The skilled professionals needed to provide proper maintenance as needs arise
- The cost of replacing and upgrading servers as needed

Because this is their business, covering all those bases is just part of the job for them, while it would involve considerable expense and inconvenience for you. This hardware is just one of the many **benefits of using web hosting**.

What About Free Web Hosting?

You know by now that you need web hosting, but do you really have to pay for it? Some searches online may reveal free platforms you can build your website on that come with hosting or free web hosting providers. Why not just go with one of them?

There may be cases where it makes sense to choose a free web hosting package—if you're just starting a website for fun and aren't too concerned about building it into something long lasting or profitable, for instance.

But for anyone with big goals or hopes for your website, it's a choice that comes with serious risks.

Free hosting has more limitations.

Free platforms and hosting plans tend to offer fewer customization and branding options. If you want to be able to design and **build a website** to your own preferences and specifications, you won't have much leeway to do so with these. That's especially true with free platforms like Tumblr or Blogger where you're working within a set structure. You can't change much more than the colors, backgrounds, and the content on the page.

If your website will be for a business or a **personal brand** you want to grow an audience for, then those limitations will cause a real issue with branding. You'll have to work that much harder to differentiate your website from the platform in the eyes of your visitors.

And there are limitations beyond design. Free hosting means less storage than paid hosting options. You'll be limited in the number of files you can add to the site, especially when it comes to media that tends toward larger file sizes like video and audio.

You'll also lose out on some of the functionality websites often need, like **setting up URL redirects** or creating custom error pages. You won't have the same options for **keeping backups of your site** or keeping it secure.

While the features and options available with different free hosting options will vary, there's a good chance some or all of these limitations will apply. Make sure you know what you're getting (and not) before you sign up.

It may not really be free.

Some web hosting services use a "free" offer to get you signed up, but once you get started, you realize you can't actually do much of anything with the free web hosting plan. To actually launch your site and have access to the features you need, you have to upgrade to one of their paid plans.

Since they've already got you hooked, you could end feeling stuck with them, even if it's not the best deal or they're not the most reliable web hosting provider out there.

In many cases, they won't even allow you to take what you've built and transfer it to a new provider. If you do decide to switch, you could be stuck building a new site from scratch.

It's not *really* your website.

When your website lives on another platform, you're bound to the platform's rules and way of doing things. In most cases, that means you won't have your own domain.

A good example of this is with free WordPress.org hosting. Instead of *www.yourdomain.com*, your url will look something like *www.yourdomainplatformname.com*. This is one reason why many people opt purchase web hosting for WordPress sites – so they can have a branded domain name while still enjoying the functionality of WordPress.

It also usually means you won't be able to use **branded email addresses** specific to your domain name, something that makes your brand look more professional and established.

Often it can even mean your provider serves up ads on your website, which makes it look more cluttered and less legitimate. And if the platform decides to change its features or rules, you're at their mercy. You may lose out on some functionality you took for granted.

When you're not paying for hosting, you just don't own the site in quite the same way. You have less control and more risk.

You could lose everything.

If your platform or provider decides they don't want your site there anymore – whether it's because you've broken one of their rules or they've just changed the way they do things — there's not a lot you can do. Your website can be wiped out completely and you'll have to start from scratch.

Even if that kind of worst-case scenario doesn't happen, free hosting providers won't generally provide tech support. If you start having trouble with your website due to run-of-the-mill tech problems, or worse, hackers, you don't have anyone to turn to. Your options will be limited and you may find you need to start from scratch with a paid service after all.

It's better to start with a service you can continue using in the long haul (and that makes it possible to take your website with you if you do leave) to begin with.

What Does Web Hosting Cost?

So, you've accepted you need web hosting from a legitimate web hosting provider. Now you need to figure out how to budget it for it.

The question of how much web hosting costs is a bit complicated, because there are a wide variety of plans and options. What you spend will depend on what provider you go with, the type of plan you determine you need, and the features you want included.

To give you a general idea though, here are the main types of hosting options you have and the price ranges you should have in mind for each.

Shared Hosting

This is the most affordable option and the most common choice for new websites. Shared hosting plans start at around \$2-3 a month for the most basic plans. But you can expect the price to go up to around \$5-10 if you want to access additional features like:

- The ability to host multiple domains
- Additional bandwidth or storage space
- Unlimited email addresses
- An SSL certificate for security
- Automated backups
- A website builder

Some web hosting providers, like HostGator, include these extra features for free with your shared hosting plan, saving you money and providing you with a better deal. You can enjoy branded email addresses and **secure SSL certificates**, all as part of your shared hosting plan.

With a shared hosting plan, you rent space on a server that will be shared with a number of other websites that use the same web hosting provider. That works just fine for many websites, but some will find they need a hosting plan that can offer more storage or bandwidth.

eCommerce Hosting

If you're planning to sell products through your website, then you need to make sure your web hosting plan will provide all the features you need to do so securely. eCommerce hosting plans tend to start at around \$5-20 a month for more basic plans and can go up to over \$250 a month depending on the features you want to include.

Any eCommerce plan needs to either include or be compatible with eCommerce software that provides:

- Shopping cart functionality
- Checkout functionality
- A way to accept secure payments

You'll also definitely need an SSL certificate, and will probably want to invest in additional security software such as [SiteLock](#), too.

Cloud Hosting

Cloud server hosting plans typically cost in the range of \$5-50 and can be a good choice for website owners that expect more traffic or need more storage space than shared hosting provides.

Cloud hosting promises faster load times, fewer storage limitations, and easier scalability than shared hosting. If you're expecting (or hoping) that your website will grow in traffic soon after you launch, then it may be a better option than shared hosting plans.

VPS Hosting

VPS plans are the next step up. They're in the range of \$20-\$100 a month. With these plans, your website is still sharing a server with other websites, but with far fewer than on a shared plan, so you get access to a larger share of the server.

For websites that get too much traffic or need more storage than shared or cloud hosting plans provide, a VPS is the next step.

Dedicated Server

When you invest in a dedicated server for your website, you no longer have to share with any other websites. You get all the resources, bandwidth, and storage the server provides for yourself (but you still get to outsource the maintenance work and costs to your web hosting provider).

When your website grows to the point that you need the level of power that a dedicated server provides, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$80 a month to over \$1,000.

Don't worry. Most websites don't have to worry about spending that kind of money on web hosting, but for especially popular sites or established brands, it may be the best option.

Yes, You Need Web Hosting

In summary, if you've asked yourself, "do I need web hosting?" then you know now that the answer is a clear yes. If you're going to learn how to start a website, then know that web hosting is needed and a part of the whole process of creating a site.

If you have goals for your website beyond having a little fun with it, then you need to take some time to identify and invest in the right web hosting plan for what you need. It's a small cost for the security and control you'll get out of the deal (especially if your website will be helping you make money).

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