

Topic | Website

Tutorial 10

Organising hosting for my site

This tutorial will explain web hosting for your website.

Reading time: 20 minutes | Prerequisites: None

The Tourism e-kit is an initiative of the National Online Strategy Committee and is funded by the Australian State & Territory Tourism Offices. This tutorial has been produced by The Australian Tourism Data Warehouse as part of the complete online education program, Tourism e-kit

DISCLAIMER:

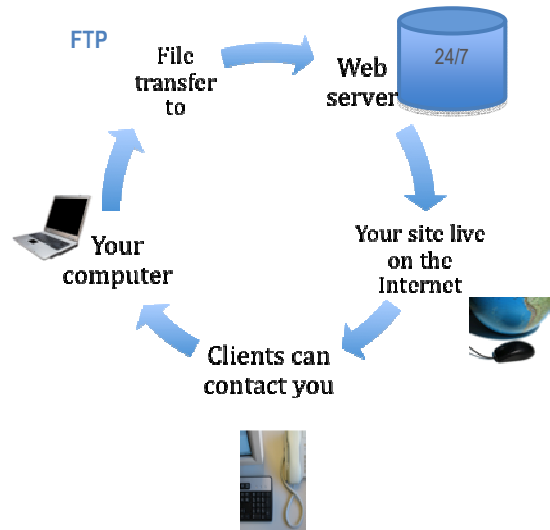
All content on this website and publication (both audio and visual) is protected worldwide by copyright and all other relevant laws. As each business situation is different no responsibility or representation is accepted or given for the use of content in this document and each user should take their own professional advice accordingly.



1. What is web hosting?

In order for your website to be visible to the world, it needs to be hosted on a web server. Just like a hotel gives a client access to a room for a certain period of time, a web host offers your website's files disk space and accessibility so your website can be seen by anyone 24/7.

Your hosting account will not only allow you to store your website but will also store incoming and outgoing mails. Your email addresses are manageable through your hosting interface (and not via the one of your domain name).



2. Hosting Types

- Free web hosting is generally available through your Internet Service Provider (ISP). This is suitable for a very simple personal website but not for a business
- **Shared hosting is the most cost-effective and common type of hosting.** Shared simply means that your host will have more than one websites sitting on the same server. This is generally suited to small tourism businesses.
- Dedicated hosting signifies that the server is solely used by one organisation/website. This is not necessary for small and medium businesses.

a) Australian servers?

If your website is hosted in Australia, your site is going to load faster (within Australia) than if it was hosted in the USA. If your clients are located domestically it is generally a good idea to host your site in Australia. If the majority of your clients are not within Australia, you might want to opt to host your site on USA servers.

b) Windows or Unix hosting

The first choice you will generally have to make is if you require Windows or Unix servers.

The general misconception is that if you use a windows PC (in opposition to an apple or linux operating system) you will require a windows server.

For most websites a Unix server is going to be sufficient. However, if your website or content management system is built using ASP.NET technology for instance (Microsoft) you will generally require your site to be hosted on Windows servers.

3. Is hosting different from a domain name?

Yes, hosting is different from a domain name. Nonetheless, both services can generally be purchased through the same company (the majority of domain name registrars offer hosting packages and vice-versa).

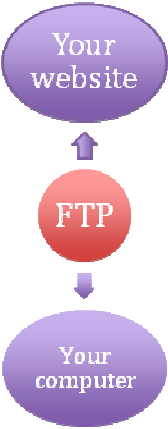
Domain name:	The Internet address where your site can be viewed A domain name (www.mygreattourismproduct.com.au) is registered through a registrar.
Host:	The server that hosts your files A web host offers you hosting packages

4. What Package do I need? And what is the cost?

Your web host will generally outline different packages. A summary is provided below:

Features	Description
Disk space:	Can vary from 500MB to 5,000MB or more. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your website files Each of your email mailboxes The databases running on your server. <p>On average, 500MB to 1,000MB of disk space is sufficient.</p>
Monthly traffic to your site:	Different hosts offer different traffic allowances. It can vary between 3GB and 35GB or more (if server located in Australia) and between 10GB and 100GB or more (if server located in the USA). The total traffic is the sum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet visitors browsing your website Upload/download of your files via FTP Email messages sent or received <p>On average, a 3 to 6GB of monthly traffic allowance is sufficient for a small and medium tourism business. Simply make sure that you are able to upgrade if your traffic increases dramatically.</p>
Number of domains:	A very basic package will allow you to have only one domain name (e.g. www.mytourismproduct.com) hosted on the site. More generous hosting packages might allow you to have between 5-10 domain names.

	<p>Will you require more than one domain name? Think about it carefully. If you are planning to have a .com and a .com.au you will need your hosting package to allow for at least 2 domain names.</p>
<p>Shared or Dedicated IP:</p>	<p>The IP (Internet Protocol) address is the real address of a website or server. Every domain name is associated to an IP address. Domain names were actually developed because it is difficult to remember long IP numbers like 234.127.56.7.</p> <p>In shared hosting, there are generally many websites sharing the same IP address. The disadvantage to shared IPs is that if someone sharing your IP gets in trouble for spamming, your IP can get banned or blacklisted and your website then disappears from the search engines.</p> <p>If you are taking payments on your site directly you may need a dedicated IP as an SSL certificate (to secure online payments) requires a dedicated IP.</p> <p>If you are using an external booking engine (like most tourism operators do), the payments are actually being taken on the third party site and not on your site. A shared IP will be sufficient.</p>
<p>Databases:</p>	<p>If your website uses a content management system you will require access to a database. Databases offer mechanism for storing, managing and retrieving information. A few of the most popular databases/programming language combinations are MySQL/PHP and Microsoft SQL Server (ASP.NET) .</p> <p>Other applications requiring a database are shopping carts, forum and blogs. A good hosting package will offer you at least one database.</p>
<p>Email features:</p>	<p>Your emails reside on your hosting server. Some packages offer you unlimited email addresses, others don't. Keep in mind that if you change your host you will need to recreate all your email address (unless you are using Google Apps. You can easily create/delete email addresses in your host's control panel and do not need a web developer to do this for you. When you have first registered with your host you would have been provided (in the confirmation email) with login details for to access your control panel. The control panel is the area where you can modify your hosting settings.</p> <p>It is now common for hosts to offer unlimited email addresses.</p>

<p>Site access and publishing:</p>	<p>FTP (File Transfer Protocol) is the protocol used to transfer your files from your computer to your host.</p> <p>Note that FTP is not a secure way of transferring your files as none of them are being encrypted. You only need a login/password to access your FTP files.</p> <p>Most servers now offer a secure, encrypted way of transferring files using the FTO protocol. Either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FTP over SSH (called Secure FTP or SFTP) or • FTP over SSL (called FTPS) <p>Free FTP clients such as FileZilla: www.filezilla-project.org, SmartFTP: www.smartftp.com or Cyberduck: www.cyberduck.ch for Mac offer secure FTP.</p>	 <p>The diagram illustrates the FTP process. At the bottom is a purple oval labeled 'Your computer'. An upward-pointing arrow leads to a red circle labeled 'FTP'. From the 'FTP' circle, a downward-pointing arrow leads to another purple oval labeled 'Your website' at the top.</p>
<p>Advanced features:</p>	<p>Features such as PHP, Apache mod_rewrite, frequency of server backup (daily, weekly) are a must.</p> <p>Your web developer will assist you with these requirements.</p>	
<p>Support:</p>	<p>Will you be offered support via telephone or email or both? What are the support hours? 24/7 or less? Telephone support is rather rare these days but this shouldn't put you off. Email support is the norm and your email should be answered within half a working day.</p>	

5. What is a reasonable price?

Before choosing a host, keep in mind that you will be running a business from your website so you are after reliability and not the cheapest service. Best and cheapest are usually mutually exclusive.

In order to host a small or medium business website, expect to pay between:

	Price	What you should get (at least)
--	-------	--------------------------------

Hosting:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AUD200-450 annually (hosting in Australia) • USD100-200 annually (hosting in USA) • There are generally no setup costs if you do the setup yourself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000MB-5,000MB disk space • 6GB-30GB traffic (if hosted on Australian server) • 20GB-300GB traffic (if hosted on USA server) • Secure FTP • 1-5 databases • Unlimited email boxes • Email support 24/7
-----------------	--	---

6. How to choose a reputable host?

In terms of hosting, you have two options:

	Organise the hosting of your website yourself	Use the web hosting provided by your web developer
Advantages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not tied to a web developer for hosting • No mark-up to pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web developer knows the features required by your website • Saves time
Disadvantages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to do some research • Liaise with your web developer to know exactly the features required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost can easily double • Tied to a specific company • Check the conditions

Remember that if your site is hosted in Australia, it will be quicker to load in on your web visitor's computer in Australia than if it was hosted on servers located in the USA. This could be an important consideration if your main target market is located in Australia.

Below is a list of hosts with servers in Australia deemed reputable by the Internet community:

- www.ausweb.com.au
- www.netlogistics.com.au
- www.quadrahosting.com.au

It is critical check the reputation of hosts before you buy. There are certainly a few to stay away from. Whirlpool.net.au has a specific forum dedicated to hosts:

<http://forums.whirlpool.net.au/forum-threads.cfm?f=116>.

7. I already have a host but I am getting a new website, shall I change?

If your website was dated and you are getting a new one professionally developed, your new site will most certainly come with a content management system (CMS). CMS run on databases which have specific requirements that your existing host or package might not support.

If your host is reputable you should be able to upgrade to a suitable package. Make sure you inform your web developer in the planning stages of your new website so you avoid paying twice!

8. If I change my host will I lose all my email addresses and emails?

Yes, if you decide to change your host, you will have to manually re-create all your email addresses by logging in your host's control panel. This is easily done and shouldn't take more than 10 minutes to do (Refer to paragraph 3 under email features for more information on how to access your control panel).

The emails (messages) downloaded to your email client (such as Outlook) should not be deleted.

To prevent this from happening again should you change your host again in the future, you should ask your web developer to move your emails to Google Apps (www.google.com/apps).

9. Will my host conduct backups of my website?

Ideally they should but you need to make sure they do. Your backups should include your files and your content (which are 2 different things if you are using a content management system). It is important you check about the backups with your web host and/or web developer.

Offsite backups are recommended however not always included in the standard hosting plans. Offsite backups would allow you to save your files and website in the event that your host server is targeted by hackers which causes all the online assets of your web hosting company to fail. This happened to the Australian hosting company in June 2011 and thousands of businesses lost all data: <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/australian-it/netregistry-group-bails-out-distributeit-after-4800-website-accounts-were-hacked/story-e6frgakx-1226080699559>.

10. Key learning outcomes

- Your web host and your domain name registrar are not always the same company
- Email is a service provided by your host (unless you use Google Apps for instance). When you move to a new host your email addresses will need to be recreated
- With hosting you generally get what you pay for. If having reliable email is important to you do not go with a cheap host
- Assess your host's support system. Can you reach them 24/7 via email or phone if anything goes wrong? What is their "turn around" time to provide you with a solution?

11. Related material

a) **Related tutorials**

- Registering a domain name 101
- Domain name: advanced
- Security and backups

b) **Related websites**

- Web hosting forum: <http://forums.whirlpool.net.au/forum-threads.cfm?f=116>
- Google Apps: www.google.com/apps