Selecting a Reliable Web Host

In addition to finding a professional, affordable web site designer, securing a web host is another crucial step in the web site design process. A web host is a company that stores your web site's files. All the pages you see on the net are a collection of pages stored in an online folder. You pay a web host to store your files in its online folder. Having a reliable web host is crucial to your business. Every time you send a potential or current client to your site, you need it to be up and running error-free. Since this is so important, we have listed a few guidelines in selecting a reliable web host:

How cost effective is this web host?

Before selecting a host, shop around and make sure the price and features of the account you are considering are competitive for the industry. Remember: expensive does not mean best! You do not need a well-known hosting provider if a smaller company can provide the same services more effectively and for 1/2 the price.

Does the host have a proven record of reliability?

There are TONS of web hosting companies on the net as I am sure many of you realized as soon as you searched for "web hosting company" in your search engine of choice. Top rankings in Google, MSN, or Yahoo do not guarantee a reliable company. These rankings only guarantee that a company spent time and/or money on search engine optimization (getting its site to the top of the charts). Before you purchase web hosting, ask other business owners which company they recommend and why. Also, check out forums such as Web Hosting Talk. This forum allows customers to sound off about their web hosting company (positive and negative comments are welcome). Here you can hear what customers have said about their hosting experience with company XYZ before you buy. Also, ask your colleagues or web designer for hosting information. Some of the best companies can be found through word of mouth referrals.

Is it easy to leave if I change my mind about this host?

This is a crucial question that many small business owners do not consider. Small business owners do not always realize that hiring a web site designer and securing a web host can be affordable. Instead, they look for an all-inclusive web hosting package that offers pre-built web site templates or site builders. These are tools are helpful ONLY IF you plan to stay with that hosting company throughout the life of your web site. You would be using the web host's design software, so if you left, the web host would still own your web site files, leaving you to start designing your site from scratch. Before using a site with pre-built templates or site builders, find out if you are allowed to keep your web site if you later decide to move to another host.There are also a few other items to consider: site uptime (is the site guaranteed to be available 99.9%), late billing consequences (is there a grace period, or will site be immediately taken down), and frequency of back-ups (if the web hosting company's servers go down for any reason, will your site have been backed up and ready to go once the problem is resolved, or will your site be lost).

As a precaution, always back-up a copy of your web site to your home or work computer's hard drive. This may not be possible if you use a pre-built template or online site builder software, but it is important in case something happens to the hosting company. Remember to always read the fine print of all hosting contracts you sign (albeit digitally) AND to choose a host that allows you to keep a back-up of your web site on your home or work computer (without any extra costs or fines).

How reliable is the customer service/technical support team?

If your site goes down unexpectedly, the hosting company should have an answer as to when it will be back up almost immediately. When problems with your web site arise, or if you have a question about setting up your account, technical support should be able to you. Make sure the host you use either has a posted customer service policy, has good customer service ratings on Web Hosting Talk or comes highly referred by one of your associates.