

Selecting a Quality Web Host

By John Catalfamo

"The page cannot be displayed." Have you ever encountered this message while surfing the net? Of course you have. We all have. Think it can't happen to you? Think again. If you're hosting your website on one of the free hosting services or even worse your own server, there is a chance of losing more than downtime.

These free hosting services can shut your site down at any time and they don't need to have a reason. You may sit down in front of your computer one morning, try to access your site and instead, this message will appear, "The page cannot be displayed." That's the end of it you web site is gone all the hard work and with it all the search engine ranking, lost for ever.

There are a lot of domain name extensions out there such as; net, biz, gov, cc, info, and so on but the most important one is without question .com. The question is do you really have a sincere desire to succeed with your online business? If this is the case then having your own domain name is a must. I can't stress enough the importance of cross domain extensions. What I'm trying to say is it's not enough to have a .com extension because a large portion of web site traffic goes to other extensions, and they are your competition after all. As an example I personally own six domain extensions and even a few different domain name variations, such as **www.albanygraphics.net** also a more descriptive one **www.albanygraphicsdesignstudio.com** In addition .net, .gov, .biz, .info and I'm always looking for more.

Selecting Your Web Page Host

When selecting a professional web host company your first consideration should be the company. Check out their background. Talk to some of their customers and ask them if they've been satisfied with their service. It's always good to have a local company this will make it easier to keep open the lines of communication. The one thing I hate more than all else is to talk to an answering service. Below is a list of some of the questions I encourage you to ask before making your decision.

- How large is the customer base they serve?
- What is their uptime percentage?
- Is there a policy for making payments in advance?
- Do they charge set up fees?
- Find out how their customer support is? Call the references and ask them what they think.
- What is the speed of their connections?
- Do they offer shopping cart software (e-commerce solution)?
- What is their E-mail package like?
- Do they offer a content management tool and ftp app for file transfer?

- Do they have a 24 hr support line or online chat service?

Web hosting prices fluctuate, so keep in mind that a low monthly cost does not always mean a good value. If the service is poor and you suffer a lot of down time then you're saving nothing.

Criteria for selecting a host

Selecting a professional web host is a very important decision. Make sure you do your homework and ensure the host you select offers exactly what you need.

- Your own domain name (www.yourname.com)
- Your own True POP email account - name@yourdomain.com
- Fast, low overhead, Multi-T3 access
- Your own unrestricted cgi-bin
- Access to SSL Encryption for secure transactions
- Java, C, C++, Tcl support
- Auto responders
- htaccess Password Protection for your files or directories
- At least 1 GIGABYTE (1024 MB) of Daily Transfer
- Design (and upload to) your site using Netscape or other HTML editing software
- Microsoft FrontPage (98) Server Extensions for those utilizing FrontPage
- Unlimited free access to your server via Telnet/FTP
- Online invoices, account tracking, and payment history to enable you to check your account balance, monthly invoices, past payments, etc.
- Complete daily server backup
- Easy access to your log files
- Statistics on visits to your site

It may not be necessary for you to have everything on the list depending on the size of your website or the technology used in development, but be sure to ask.

I know just how hard it can be to get a small business started and watching every penny is a big part of that. Let's stop and take a look at the outcome of the last cheap investment we got involved with. Let me guess a disaster! Don't feel bad it happened to me a few times in the beginning. My point, don't try to save on hosting get a good quality company with professional support.