



# Web Hosting

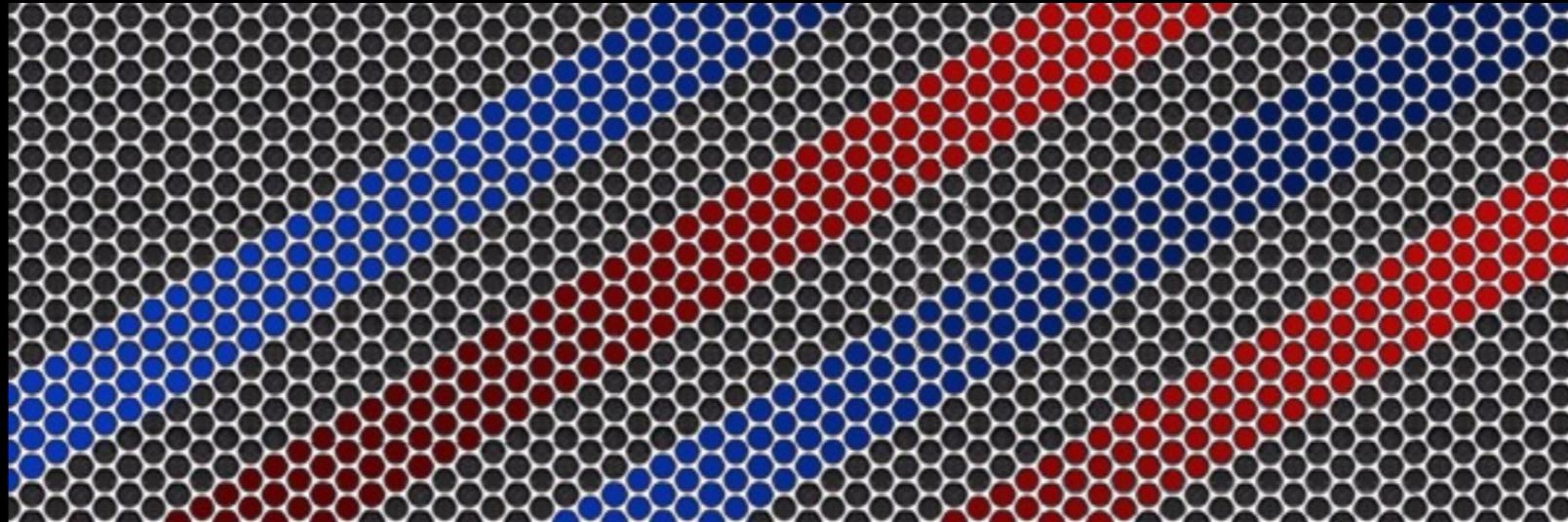
Important features to consider

# Amount of Storage



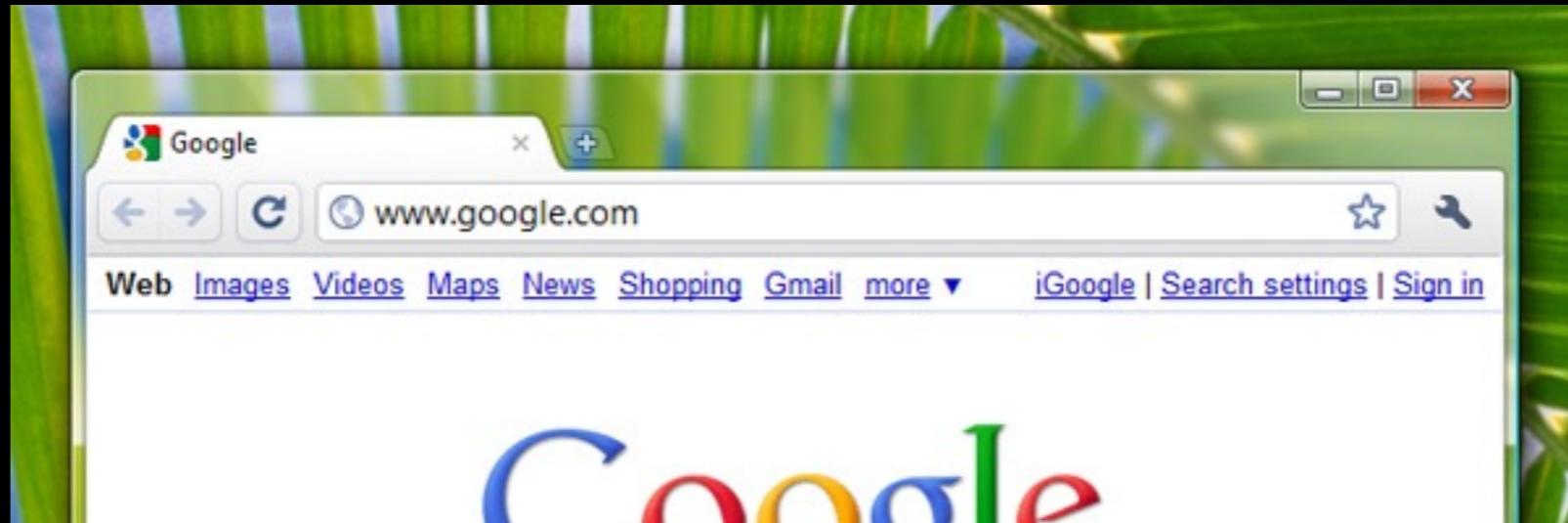
When choosing your web hosting, one of your primary concerns will obviously be “How much data can I store?” For most small and medium web sites, you’ll find that several gigabytes should be plenty of storage. Some hosts may offer “unlimited storage”: caveat emptor! If you read the fine print (usually, the Terms and Services) you’ll find that it’s unlimited until you go over the “normal site usage.” If you think you might be close to or over whatever “normal” is, make sure you know what you can use before buying ... or go with a host that sets clear limits.

# Amount of Bandwidth



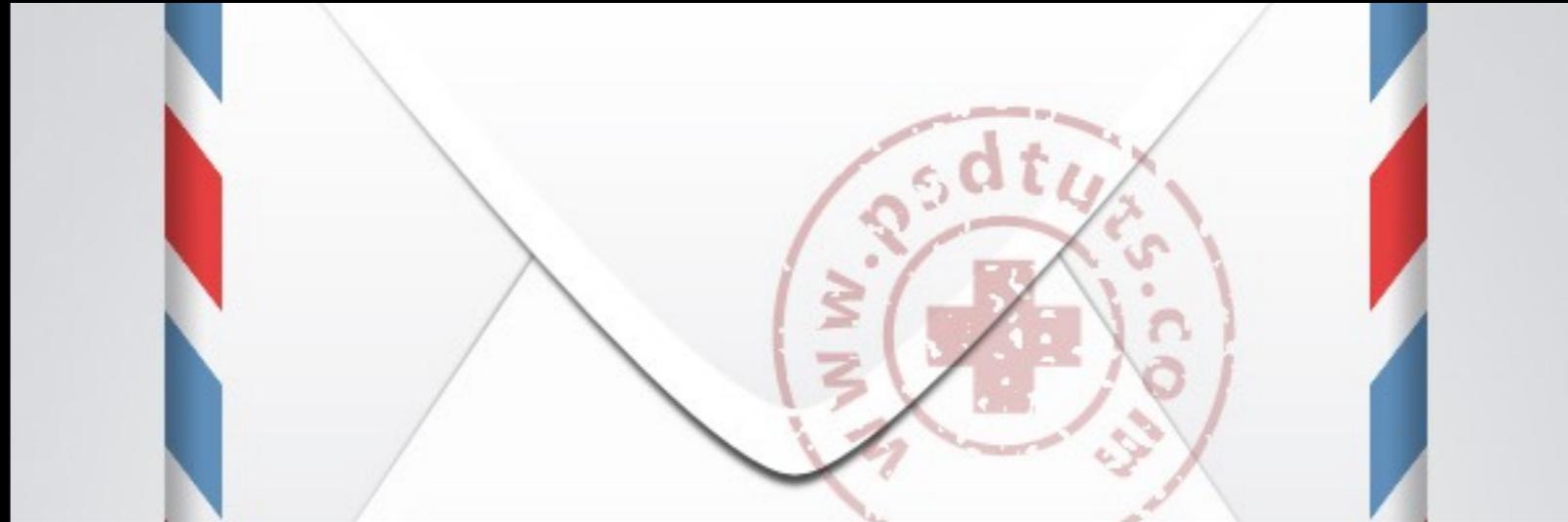
What is bandwidth? It's the amount of data that your host will let you and your visitors upload and download (cumulatively) in a given month. Say your website is 1 megabyte of data and your monthly bandwidth is 10 MB. At the beginning of the month, you upload the entire site; now you've used up one MB of bandwidth. If a visitor to your site views every page, they will have downloaded 1MB of data. That means you can have up to 9 visitors in that month (assuming each views your whole site). After that, your web host will either not allow any more visitors, or (more likely) charge you extra per MB. Of course, your bandwidth is something you'll want to keep an eye on, especially if you run a fairly popular site or do something media intensive (like host your own video, or high-res photos). Just like storage, some hosts offer "unlimited" bandwidth; again, if you think you'll be in a grey area, find out the limits or choose a host that sets the bar where all can see it.

# Number of Domains and Subdomains



Once you're running one site, there's a good chance it won't be long until you've got a second one up ... and then a third. It would be a pain to have to manage a hosting account for each site you own, so make sure your web host will let you host multiple domains. Often, there will be a limit on how many domains you can have on one account; make sure it will accommodate you! Usually, there will be a section in the admin panel for adding your domains and choosing which sub-folders each one will point to. The same is true for sub-domains.

# Email Accounts and Features



Many web hosts also offer email account for your domains. You'll want to know how many email accounts they'll let you set up; also, don't forget to check out their selections for receiving that mail. Do they have a webmail interface? Multiple ones that you can select from? How about integration with Google Apps (for the Gmail interface)? Can you get your mail in your client of choice via IMAP, or do they only offer POP?

# Database Support



Now-a-days, even small websites seem to have a database on the back end. You'll want to make sure you can use the type of database you're comfortable with. Most hosts today offer MySQL; that's probably enough for most people, but if you'd prefer PostgreSQL, Oracle, SQL Server, or another flavor, don't settle for anything less. Remember, if they aren't advertising it, they probably don't offer it!

# Framework Support and Easy-Install



A lot of web hosts offer support for popular frameworks, blogging systems, or CMSes. It's always nice when your web host offers a one-click install (or at least a super easy set-up) for your CMS of choice.

# Mobile App or Website



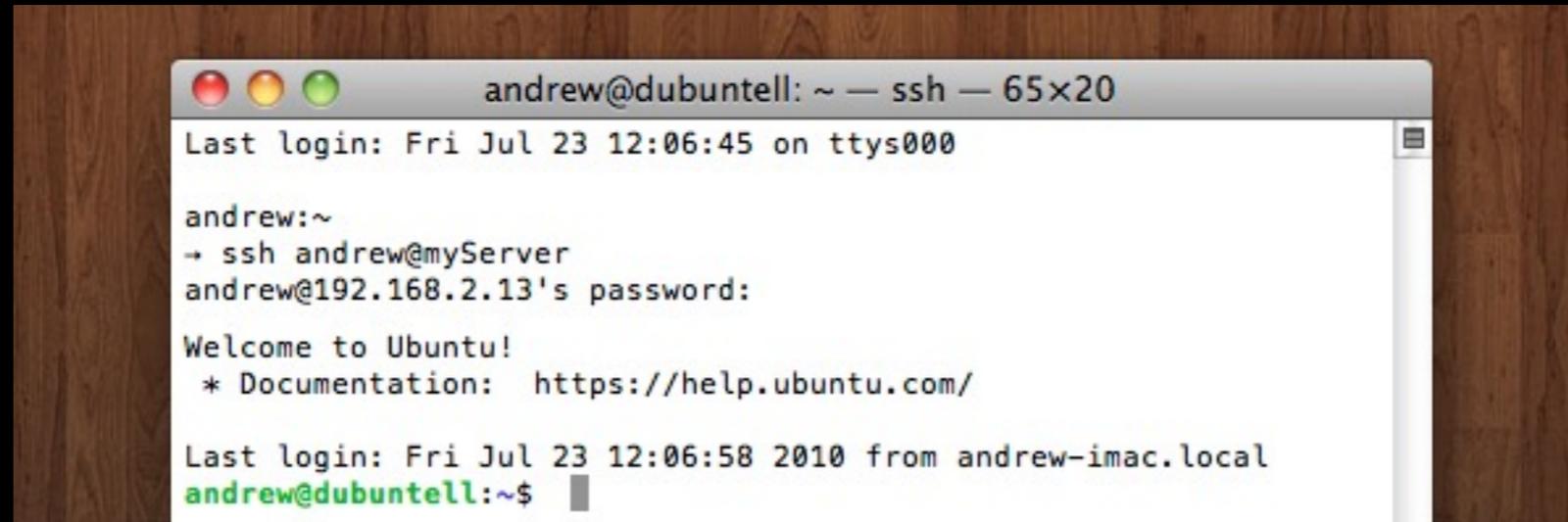
For most people, this will probably be a nice extra; however, I'm sure there's something who will find having a mobile app to access your site administration / statistics on the go indispensable. While I only know of two hosts (MediaTemple and SliceHost) that currently offer iPhone and Android apps (MediaTemple's Android app is forthcoming ), I'm sure most hosts will follow their lead. Both offer mobile websites as well, and I'm sure other hosts have the same.

# Tech Support



This one is very important: find out exactly what your prospective host offers for tech support: can you phone them? At what times? Do they have a support email address? A ticket system? What's their promised response time? How about a live chat? Do they have a wiki or library of help articles / tutorials? Don't choose a host until you know exactly what support they offer; you'll be happy for it later, trust me!

# Shell Access

A terminal window titled "andrew@dubuntell: ~ — ssh — 65x20" showing the process of logging into a remote server. The terminal output includes the last login time, the user's prompt, the command to run 'ssh', the password prompt, a "Welcome to Ubuntu!" message with a link to documentation, and the final login confirmation.

```
andrew@dubuntell: ~ — ssh — 65x20
Last login: Fri Jul 23 12:06:45 on ttys000

andrew:~
→ ssh andrew@myServer
andrew@192.168.2.13's password:
Welcome to Ubuntu!
 * Documentation:  https://help.ubuntu.com/

Last login: Fri Jul 23 12:06:58 2010 from andrew-imac.local
andrew@dubuntell:~$
```

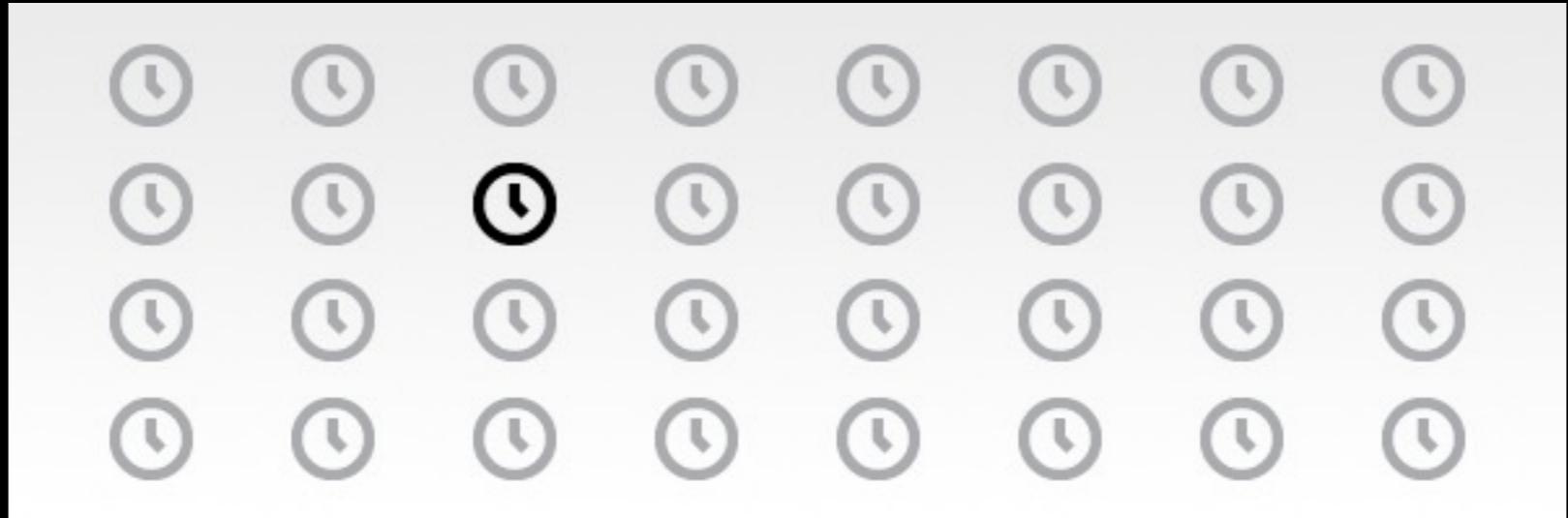
If you're a little more advanced, you might want to consider choosing a host that offers shell access: that's logging into your server from the command line over SSH. You'll be able to securely copy files up and down, change file permissions for whole groups of files quickly and easily, and perform a multitude of other tasks. If you want this feature, you'll know all that you do with it!

# .htaccess Files



Here's another important one: you'll want the ability to add your own .htaccess files to your directories. What's a .htaccess file? It's a configuration file used by Apache server. You can use them to password protect directories, re-write URLs, redirect pages, and more. Check out the many good tuts here on [Nettuts+](#) to get familiar with them.

# Cron Jobs



Cron jobs are another great feature to have on your web host (and there's a good chance you'll have them if you've got shell access). Cron is a "time-based job scheduler" (thanks, Wikipedia) that you can use to perform tasks on the server at given times. To learn more about how to use Cron and what you can do with it, check out the great Cron tutorial we ran back in January.

# Language Support



This should go without saying, but make sure the host you plan to choose offers support for the server-side languages you want to use. If you plan to pick up Ruby on Rails in the next few months, you probably want to see it on the list of supported frameworks. If you want to use Django, make sure there's Python support. Don't lock yourself into having PHP as your only option (unless you're sure that's all you'll ever want or need!).

# Free AdWords



While not a necessarily something you need, it's something you'll probably want to take advantage of: many hosts offer some Google AdWords credit (usually ~\$50, I've found) or some other form of advertising. Even if you'd rather use another advertising proxy, you can't beat free: you might as well use it!

# Site Backup



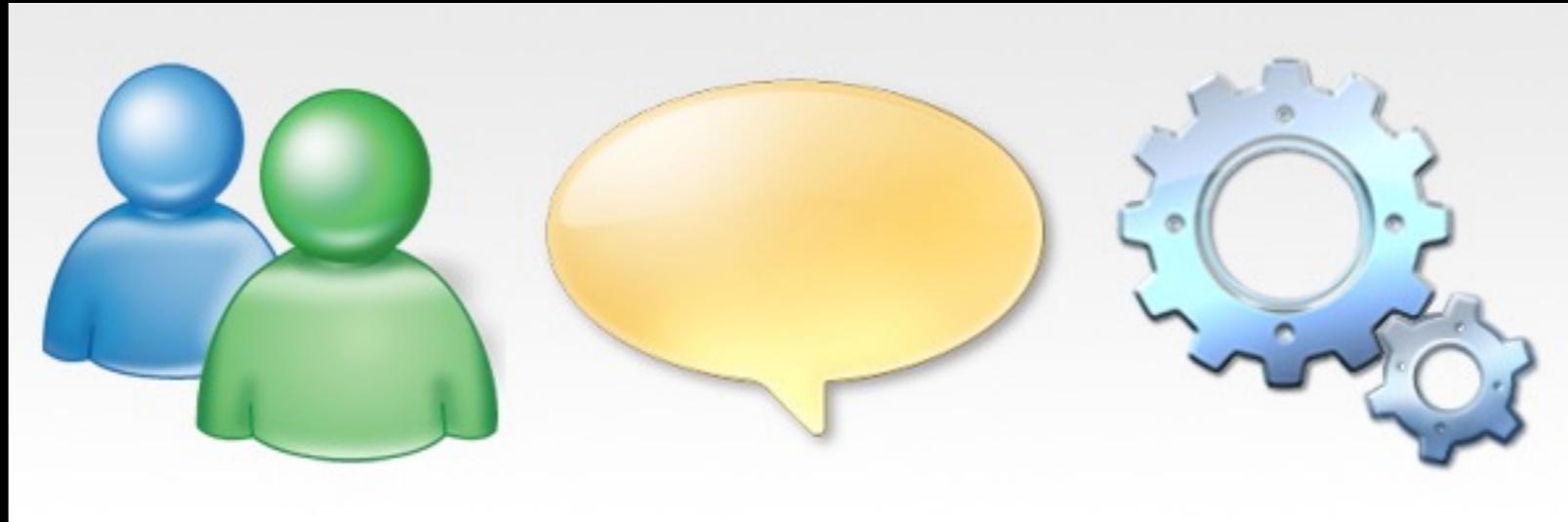
Don't think that your web host is any less susceptible to data loss than your own computers; remember, servers are just big computers that everyone can read files from! What backup options, if any, does your host provide? You'll want to back up both your site files and databases. If they don't offer backup, figure out how you'll be able to do it yourself: this might be one of the places that shell access and cron come in handy!

# Choice of OS



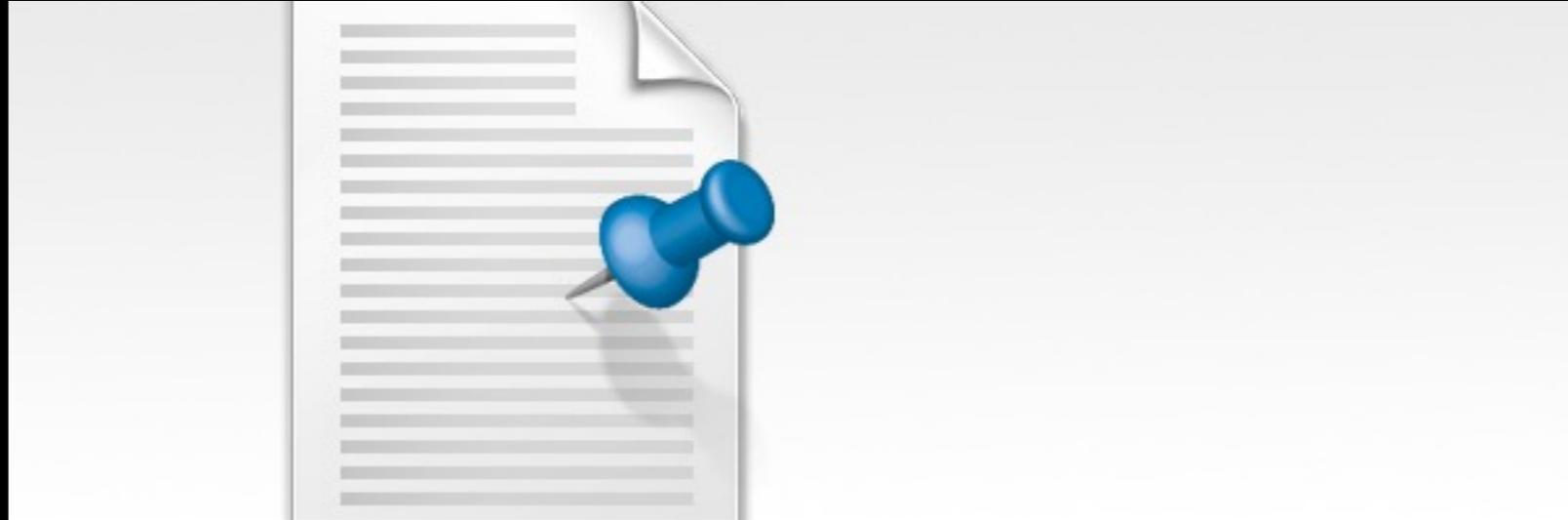
For most people, this won't be a big issue. Of course, if you're developing in ASP.NET, you'll need Windows hosting; that's a little harder to find, and often a bit more expensive, but if you're a Microsoft developer, the extra cost will be worth it. (If you're interesting in learning about ASP.NET, check out our great tuts on the subject.) If you're using an open source language, you probably won't need to worry about which Linux/Unix distribution you'll get; however, some hosts give you options, and some developers may have preferences, so it's worth mentioning.

# Extra Applications



We already talked about content management systems, but sometimes you'll want a something more. Several hosts offer set-ups for social features like forums, bulletin boards, mailing lists. If you'll be running an online store, some hosts offer setups for eCommerce solutions.

# Up-to-Date-ness



If you can, find out what software versions the host you are considering offers. Some hosts aren't quick to upgrade to the latest offering, while others will let you choose which version you want. There are few things worse than signing up for a year of hosting only to discover your host is running PHP 4.x (yes, I've made that mistake).

# Up-Time



I'm sure I don't have to convince you that it's important to know that your visitors will be able to get to your site when they try! Find out how reliable your prospective host is; when you're doing this, it's important to read the fine print. Often, hosts will stretch the truth a bit (claiming 99.9% uptime, not counting almost everything that could go wrong), so make sure you understand exactly what "100% uptime" means. It would be a wise move to google around and see what other users and reviewers have said about the host.

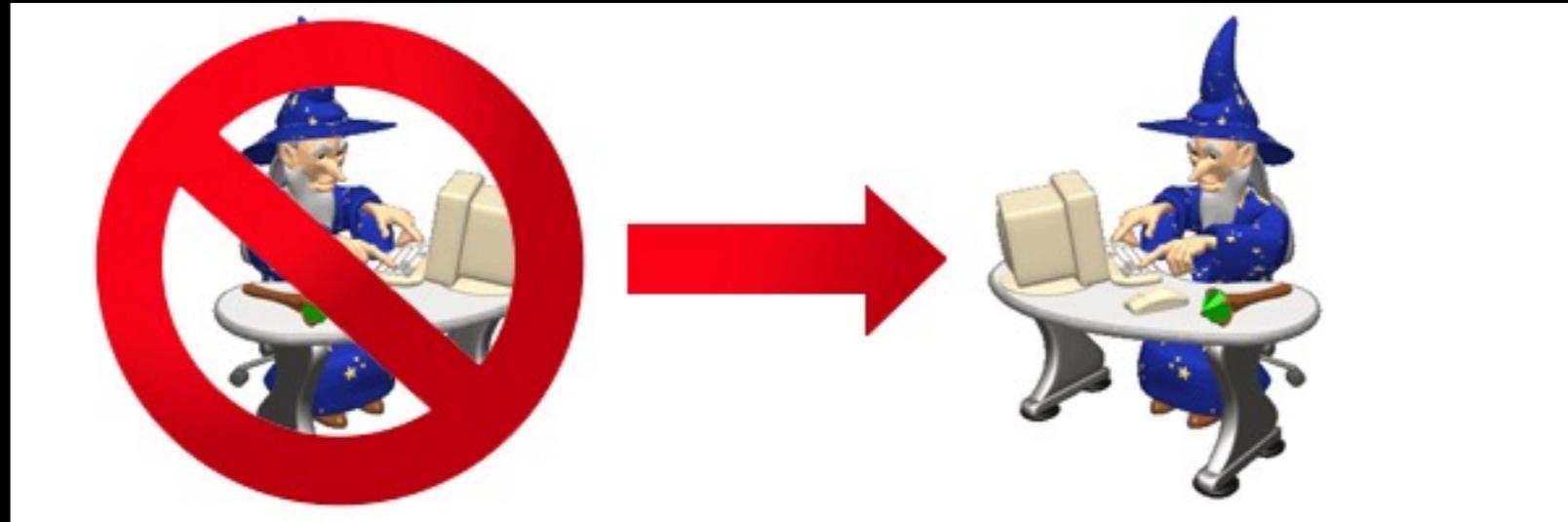
# SSL (secure server)



**https://www...**

If you are planning on selling any goods or services through your website, you may want to see if the web host lets you set up SSL (a secure server). You may have seen this on other websites where their web address begins with a "https://" instead of "http://". Setting this up will normally involve additional charges or a higher priced package. At this point, the main thing is do is to check if they are available at all before you commit to the host. You will definitely need to have SSL if you plan to collect credit card payments yourself. If you're relying on a payment gateway instead, and are not otherwise collecting sensitive or private information from your customers, it's possible that you don't need this facility.

# Account Administrator



Fate plays strange tricks sometimes, and we often forget to plan for contingencies should an unfortunate event occur. Having an Account Administrator gives you and your organization the assurance that your hosting account can still be accessed when you are not able to.