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Choosing a webhost

Introduction

Your website and/or CiviCRM database must be placed on a computer that's always connected to the Internet in order to be accessible to your visitors and/or staff. While theoretically you can take an unused computer in your office and put the site on it, this has multiple drawbacks. First, if your office's Internet connection goes out, the site becomes unavailable to people outside your office. Second, you take on the responsibility of maintaining the hardware - if the computer breaks, your site is offline until you can fix it.

For these reasons, unless your organization is in a position to support these issues, it's recommended to lease space from a "web hosting company", aka a "webhost". The webhost will maintain the hardware and Internet connection for your site. For small organizations, your choices fall into three categories: Shared hosting, Virtual Private Servers, and Platform-as-a-Service.

Shared hosting

Your webhost will put your site on a server with the site of dozens or hundreds of other sites. This makes it inexpensive, but it tends to be slow, and if one of the other sites gets a spike in usage, it can slow down your site.

- Price: From free to about $25/month. More expensive companies generally place fewer sites on a server, which gives better performance.
- Security: Some webhosts are committed to providing the maximum protection from law enforcement. Shared webhosting tends to be less secure overall because one site on a server being compromised can lead to the whole server being compromised.
- Maintenance: The webhosting company will be 100% responsible for maintaining the server. You are still responsible for necessary updates to your site's software.
- Pros: If you need e-mail through your webhost, shared webhosting is often an inexpensive way to get it.
- Cons: To make the server more secure, the hosts may restrict what you can do on the server. Because these restrictions change from host to host, sometimes simple setup tasks take much longer. Because they don't provide much power, they're generally not suitable for running CiviCRM.

Here are the shared webhosts our clients oten use: [Shared Webhost options](#)

Virtual Private Servers (VPS)

With a VPS, you're given a private server with a guaranteed level of resources. Because it's your own server, you can set it up as you need, and because your resources are guaranteed, you aren't affected by the activities of others. VPS price is determined by the amount of resources you get, and also whether you pay the webhost to maintain the server for you. You can also purchase VPS management services from Palante.

- Price: $10/month and up (typical for most organizations is $20-40/month). Managed servers are $90/month and up.
- Security: Managed servers are generally more secure than shared hosts, because you're not running any software except that which is crucial for your operations.
- Maintenance: With unmanaged servers, you must either maintain the server yourself or hire someone to maintain it. Managed servers are maintained for you.
- Pros: This is the most economical way to get the power to run software like CiviCRM.
- Cons: Managed VPSes are expensive, but unmanaged VPSes need outside maintenance.

Some clients on a very low budget will lease an unmanaged VPS, but only maintain it during emergencies. While a bit risky, several of our clients have gone years with this approach successfully.

Here are some VPS companies Palante uses: [VPS webhost options](#)

Platform as a Service (PaaS)

With PaaS, you can hire a company to manage not just the server, but the application running on the server - for instance, WPEngine for Wordpress installations, or Pantheon for Drupal and Wordpress. These choices tend to be a bit more expensive than general hosting, but can be helpful if you expect to see spikes in demand, since these platforms will automatically allocate (and charge for) resources as they are needed.