

What You Must Know About Choosing Your E-Commerce Hosting

Before you decide to venture off on your e-commerce hosting adventure, there are a few things you need to know about choosing a web hosting company. Even before that, you must investigate whether or not e-commerce is the best choice for your business. Once you have made that determination, then you set about finding the best company to fit your particular needs. There are a lot of different hosting firms because there are a lot of different approaches to hosting. It's that simple.

Your web host is essentially a service provider that rents you space on their system(s). Some will also offer website building services and other things, but whoever takes care of building your e-commerce site, your hosting company is the one that will implement it on a server that connects to the Internet.

Thus, one of the first things to find out when you are considering prospective hosts for your firm is that the company provides near total uptime (well over 99%). If your website is inaccessible to visitors because the server is down and being repaired, then you are losing money.

Features and costs

If you really have the intention to open an e-commerce site you should bear in mind the type of features that are common to most hosting services, and compare them. There are many companies that offer "one size fits all" e-commerce and shopping cart services, often for low or no cost, in its hosting plans. For smaller companies these basic options may be enough. On the other hand, there are many hosting firms that offer more comprehensive, customizable services for both hosting and e-commerce. These services can be quite good, but the price can be quite high.

If you have adequate technical expertise, or someone in your company does, then you may be able to manage with a "Chinese menu" arrangement for choosing hosting and e-commerce services. This way you can save money by building the site yourself, as well as performing maintenance and troubleshooting. You must keep in mind that whatever technical abilities you lack, you will have to pay for, to someone. If you are already hosting your site with an e-commerce-oriented company, it will most likely be them. Minimizing these costs is important.

Follow the money

Finally, you absolutely must know how you are going to transact business (process purchases) before setting up your e-commerce site. If you do not already have a merchant account for processing credit cards, you should look into getting one. If you are too small or too new to get an account on the best terms, you will have to settle for paying higher rates and fees while you grow your company. You can always renegotiate your merchant account when your fortunes improve.

Fortunately, there are also alternatives for when your fortunes diminish, or you just want to start out slow and "test the waters." You can use PayPal, a financial "third party," for customer purchases, though it will cost you somewhat more. There are other third-party processors, as well, with a variety of entry-level accounts that will at least allow you to take major credit and debit cards, even checks.

However, third-party processors will always cost you more. The advantage to you, of course, is being able to take credit cards at all, since without that capacity you really have very little hope of success in today's "plastic-oriented" sales environments. People want to use credit and debit cards, not cash or checks, period.

As always in business the parameters you need to look for, when choosing the best e-commerce hosting company, are good management, reliable equipment and speedy, professional customer service. If it is one thing more than any other that you should focus on, all other parameters being equal, then go with the firm that has the most expert (and available!) customer service staff. You will be dealing with them more than you now think, that's for sure.

About the Author

Amy Armitage is the head of Business Development for Lunarpages. Lunarpages provides quality [web hosting](#) from their US-based hosting facility. They offer a wide-range of services from dedicated server hosting and managed solutions to shared and reseller hosting plans.