Finding the right hosting plan for your small business.

by Ivana Katz

If you are the owner of a small business and are looking to expand your business online, one of the decisions you will be faced with is what webhosting company to select. Many people search for free web hosting plans without considering what it could mean for their business.

Think of it this way: web hosts have to make a profit, so why are their hosting plans free? Firstly, you can be forced to support their advertisements on your pages, which will drive people away from your site. Secondly, your website might be infested with Trojans, viruses, or used as a viral marketing tool. You can also have the unpleasant surprise of finding you get no technical or customer support whatsoever.

As such, it is a good idea to find a reasonably priced webhosting plan that will meet all your needs. Consider that your website might grow over time. Always make sure you have enough storage space and bandwidth. Look for additional features that come with that hosting plan. There are virtually thousands of web hosting companies on the web, so you have plenty to choose from. The following are some of the most important aspects you should consider when searching for the right hosting plan for your small business.

SERVER OPERATING SYSTEM.

Although there is and will always be a debate between Windows servers and Linux servers, both of them are perfectly capable of hosting your website. However, since Linux servers are more widespread than Windows servers, you will find better prices. Competition is really intense between Linux hosting companies. And the best part is you will not feel any difference between servers running either of these operating systems. They have almost the same performance and the same con-trol panels.

SHARED HOSTING.

If you are on a tight budget, this is the best choice for you. Shared hosting means your website gets to share a server with other websites. This is the most economic way to host your new site because, in most cases, it does not need the resources of an entire server. However, be aware that some hosts place too many websites on a single server, resulting in loss of performance. These companies are rare though, but keep it in mind.

Other options, if your website needs more resources, are Semi-Dedicated servers and Dedicated servers. As their names suggest, Semi-Dedicated servers host fewer websites, thus reserving a larg-er portion of resources for each one and Dedicated servers host only one website, thus giving it all their resources.

DISK SPACE.

You must consider disk space at all costs. Let's say your initial website has 10 pages and a small database, totalling a size of 10MB. You wouldn't think you need 100GB of storage space, would you? Well, you do! Most websites grow over time. For example, you may add more products, attach a blog, populate the blog with text, images, and video, attach video descrip-tions of your products, add a shopping cart etc. Even your customer database will grow exponentially. If after a year or two, your website is too large for the current host, you may have to relocate it else-where, so it is best to have more storage space than you need.

MONTHLY TRAFFIC.

This is another very important aspect to consider. It is a good idea to select hosts that offer unlimited monthly traffic to your website. At first, you might get 100-200 unique visits per month. No problem! But what if your marketing campaign hits the jackpot? You will start receiving 200,000-300,000 unique visits per month and, if you don't have an unlimited traffic hosting plan, all your potential customers will receive a "Sorry, bandwidth exceeded. Contact the system administrator!" page.

DOMAINS.

Many hosts offer domain name regis-tration and allow you to store multiple domain names under the same control panel. Although not as cheap as dedicat-ed domain registrars, you will soon find out that the time you save by having all your web-sites and domains under the same control panel easily outweighs a small $5-$10 monthly fee.

> "be aware that some hosts place too many websites on a single server, resulting in loss of performance. These companies are rare though, but keep it in mind..."

CONTROL PANEL.

Some webhosting companies offer complicated control panels that make even creating an email account difficult. Some hosts will offer a demo control panel so that you can get a feel of its potential. The easier to use the control panel is, the easi-er managing your website will be.

If finding a webhosting company seems like a daunting task, leave it to your webdesigner. They generally manage a number of websites and can easily organ-ize suitable webhosting for you.