Article Side

What is a Web Host?

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As you browse the internet, you are being passed from server to server, looking at different sites from around the country and around the world. And now that you are looking into web hosting it hits you: you have no clue how that works.

How are Sites Accessed?

When someone out there in the world wants to reach your site, they send out packets. These stumble along the internet, getting forwarded much like a package does at post offices, until they reach their target. There they dump their information, for example a request to see a page. The server responds by sending packets back to the address that sent the packets.

Both sides need to have an address, just like you need an address when sending something through the mail. This means that your site needs to have some method of identifying itself, and no, the URL isn't enough.

Instead, there are servers out there that your computer knows how to connect toâ€”think of them like books of statisticsâ€”that resolve the addresses. On one side is the URL and on the other is the address that the computer understands, telling the packets where to go. That information is stuffed into the packet and sent on its way. Each time the packet hits a different server, the machine reads the packet, decodes it, and forwards it on in the right way.

What is a web host?

A web host is someone who provides server space for websites. Web hosting companies have machines especially designed to handle the stresses of serving web sites. They rent out space on the machines to people who want to run websites.

The specifics get a little messier than that. A web server needs to be able to handle a large number of connections at any given time from the various people browsing the website. The number of people who can see a site at any given time is limited by the number of connections that the web hosting server can handle. Further, each connection takes up processing power. If the machine doesn't have enough oomph to handle all the connections that have been made, then the website will load slowly for everyone who visits the site.

Most cheap hosting plans offer what is known as a virtual private server, which is where one machine hosts many different websites. Most websites don't get much traffic, which means that a few can be grouped together and use the same resources. Web hosts do this by running each client on a virtual server, which splits the resources between different servers while making each think it is the entire machine. Virtual servers are fairly complex to set up, but they save web hosts and you a lot of money.

If you can't get a virtual private server, you have to find web hosting services from a dedicated private server. Those cost a lot of money to buy and maintain, and the costs get passed on to you.

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