

Liquid Web

Ebook

The informed buyer's guide to hosting partners

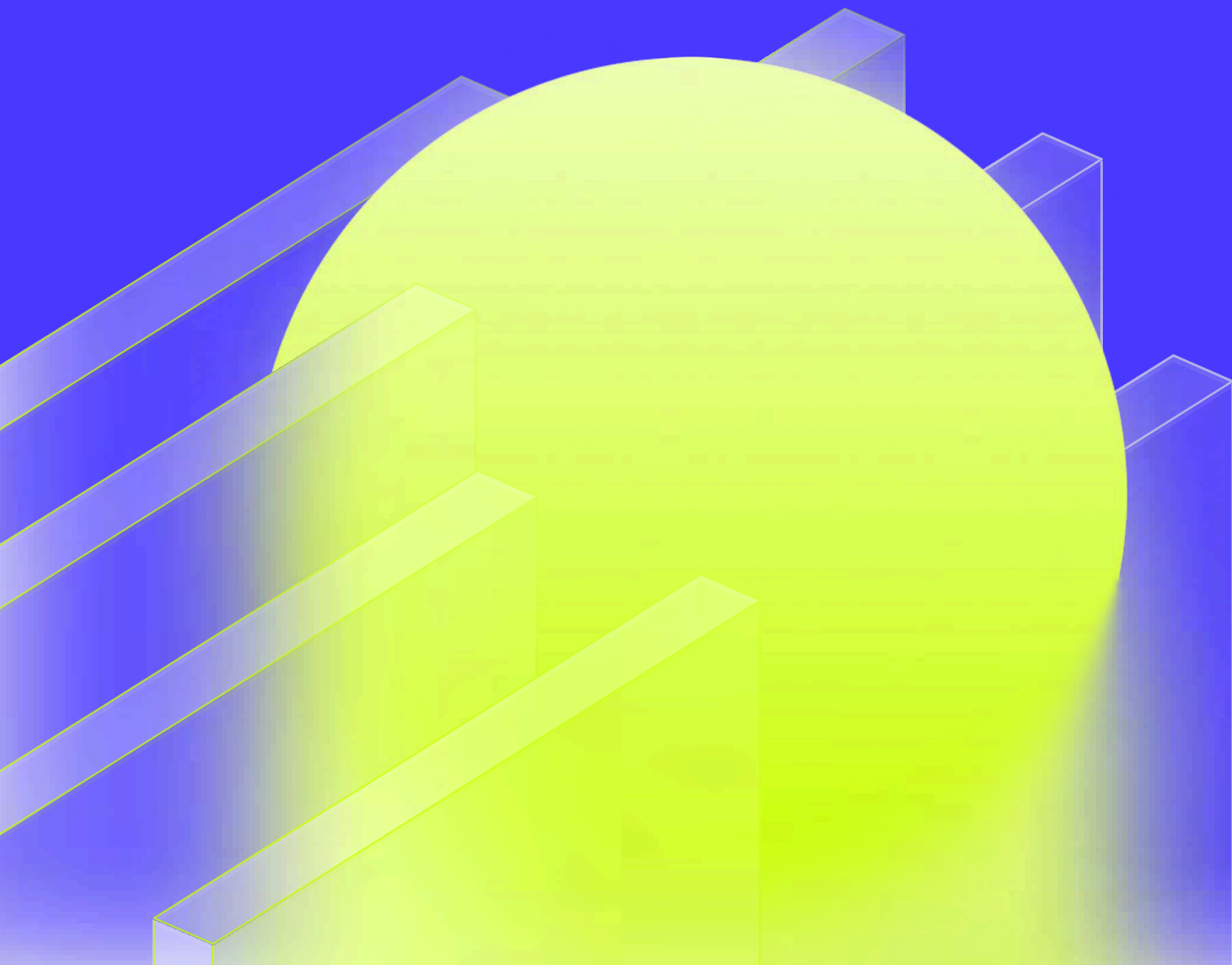


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This guide is designed to help you make an informed decision when choosing a hosting provider for your business.

First, we'll help you determine which type of hosting company is right for you. Then, we'll explore the technologies available and help you find the best fit for your needs. Finally, we'll wrap up with a hosting provider checklist to help you get the most value for your investment.

[Let's dive in.](#)

If you only take one idea away from this guide, it should be this: **Where you host matters.**

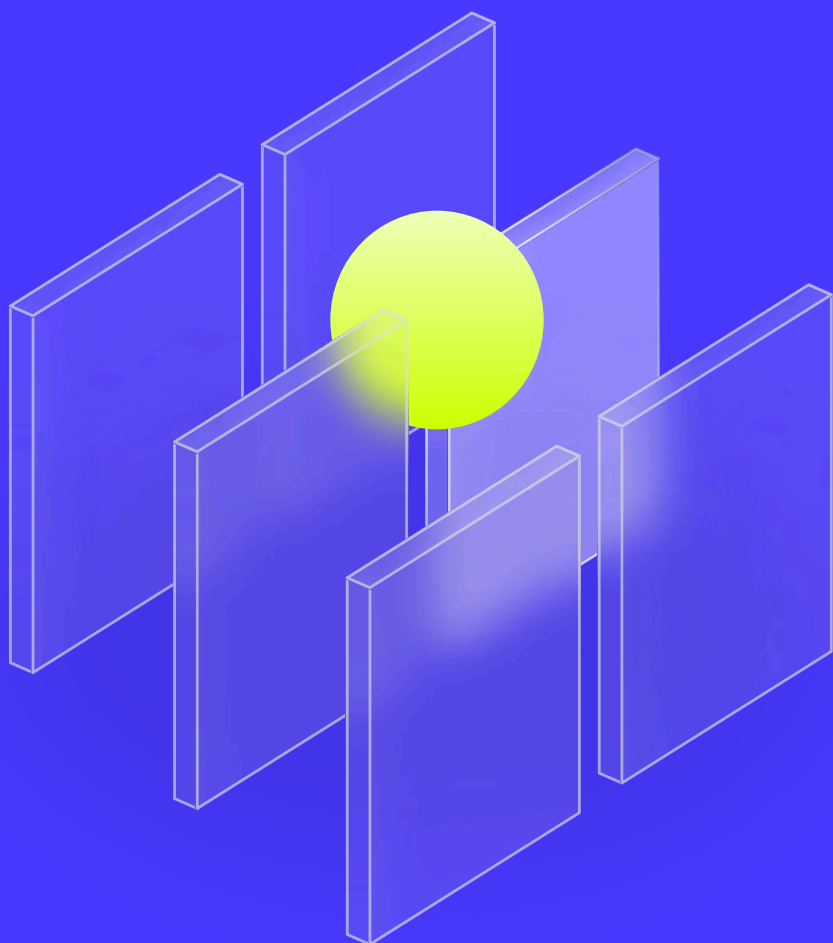
It's a simple idea, but one that has far-reaching consequences. The implications of choosing a hosting company that isn't a good fit for your business can be painful: slow sites, downtime, and, worst of all, lost revenue.

To the untrained eye, many hosting companies look the same. They offer products that appear similar, have similar features, and even similar guarantees. But looks can be deceiving.

Once you scratch the surface, it becomes clear that all hosting isn't created equal, and some hosting companies are better aligned with your business than others.



What type of hosting company should I choose?



In today's economy, **your choice of hosting provider** is as much a strategic business decision as it is a technical one.

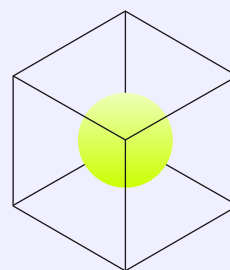
While many providers can meet baseline IT requirements, few truly align with your long-term goals or growth strategy.

Take an ecommerce business that earns 100% of its revenue online. Plenty of hosts can keep the site live, but not all can keep it performing when it matters most.

When traffic surges during a sale, or when a plugin update unexpectedly breaks a checkout flow, the difference between a generic host and a true partner becomes clear.

The right provider combines reliable infrastructure, proactive monitoring, and expert support that's ready when you need it, whether through live chat or ongoing managed service.

Choosing a host that's aligned with your business needs can save you time, money, and countless headaches.




✦ **Pro tip**

Many providers can meet baseline IT requirements, but few truly align with your long-term goals or growth strategy.

The hosting continuum

The hosting landscape can feel crowded and confusing. With so many providers promising similar results, it's hard to know what really sets one apart from another.

To help make sense of it all, this hosting continuum groups providers into three broad categories: shared hosting, managed hosting, and large enterprise hosting.

Shared hosting	Managed hosting	Enterprise hosting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Consumers ✓ Hobbyists ✓ Brochureware SMBs ✓ Micro-SMBs ✓ Freelancers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ SMBs with sites, stores, and applications ✓ Mission-critical sites, stores, and applications ✓ Designers ✓ Developers ✓ Digital agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Enterprise ✓ Hybrid ✓ Large SaaS providers ✓ Complex solutions
< \$99/mo.	\$100-9,999/mo.	> \$10,000/mo.
	<p>Liquid Web</p>	<p>rackspace. <small>SOFTLAYER</small></p>

To understand **which hosting companies are best aligned with your business**, let's look at each category and the customers they typically serve.

Shared hosting

The vast majority of hosting companies fall into this category. This is the least expensive option, often starting at \$10 a month. For that amount, you'll receive a very small portion of a server and share the server with thousands of other websites.



Good for:

Personal blogs, simple static websites, brochureware sites, and non-critical websites

Example businesses:

A local restaurant with a simple website. If the site goes down, it might inconvenience some customers, but it's unlikely to have a major impact on the business.

Managed hosting

Managed hosting includes both the hosting infrastructure and ongoing management and support. Prices typically start around \$50 per month and can scale to several thousand. You get a large portion of a server, an entire server, or even multiple servers, depending on your needs.

For businesses that rely heavily on their online presence, managed hosting offers a seamless blend of performance, reliability, and expert support. Providers handle server management, operating system updates, and control panel maintenance, freeing your team to focus on what drives your business forward.



Good for:

Ecommerce stores, mission-critical websites, databases, multi-site hosting, online businesses, and web applications

Example businesses:

Large online businesses and enterprise SaaS companies that have large-scale cloud deployments. These companies generally have employees or third-party partners focused on hosting.

Large enterprise hosting

Enterprise hosting serves the largest organizations with the most demanding infrastructures. Public cloud providers like AWS, Google Cloud, and Azure power giants such as Netflix and Zillow, with environments that often start around \$10,000 per month.

For enterprises with complex needs, consider major public cloud platforms that offer robust API access and geographically diverse availability zones. Confirm the level of support and included server management. It's essential to match those services to your team's capacity and technical expertise.



Good for:

Enterprise applications, big data workloads, and other large-scale systems

Example businesses:

Large online businesses and enterprise SaaS companies that have large-scale cloud deployments. These companies generally have employees or third-party partners focused on hosting.

Making the choice

If you're just getting started or have minimal requirements, shared hosting is a good option.

Be cautious of introductory pricing traps. Many shared hosts advertise extremely low rates that apply only to the first term or require long prepayments. While those deals may look appealing, renewal prices can rise sharply, and refunds are often limited.

Instead of shopping by price alone, focus on value. Look for reliable performance, transparent pricing, and 24/7 expert support.



✦ Pro tip

Look for a host that offers around-the-clock access to expert support.

Managed hosting: a “do it for me” solution

Many businesses face a choice: hire in-house IT staff to manage server administration or outsource those responsibilities to a trusted partner.

With managed hosting, the provider handles server administration for you, acting as an extension of your team to keep your infrastructure online, secure, and up to date.

Managed hosting is ideal for organizations with limited or no in-house IT resources, or for teams whose technical staff are focused on revenue-generating projects.

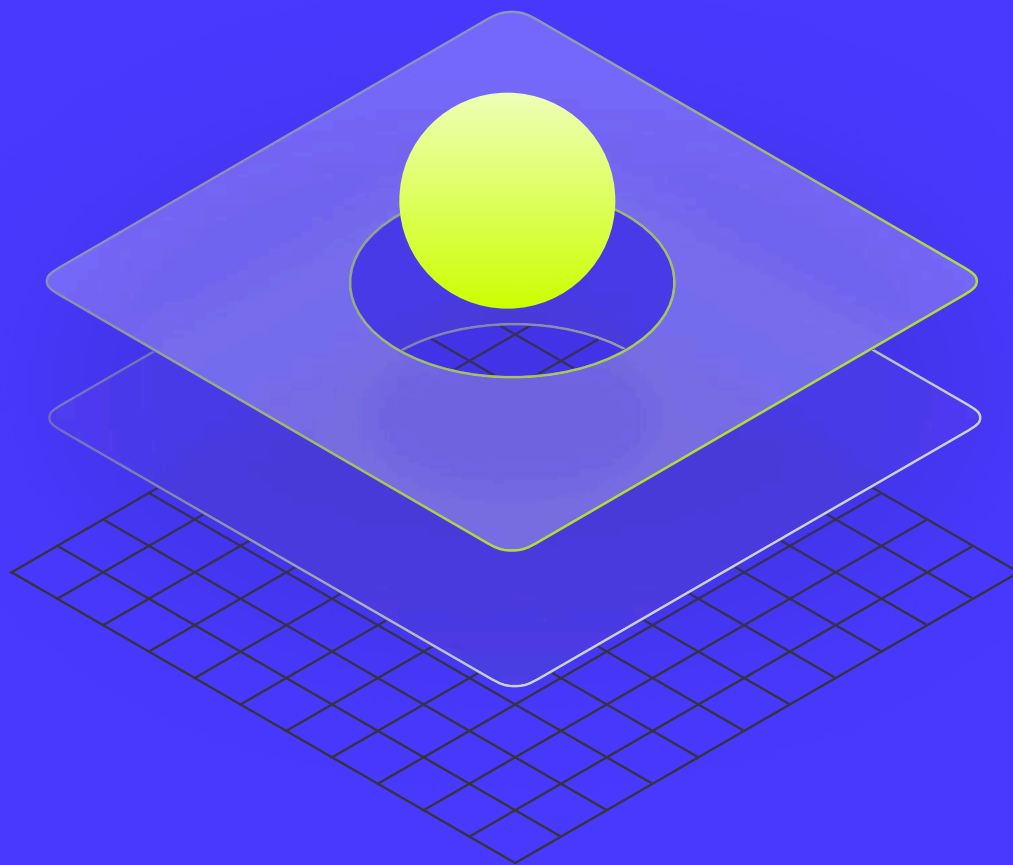
Managed hosting often includes added features such as managed security, backups, and on-site technical assistance for complete peace of mind.

- ✓ Managed backups
- ✓ Managed migrations
- ✓ Managed security
- ✓ Managed monitoring
- ✓ Managed CDN
- ✓ Managed software patching
- ✓ Managed software updates
- ✓ Managed DDoS attack protection

The next step

Now that we've established managed hosting as an ideal match for most businesses, we'll explore the products and solutions available from managed hosting providers, and help you find the best fit for your business.

Which hosting solution is the best fit?



Hosting solutions can seem complex, but we're here to simplify them.

If you've spent any time shopping for hosting, you've probably seen terms like "VPS" (virtual private server), "dedicated server," and, of course, "cloud." But how do you know which hosting solution is right for your project? The answer comes down to server resources.

Example

An ecommerce store might start with a VPS plan, then move to a platform-as-a-service (PaaS) solution as traffic grows. Before a major campaign, migrating to dedicated servers—one for the site and one for the database—can further improve performance and reliability.

As you can see, the question "Which hosting solution is right for me?" depends partly on your project's resource needs.

It also depends on the software you use. Some managed hosts now offer solutions optimized for specific open-source platforms, such as WordPress, that go beyond server management to include automatic updates for the CMS, themes, and plugins.

If you're unsure, ask.

A key part of the value managed hosting provides is pre-sales consultation. A technical sales representative, sometimes called a solutions architect, can help you identify the right solution for your needs.



The table below provides a closer look at common hosting solutions offered by managed providers.

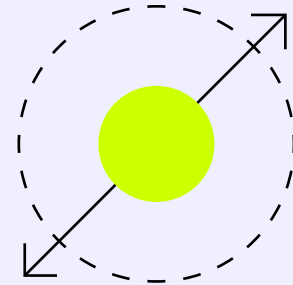
	VPS/cloud hosting	Dedicated server	Hosting platform-as-a-service (PaaS)	Managed applications
What is it for?	Smaller workloads that need consistent performance	Persistent workloads, or compliance requirements (HIPAA)	Having multiple CMS high traffic websites and apps, all with scalability	Open source CMS, ecommerce, or CRM applications
What is it?	A portion of a server with guaranteed resources	An entire server where you have access to all of the resources	A platform of many servers on which your project lives	A service where the provider manages the software (i.e. WordPress) in addition to the infrastructure
Pros	Easily expandable to meet workload/traffic demands Less expensive than dedicated servers	Your information is private Meets compliance requirements for PCI and HIPAA	Your “slice” of the platform can scale based on usage Quickest way to deploy new projects	Hosting is optimized for the application No server management required
Cons	Some hosting companies use older hardware to create their cloud	If your application or website isn't using all of the dedicated server, you're paying for unused capacity	No root access to server Limited application compatibility	Limited access to server for custom configurations
Infrastructure type	Cloud	Dedicated	Cloud	Cloud
Root access	✓	✓	✗	✗
Single tenant	✗	✓	✗	✗
Complexity	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
Reliability	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
Performance	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●
Cost	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●	●●●●●

Consider the hosting solution portfolio

When evaluating hosting providers, consider the range of products and solutions they offer. As you launch or grow additional projects, you can gain efficiencies by keeping everything under one provider.

Scaling your project

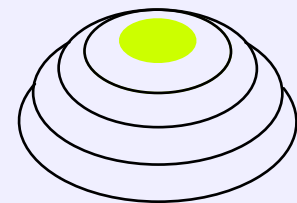
As your project grows, your hosting infrastructure will need to grow with it. As you consider managed hosting providers, it's important to understand their capacity to scale alongside your needs.



Some providers specialize in a single technology, such as managed WordPress or VPS. To future-proof your project, choose a partner that offers a broad range of hosting solutions and technologies.

Starting new projects

Your first project might be built on WordPress, but your next could be a custom PHP application. Choose a hosting partner that can support any project you take on.



Up next: Hosting provider checklist

Your hosting provider can directly impact your company's competitiveness. With so many businesses betting their success on their web presence and cloud-based technologies, it's troubling how many make this critical decision based on price alone. It can be a costly mistake, especially when you can't afford downtime, slow site performance, or security breaches.

Instead, use this checklist to guide your search. Ask your hosting provider these questions, and review their website, social channels, customer feedback, and analyst reports to help inform your answers.

Hosting provider checklist



Hosting provider checklist

	Yes	No
Stability		
Has the company experienced growth in the last 12 months or, conversely, suffered an adverse business event?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does the company have a strong, experienced executive leadership team?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does the company own its own data centers?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does the company use Tier 1 providers for network access?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Innovation		
Does the company support a variety of hosting products and services that can meet the ever-changing needs of your projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have there been any new products developed in the last 12 months?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do the products include the most up-to-date security and performance software?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How old is the hardware/software being used? Does a cheaper price mean they use older or refurbished hardware?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How compatible and flexible are the products? Do they work with a wide variety of plugins? Do they support a variety of operating systems and applications?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service		
Do customers have around-the-clock access to highly-trained, certified technicians?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Can you talk live to someone about your issue same day?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Are you given multiple methods of contact for support?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does the company charge for support?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do they own their own infrastructure and are they on-site with the servers 24/7/365?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do they have a team dedicated to helping you migrate data? Will they do it for free?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
What do current customers say about the customer service? Ask for data.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promises		
Does the company provide performance and customer service guarantees?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
What's their track record on uptime? What service level agreements are in place in the event of an outage?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does the company have flexible agreements and pricing or are you locked into contracts?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Does the company have a high net promoter or satisfaction score? (Do current customers recommended them?)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Key takeaways



Key takeaways

Where you host matters

Not all hosting companies are aligned with your business. Choose one that understands your size, goals, and level of technical support.

Choose the right partner

Rackspace targets large enterprises, GoDaddy and Bluehost focus on very small businesses, while Liquid Web specializes in companies with 5–200 employees and the experts who build for them.

Think long-term

Look for a partner that fits your needs today and can scale with you tomorrow. The best providers offer a wide range of solutions and a lasting commitment to their customers.

Get expert guidance

Not sure which hosting solution is right for you? Talk with an expert. Trusted providers offer guidance at no cost.

Move with confidence

Don't let migration concerns slow you down. The right partner will guide you through the process and ensure a smooth, stress-free transition.

Liquid Web

liquidweb.com

For nearly 30 years, Liquid Web has helped businesses build, scale, and succeed online. Our team of hosting experts can help you find the right solution for your unique needs.

Chat with us anytime. Our support team is available 24/7 and ready to help.