

Managed WordPress Buyer's Guide



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Do I Need Managed WordPress Hosting?



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Do I need Managed WordPress Hosting?

The answer to that very important question will depend a lot on who you are and what kind of site you're running. Managed WordPress hosting in general is a do-it-for-you service, much like having a virtual assistant to configure, set up, harden, and enhance WordPress.

As you're trying to decide if you really need Managed WordPress hosting, ask yourself a few questions about who you are and what you need.

What do I value more: time or money?

Let's say that you're a traveler that likes to arrive at a hotel and go with self-park versus valet. You're a person who doesn't mind driving around, finding a place to park, then walking the distance to check into the hotel. You frequently think, "Why would I spend more money when I can do it myself?"

But what if you are the type to pull right up to the valet and hand over the keys? The trade off in cost is worth the time it saves, so you can focus on what's important to you.



Part 1: Do I need Managed WordPress Hosting?

How does Managed WordPress hosting save me time?

Managed WordPress hosting offers a number of advantages, but first and foremost it gives you back time. Your host will take care of things most likely to cause you delays or take up a lot of time. Would your life be easier if someone else took the time to:

- Harden and configure your environment
- Adapt WordPress for safety or for speed
- Make sure your plugins are updated

You shouldn't have to worry about doing things yourself, or about paying someone else to do it in a pinch, because the right Managed WordPress host will handle those needs.

It's important to consider the value of your time in the same way you think about self-parking or valet: it is worth real money. You don't want to spend days figuring out security settings or worrying about speed and performance. You don't have to spend time learning to manage WordPress updates, or configuring backups, or putting site uptime monitoring in place to make sure all is well.



Part 1: Do I need Managed WordPress Hosting?

Am I capable of managing the environment?

Of course, there are business owners who simply say, "I'm going to try and figure this out." Spending a few days on set up isn't a loss for them. They have a good handle on what is required or they have a team who can help.

Those who are even more technical might be confident they can get up and running in a matter of a few hours. But what if you are not someone who's technically adept, or who has a lot of experience with setting up site hosting? You could spend hours just trying to get started.

Let's say you've never configured your own site backups, and you realize it isn't as easy as you expected. From choosing the right backup plugin or tool, to configuring it to store backups in the right location, to testing the restore function, you're on the hook to research and implement, or to find an expert to help you. How much hassle would you avoid if this was an item your host handled by default?



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Part 1: Do I need Managed WordPress Hosting?

Am I seeing the speed and performance I expect?

A crucial dynamic to consider when evaluating your need for Managed WordPress hosting is the possibility of better performance. Like most decisions in this area, it depends on your site and its purpose. You have to decide, "Will it deliver more value to me as the site owner if it performs better?"

Think about the purpose of your site.

- How many visitors do you get, and how
- does your site perform at busy times?
- How critical is your site on the whole to your business?
- Do you use it as a store front, or is it merely a place to find static information, such as PDF manuals on product specifications.



If it isn't important to improve performance or increase speed, then shared hosting may make the most sense in terms of cost or technical requirement.

Part 1: Do I need Managed WordPress Hosting?

Why wouldn't I just choose shared hosting?

With shared hosting, often what we're really talking about is high density hosting, which means

- High quantity of sites on a shared server
- Stringent limitations on access or usage to protect the environment
- Slow site speeds due to shared or oversold resources, including CPU and RAM

If you have a blog that people visit every now and then, and you don't consider traffic or site speed critical issues then a Managed WordPress host is not likely a necessity. Shared hosting or high density shared hosting may meet your needs.

For most, speed is critical and a shared or high density environment won't offer the gains available on a high performance Managed WordPress product.

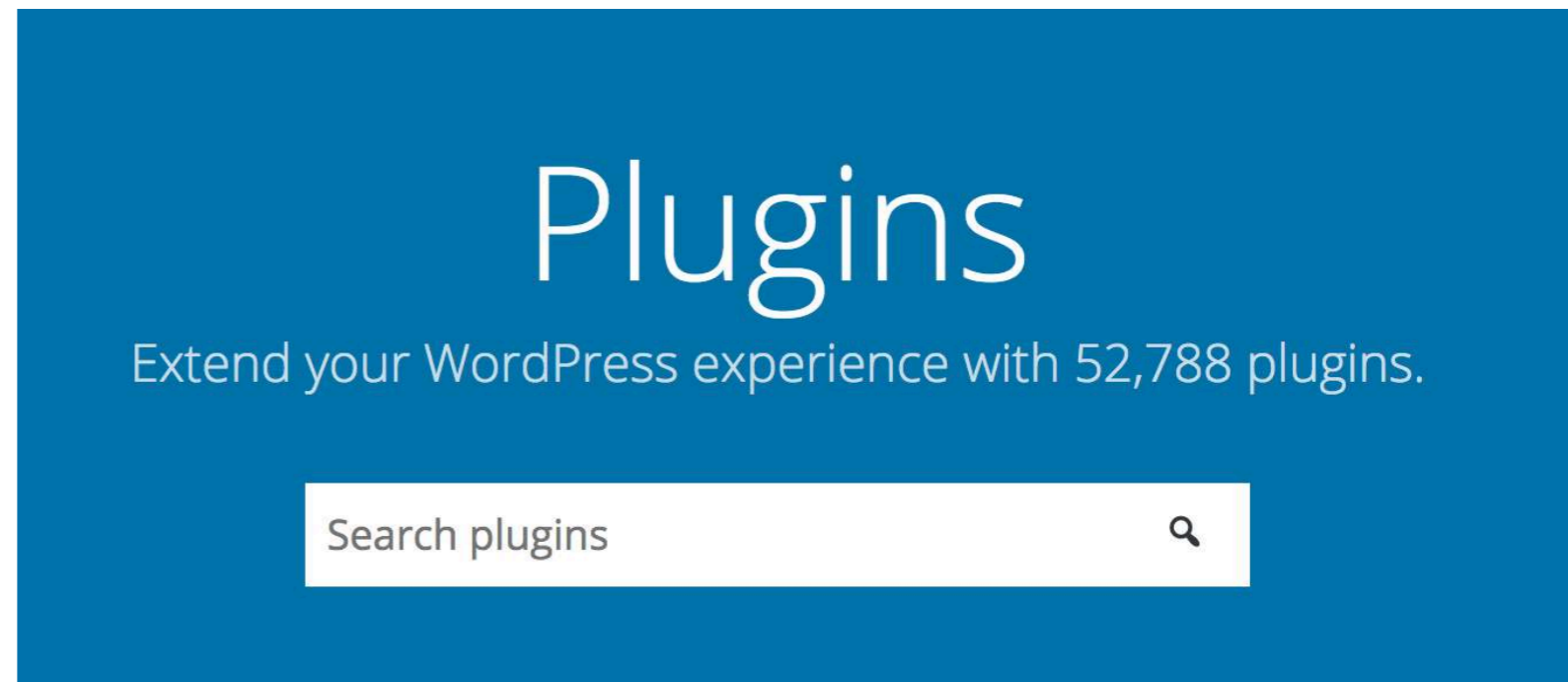


Is WordPress always up to date? Are my plugins?

Making sure your site and plugins are up to date, and knowing the method in which your website is updated can make a huge impact.

The average WordPress website has 20 or more plugins, each on their own update cycle. This is in addition to WordPress itself, which has to be updated regularly, both for security and performance. If your site only has a few plugins, and you feel confident about maintaining an update schedule that aligns with WordPress core updates, you may not need tools to monitor and manage these tasks.

If you have a lot of plugins, or manage a lot of sites, and you have to worry about whether one update could impact your site, automatic updates provided by a Managed WordPress host could be a big deal for you, couldn't it?



Can I afford to not have Managed WordPress hosting?

Of course, budget matters. The extremely cost conscious may prefer to trade personal time, energy, effort, and learning against the dollars they spend, meaning Managed WordPress is probably not of great value to them. They don't want to spend more than a few dollars a month on hosting.

But if you've arrived, through careful consideration, at the conclusion that yes,

- You want someone else managing the right environment for your site
- Speed is critical to your site performance
- WordPress core and plugin updates require more time than you have to spend
- Your time and effort are worth more than the dollar cost,



WORDPRESS

Managed WordPress hosting is a need.

Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting



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So how do I evaluate a Managed WordPress host?

Now that you've decided to move forward, how do you pick the right Managed WordPress product? There are several elements to consider when evaluating, testing, or comparing Managed WordPress providers.

First, who are you? Are you a developer? Designer? Business Owner?

Next, what about the company itself? Can you grow and scale with them as your business needs? Are you choosing a price or a partner? And who are they— are they innovators who support you in every way possible?

Know thyself, and know what your potential Managed WordPress partner brings to the table.



Who am I – why does it matter?

It's common for people to start with feature comparison. Does this product allow SSH access? Does it have Git integration? What about staging options? Does it support WP-CLI? But before evaluating individual features, start by considering who is going to be using the product and what they need. Is it you? Your team?

If you don't plan to do your own development, SSH, Git, and REST API access are components that may not be important utilities. You want to look at products that answer the question, "How does this work for me, a non-developer?"

Let's say one of your options involves the use of cPanel or a similar interface, which can certainly help with hosting WordPress-driven sites, but may offer you significantly more tooling than you need. Again, you want to focus on what you need, based on who you are, not the feature set in whole. If you need to manage redirects, domain parking, or more complex DNS tasks, then this may be the right solution. If you look at this kind of interface and find that most of the tools offered are confusing and don't fall into your needs list, then it's not going to be useful.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

I'm a developer.

I need Git integration and staging sites. SSL is a requirement, and I don't want pay a lot to secure my sites. I find managing sites or developing for them is hindered if I have to do everything through a graphical interface, so I need SSH access, and WP-CLI is non-negotiable.

Most Managed WordPress offerings deliberately restrict access, so you can't unintentionally modify things on the backend. For example, if you want direct database access, Managed WordPress hosts will either make it difficult, or not let you have access at all. Similarly, when you need to SSH or SFTP a visual interface may be provided with limitations. The intent is to protect you from site downtime through restriction.

The ideal Managed WordPress offering will allow access at levels that suit those who are or are not developers. At Liquid Web, our approach was to make the user interface comfortable for non-developers, and at the same time give developers the deeper access they need. Database management is available using phpMyAdmin. WP-CLI and Git integration are standard, allowing developers to navigate freely through site files without having to utilize a visual interface.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

I'm a designer.

I need to be able to work quickly in staging environments, so I don't have to make changes on the fly in production. I want to be able to use crisp images and not worry about compression values— my host should do this for me. When I complete a site, I want to password protect it until my client signs off and gives me the go ahead to set it live.

Providing accurate reports to my clients is also important, and I want to be able to show them the value of my work, as well as the stability of my Managed WordPress hosting provider.

Liquid Web provides one-click staging environments because we knew it was critical for designers to see how updates and changes could impact sites. We also partnered with iThemes to give every account Sync Pro, so that reporting to your clients is easy and provides detailed, meaningful information.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

I'm a business owner.

I have to think about all aspects of what is best for my site, whether I directly interact with it or not. I need to make sure that the site is fast and always available. I can't afford to lose traffic or miss orders because of unreliability.

When we thought about the needs of those running their businesses on WordPress sites, the first thing we considered at Liquid Web was making sure that your sites were backed by infrastructure that guarantees uptime. We focused on redundancy and availability, because we know you need us to have your back during a big campaign or on Black Friday when your orders double.

Our features are backed by innovative infrastructure, so count on us to keep the lights on for you.



How do I grow with a Managed WordPress host?

Perhaps as a business owner your requirements may not include a specific interface solution, but will be focused on what it takes to scale your solution as your business grows. You'll want to ask:

- What is the cost of scaling?
- Will it be gradual, or will I double, even triple my cost?
- What Managed WordPress plans are there to meet my growing traffic needs?

Understanding the dynamic of scalability as it relates to price is a key piece of this decision, and so is the way scalability and architecture can affect you. The Managed WordPress hosting providers you're considering should also be able to tell you

- What happens if you want to scale
- If you are going to have architecture changes
- The noticeable environmental differences if you scale
- If your level of support changes



Choose a partner, not a price.

When you're looking for a Managed WordPress partner, then price is only one element of that relationship. If you decide to buy a new refrigerator price is important, but realize you're going to have your refrigerator for a long time. You don't buy a refrigerator for a month or a year, you buy one for the long haul.

As with refrigerators, you will quickly find that every pitch is based on the same metrics, in this case disk space, RAM, page views support per plan, and pricing, rather cubic inches and environmental impact.

The question here is: can you evaluate a partner based solely on these criteria?

At the core of this decision, you're not just buying another product. You're buying the ability to make sure your business runs effectively. You need more than a specific amount of disk space or RAM or even pricing; you need a partner who understands how to meet your needs.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

Look for innovation.

Why do you care about innovation? The answer to this question probably seems overly simple, but the truth is technology is always changing. If technology is always changing, but you choose a partner where the fundamental objective is keep cost low and aim for better margins, they may not commit to updating and changing with technology. In short, the odds are that they're going to keep doing things as they always have.

It's important to consider how that could affect your business. If you are shifting and changing to meet your own needs then you need a partner who will do the same. Have your potential Managed WordPress hosts:

- Introduced new products in the last year or two?
- Shown a good grasp of the current markets in their technology decisions?
- Do they have a reputation for good product roll outs?
- What do their customers have to say about those products?

If a company you are considering has innovated new products well in the past, the odds are higher they will do so in the future. It also stands to reason that if they haven't released innovative products in the past, they may not do so in the future.



Require good infrastructure.

A company's approach to innovation can say a lot about their software and hardware decisions. Liquid Web operates their own data centers, but some hosts don't own or maintain their own data centers. This fine if they are building on top of trusted resources. You know the names—Amazon, Google. But you still want to know:

- Do they manage their own infrastructure, and if not, who does?
- Does their provider refresh or update hardware on a regular cycle?
- Are there guarantees that their critical software is updated to latest versions?

If a host is running outdated infrastructure, or they can't upgrade internally to latest versions of critical software (think firewall and security software), this should be of particular concern as you evaluate a potential partner.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

Make sure you and your needs will be supported.

Does the infrastructure itself support your needs? Yes, you want to know that they can support WordPress, but what if you have a database that functions in a particular way, or what if you have a video membership site that needs to interact with other software? Know what you need for your site, know who you are, be that a developer, a designer, a business owner, and be sure that your Managed WordPress evaluation includes that information.

Just as important as infrastructure that supports your needs are the people backing you up. You want to have a good sense of how knowledgeable the support is as it relates to your own needs.

Is there any cost for support?

If you have to pay for access to support staff, that's going to impact your budget, and you may not get the help you need at critical times.

Is the support team available 24/7/365?

How do you get a hold of support when you need them— email, chat, phone call? Ask potential hosts if they guarantee response times.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

Know what guarantees back your partnership.

Partnership

As you look at Managed WordPress hosts consider a few things that may impact your ability to truly partner with them:

- Do they require contracts?
- Is there any flexibility in pricing?
- What customer service agreements do they offer?

Perhaps you have a great deal of influence in your sphere of expertise and you want to be able to bring them your new host, assuming it's a great fit. If you have the potential to bring more clients to their service, how do they reward you for doing so?

You may wish to publicly declare your relationship with your Managed WordPress hosting provider. Is there any benefit to being an affiliate of the company?

A true partner will offer opportunity as you grow with them to mutual benefit.



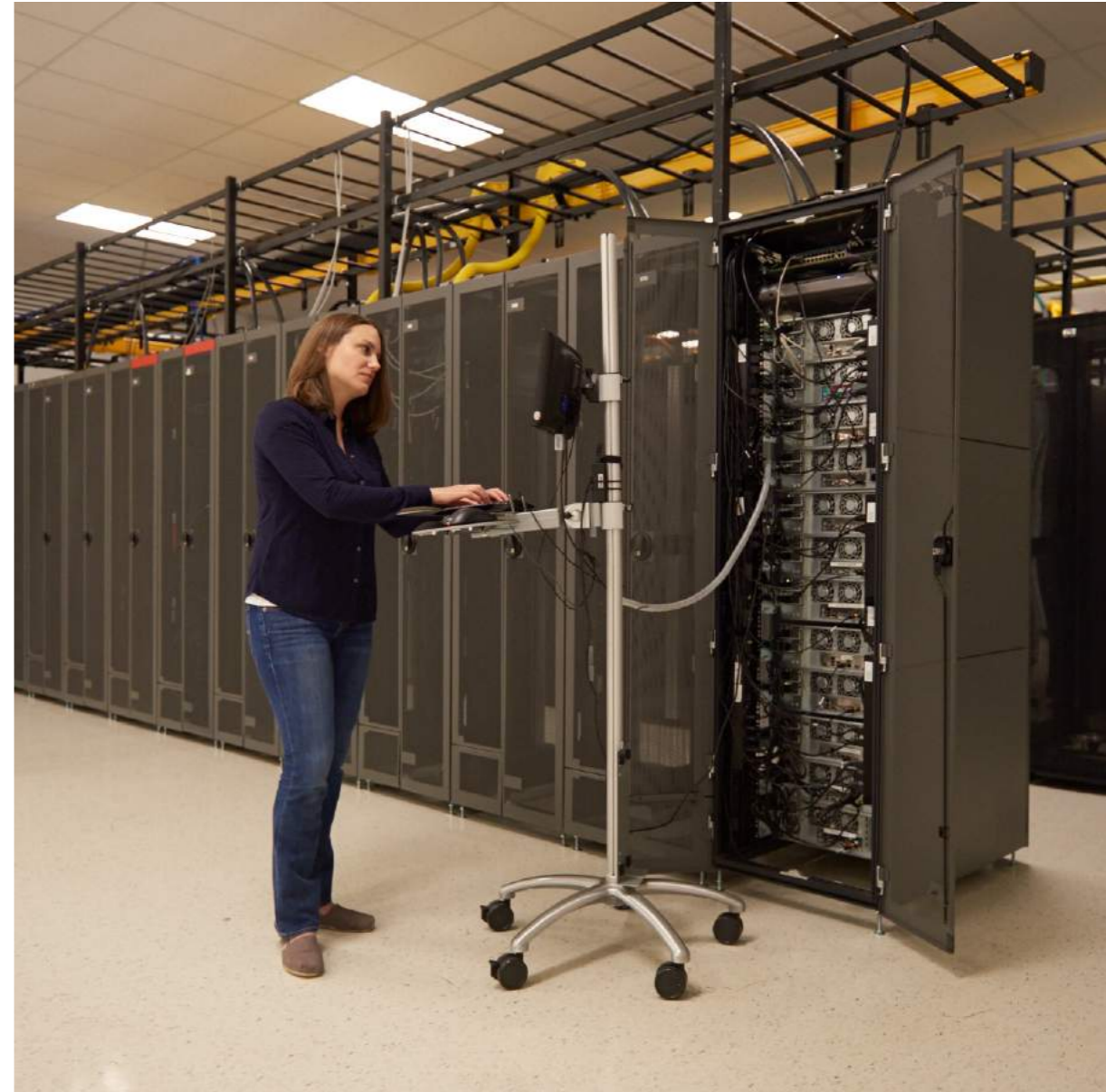
Service Level Agreements

Even a host that guarantees 100% uptime knows that things can go wrong sometimes, and you need to know how they'll make it right if there is an issue with your service.

- How often do they have service disruptions?
- How do they communicate with you in case of an outage?
- If there is an outage, what type of reparations are available?

Everyone says they have the “best” customer service. Ask for the data.

One of the ways we measure how well we're doing at Liquid Web is through our Net Promoter Score (NPS). The Net Promoter Score asks, on a scale of one to 10, how likely are you to recommend us and our products to your friends? We have an industry leading score of 71, but even a well-loved company will take feedback to heart and work to solve problems with their customers, through innovation or improvement.



Part 2: Evaluating Managed WordPress Hosting

Get to know the company.

As a final step in your evaluation process, take the time to get to know the company you're considering. You want to know if their leadership team is highly engaged with the business.

- Do they have a presence that makes you feel like they can support your business?
- What kind of reputation does the company have?
- Are they well known in the industry?
- Do they own their own infrastructure?
- Who are the vendors that back them?
- How well did they respond to any outages?

It's important that you be able to trust your Managed WordPress host to focus on solving problems and innovating new solutions, and that you know they are committed to supporting your growth as a business.



Choose your Managed WordPress host.

The time you spend on this decision is a byproduct of the kind of site you're running. A mission critical site may require hours, days, or weeks to evaluate the available options. A hobbyist may make this decision in seconds or minutes.

We don't mind if you take your time, in fact we encourage taking the time you need. We recognize that whether you choose Liquid Web or another host, if you're running a mission critical site, if that site is the core of your business, then you should take time to do your due diligence.

When it comes to that due diligence, we recommend looking at more than just the price in relation to RAM and storage, or as it relates to the total number of page views that your website supports. We think there's a lot to consider. Do you need Managed WordPress hosting? What kind of customer are you? What does the company offer in terms of innovation, infrastructure, support, and partnership? Are they reputable and reliable?

You're picking a partner, and you want to choose the right one, and we believe this guide can help you with that decision.



About Liquid Web

Marking its 20th anniversary, Liquid Web powers content, commerce and potential for SMB entrepreneurs and the designers, developers and digital agencies who create for them. We're totally devoted to web and cloud professionals like you. It's our focus. And that focus translates to products, services and support designed specifically for mission-critical sites, stores and applications. Our nearly 600 experienced administrators, engineers, and technicians are dedicated and empowered to make your life easier - so you can focus on the work you love. For us, it is about Power Your Business Potential.™



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