20 Point Checklist for Vetting a Managed Hosting Provider

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20 Point Checklist for Vetting Your Hosting Provider

The effective use of technology to optimize and grow your business is quickly separating the winners from the losers. If you're a small- or medium-sized business, you're probably feeling this competitive pressure in a variety of different ways. You may find it hard to keep up with the pace of innovation and feel like larger competitors are leaving you behind. You may also find it hard to hire and retain the type of top technical talent required to keep your systems running smoothly. And if you're in a highly regulated market that must adhere to compliance standards like HIPAA and PCI, these challenges are only exacerbated.

Rely on Trusted Expertise

Many SMBs have discovered the benefits of outsourcing management of their key IT infrastructure (i.e., servers, network, etc.) to a managed hosting provider. Managed hosting providers can deliver the deep and specialized technical expertise required to keep mission-critical workloads running smoothly. They also offer other benefits, like the ability to shift IT investments from costly up-front CAPEX to more manageable and recurring OPEX. Perhaps their biggest benefit is their ability to relieve the pressures identified above and help your business stayed focused on driving innovation that delivers meaningful benefits to your customers.

As you pursue a managed hosting strategy, it's important to remember that not all providers are equal. Some may claim to offer the infrastructure and technical skills, such as certifications from Microsoft and other vendors, to support your objectives, but don't. Others have the resources, but choose to focus them on certain types or sizes of companies that don't reflect where you are as a business. If you're not careful, you might end up with the wrong provider for your needs.

Asking the Right Questions

The key to ensuring that you choose the right managed hosting provider is to make sure that you are asking the right questions up front, before you sign a contract. In order to help you do that, we've put together this comprehensive checklist to get started. It's organized into three sections that each cover an important aspect of managed hosting. Since every business is unique, we encourage you to use this checklist as a starting point to help make sure that you answer all the important questions specific to your business and its needs.

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NETWORKS AND SERVERS

All infrastructure is not created equal. If you're satisfied with the performance you're getting from your hosting provider, you may assume that the speed and power you experience are standard across the industry. On the other hand, if you've been burned before — partnered with a provider who just couldn't deliver the performance you needed — you'll know exactly why you should care about networks and servers.

The variations in network and server performance between different providers, and especially between service offerings like unmanaged, shared hosting, or fully managed hosting, is vast and impacted by many factors. Is the provider you're dealing with a host, or a reseller piggybacking on the service of another company? Where are their data centers located? What hosting platforms do they use? What hardware?

A Strong Foundation

All the features you should expect from a quality managed hosting provider — regularly upgraded hardware, planned failovers during scheduled maintenance or upgrades to reduce downtime, and scalability to handle increased traffic — are services that can disappear in an instant when you switch to a lower quality provider, and bring the performance of all your workloads to a grinding halt in the process.

Now it's fairly likely that you'll never lay eyes on your hosting provider's data center. And frankly, if you did, it wouldn't help you determine anything about their services. So whether you're shopping for a new provider or proactively checking that the services you're paying for are meeting your needs, it's important to ask the right questions.
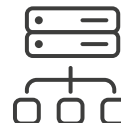
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PART ONE | Network and Servers
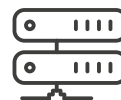
CAN YOUR HOSTING PROVIDER:

1. Provide a fully redundant network and power infrastructure to deliver reliability and peak performance?

2. Offer dedicated and cloud servers to ensure your workload performance isn't affected by other customers?

3. Have the expertise to prevent network problems and immediately address any issues that arise?

4. Have data centers in optimal geographic locations to serve your end users, wherever they may be?

5. Offer a content delivery network (CDN) to ensure that all of your customers have a remarkable experience?
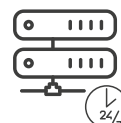
6. Provide you with optimized server templates that uniquely address the needs of your workloads?

7. Let you schedule resizes, reboots and upgrades to minimize the impact on your customers?

PART TWO

APPLICATIONS AND SITES

The difference between working with a managed hosting provider and a self-managed host can make all the difference to the reliability, security, and performance of your applications and sites. Self-managed hosting providers excel at deploying and repairing infrastructure, but lack the critical expertise to help you customize or optimize that infrastructure to meet the unique needs of your workloads. They also lack the expertise to help identify and prevent issues before they impact your business.

Don't Be Fooled by Imitators.

To complicate matters further, many self-managed hosting providers attempt to pass themselves off as managed hosting providers. They may, for example, offer incomplete packages of advanced services a la carte for an additional cost. What's worse, these services often operate in independent silos managed by separate teams that don't communicate well with each other — or with your team — making root cause analysis and remediation a nightmare.

Don't Settle for Second Best.

If you're not currently working with a managed hosting provider, it will almost certainly shock you to see what you're missing out on. All too often the success of your workloads relies on a tight collaboration between your in-house development team and those responsible for managing the underlying infrastructure. Seasoned managed hosting providers excel at this type of collaboration, delivering key insights and recommendations that can make all the difference to you and your business.

So as you evaluate those advertising managed hosting services, make sure to explore the depth and breadth of their application support by leveraging the following checklist of questions. In that way you'll ensure that you'll actually get what you need to succeed.

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PART TWO | Applications and Sites

CAN YOUR HOSTING PROVIDER'S TEAM:

8. Help with issues beyond those that are directly related to the infrastructure, such as the operating system itself and software configuration and optimization?

9. Be able to assist you in creating a disaster recovery plan to protect against loss during major catastrophes?

10. Make recommendations to optimize the performance of your website?

11. Provide best-effort support for third-party applications integrated with your site?

12. Use backups to restore sites that have been attacked or damaged?

13. Respond to inquiries on a medium that suits you — email, telephone, or live chat?

14. Be available 24/7, every day of the year?

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MONITORING AND MAINTENANCE

It is absolutely conceivable to offer your clients good service with a hosting provider that only offers the services that we've discussed so far. But if the aim of your business is to deliver a remarkable customer experience and to outpace your competitors, you need more. That's where the third component of managed hosting, monitoring and maintenance, comes into play. It's the key ingredient to delivering the type of user experience that turns customers into loyal promoters of your brand and spurs the type of word-of-mouth advertising that fuels phenomenal growth.

Turning Customers Into Promoters

Monitoring and maintenance is unique to managed hosting and sets it apart from other categories of hosting. Other providers will offer servers and networks, and may even provide some support to help you get up and running. After that, though, you're on your own. A managed hosting provider makes it their mission to keep your workloads running smoothly, leveraging advanced monitoring technologies and delivering ongoing expertise to proactively ensure that your hosting infrastructure is always running at peak levels.

The difference for you and your customers is night and day. Your internal teams will be freed from worrying about routine maintenance and reacting to threats, and can focus on delighting your customers. Your customers, in turn, will marvel at the stability, performance, and innovation that you deliver, rewarding you with their loyalty and praise.

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PART THREE | Monitoring and Maintenance

CAN YOUR HOSTING PROVIDER ASSIST YOU WITH:

15. Ongoing monitoring of your sites' performance and security?

16. Regular security patches and updates to your servers to keep your sites safe from the latest viruses and hacks?

17. Scaling for traffic spikes to ensure optimal load times for all your workloads?

18. Restoration from backups?

19. Failover and replication for business continuity, in the case of outages?

20. Making changes to improve website performance?

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MANAGED HOSTING PROVIDERS
A Trusted Partner Beside You All the Way

Ultimately the key differentiator for any managed hosting provider is their ability to partner with your business to deliver results for your customers. That means playing a key role in the background leveraging their technology and expertise to keep your infrastructure running smoothly no matter what comes your way. But it also means understanding your business and its goals, and proactively recommending technology strategies to keep you one step ahead of your competition.

If after reviewing this checklist you find that your hosting provider is coming up short, it might be time for a change. At Liquid Web we take pride in delivering exceptional support to small- and medium-sized businesses. We do this by taking the time to get to know your business, always treating you with respect, and treating your business as if it were our own. That's why we're known as The Most Helpful Humans in Hosting™, and why our customers rank us as the most loved hosting provider in the industry with an NPS score of 71.

To find out more about what Liquid Web can do for your business, visit us at https://www.liquidweb.com/products/.

Company Profile

Liquid Web powers content, commerce and potential for SMB entrepreneurs and the designers, developers and digital agencies who create for them. The $100 million web hosting and cloud services provider known for its high- performance services and exceptional customer support delivers reliable, highly-available, secure and hassle-free hosting backed with a human touch.

With over 30,000 customers spanning 150 countries, Liquid Web has assembled a world-class team, global data centers and an expert group of 24/7/365 solution engineers that has made it an industry leader in customer service and recognized among INC Magazine's 5000 Fastest Growing Companies for the last ten years.

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