

# *Managed Hosting:*

## *The Top Five Factors to Consider When Choosing a Provider That is Right for You*

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Hosting comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Dedicated hosting, fully managed hosting, collocation, shared hosting, remote managed services...these terms are not always clearly understood and are sometimes defined differently by various providers. This article will serve as a guide to understanding the different types of hosting scenarios and will give you the top five factors to consider when choosing a provider to fit your needs.

*Below is a table that outlines the general consensus regarding the types of hosting available, who owns the hardware in each hosting scenario, how many customers reside on each server and the types of services that accompany a particular type of hosting service.*

|                                | <b>Owner of Hardware</b> | <b>Location of Equipment</b>                        | <b>Multiple Customers on Server?</b> | <b>Examples of Services Offered</b>  |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Dedicated Hosting</b>       | Hosting Service Provider | Data Center   | No                                   | Basic Monitoring (Availability, Resource Utilization: memory, cpu, disk space), Back-up and Restore, Fault Management, 24/7 Network Operations Center (NOC), Patching, Technical Support, etc.   |
| <b>Collocation</b>             | Customer                 | Data Center   | No                                   | Power, Bandwidth, Climate Control  |
| <b>Shared Hosting</b>          | Hosting Service Provider | Data Center   | Yes                                  | Management of servers, Installation of server software, Security updates, Technical support, System Administration, etc.   |
| <b>Fully Managed Hosting</b>   | Customer                 | Data Center   | No                                   | System administration, Proactive monitoring, Security and Operating System patch management, Fault Management, including verification, escalation and remediation of monitored services via a 24/7 Network Operations Center (NOC), Monthly Health and Security Assessment, including port scans, and review of CPU, memory and disk space utilization, Intrusion detection services, etc. |
| <b>Remote Managed Services</b> | Customer                 | Varies:<br>Customer location, 3rd party data center | No                                   | System administration, Proactive monitoring, Security and Operating System patch management, Fault Management, including verification, escalation and remediation of monitored services via a 24/7 Network Operations Center (NOC), Monthly Health and Security Assessment, including port scans, and review of CPU, memory and disk space utilization, etc.                               |

As if understanding the varying hosting scenarios is not complicated enough, how does one go about choosing a provider? What should an organization be looking for when evaluating the myriad of hosting providers and options? After careful consideration and evaluation of customer feedback, the following five factors were identified as having the greatest impact on successfully outsourcing hosting operations.

### **1. Experience**

This is the most obvious factor to consider as you start the process of choosing a hosting provider.

- a. How long has the hosting provider been in business?
- b. How many vertical markets does the provider work with?
- c. What is the range of technological expertise within the staff?

### **2. Flexibility**

Is the hosting provider able to change with your evolving business requirements? Perhaps you already have data center space, does the provider offer remote management of your systems and network? In addition, consider the following:

- a. It could be that you have developed a new product or have changing requirements for an existing one, will your hosting provider adapt?
- b. You acquire a new division, expand your market or you broaden your geography; how will your hosting provider react?
- c. Is the provider willing to start small?
  - i. Test the water before taking the plunge. If the provider is confident in its services, it will be willing to take on smaller contracts in order to gain your trust
- d. Perhaps you are consolidating your operation, can the provider scale down to meet your needs?

### **3. Diversity**

Some hosting providers will offer 'boxed' solutions. When it comes to managing hosting infrastructure and operations, one size does not fit all. Don't suffer the arguments and demands of purist vendors, requiring a change to *their* ways.

- a. Choose a provider that has a proven track record in customizing hosting solutions; ask for examples. A best-in-class provider will cater to your business needs, not theirs
- b. Look for an organization that is proficient in managing heterogeneous environments
- c. Is the managed hosting provider proficient in multiple ticketing systems? Will they work with yours? If you require a ticketing system, does the hosting company provide one?
- d. Does the provider take a comprehensive approach to managed hosting? Do they understand systems, networks, applications, databases, mobility, media management and how all these critical components work together?

### **4. Proactive vs. Reactive**

Some call it thought leadership. Others call it meticulous planning. Either way, evaluating hosting providers based on their proactive management of your systems is a must.

- a. It is not enough to be able to respond quickly to events. The best providers are able to proactively manage issues before they cause problems. Some of the things to look for include:
  - i. Capacity planning capabilities
  - ii. Predictive analysis with trend tracking capabilities
  - iii. SLA monitoring to track the customer experience
- b. Problem prevention is first and foremost with any first-class managed hosting provider

#### **5. Single source for accountability**

Eliminate the blame game. Many organizations are infamous for finger-pointing:

- a. The datacenter's answer is "The problem is at the application layer"
- b. The IT/Infrastructure department says "The customer code was loaded improperly"
- c. The systems integrator responds "The code was corrupted after deployment"

Having one hand-to-shake at the end of the day eliminates the frustration encountered when systems are not properly managed by one capable and accountable organization.

The intent of this guide was to help you better understand the difference between the various types of hosting. Dedicated hosting and shared hosting are the best choice for organizations that do not wish to make the large capital investment in hardware. In a shared hosting environment, multiple customers are given space on a single machine. A dedicated server is one in which the organization leases full control of the machine and can choose services a la carte for maintenance and administration of the server. Organizations requiring only a secure location with ample power supply, climate control and access to the Internet for its hardware are best suited in a collocation hosting scenario. For those organizations valuing ownership of hardware and proper management and maintenance of systems and networks, a fully managed hosting solution or remote managed hosting solution is the ideal service package.

In addition to choosing the hosting model, organizations should take care in choosing a provider. Experience, flexibility, diversity, a proactive vs. reactive philosophy and a single source for accountability are the top five factors contributing to a successful outsourcing experience. Carefully evaluating managed hosting providers can reveal significant differences in service levels. Choose the provider that caters to *your needs*, not theirs.