

Website Guide

Web Hosting

A web host is a company that leases space and bandwidth on their servers, so that you can store your website there. **Web hosting is never free**, but most companies give a substantial discount if you pay annually.

Try to avoid “free” webhosts. Most are supported by ads on your site and tend to limit your content, for example by blocking PayPal or JavaScript. They are often unreliable and can make your site slow to load. Plus, since you are not paying, the company has little reason to give you good customer support.

However, there are some classier free webhosts, like Wix. This works because they don’t let you download the actual content of your site, so if you need to expand beyond the limits of their free service, you can’t switch hosting companies. They provide the free service because they hope you will upgrade to a paid service in the future.

Domain Names

Your domain name is the address of your site, e.g., “awesomemusician.com.” A visitor’s computer needs to know where to find the server for your site. Lots of companies sell domains. It can be especially nice to register your domain through the same company you use for hosting, if they offer that service. Sometimes you can get a deal this way. As with a webhost, make sure you would be able to switch to another company, should you choose to.

Domain names are cheap. Usually, a domain name will cost something like \$10-40 a year, depending on the name. Lots of webhosts will offer you a free subdomain. This means your web address would be something like “mysite.webs.com” instead of “mysite.com.” **Compared to hosting, domain names are cheap. Just buy one.** Since domain names are so cheap, it looks unprofessional to cut corners on them.

The suffix of a domain name (.com, .net, .gov, etc.) is called the Top Level Domain, or TLD. When you go to buy your domain, you will be presented with an array of choices of TLDs. Do you want a .net, or a .org, or perhaps a .biz? Perhaps you want a free domain name at .tk, or a snazzy new .me? Bottom line: If you are a non-profit organization, get a .org. Otherwise, get a .com. Do not be tempted by cheaper prices for weird TLDs, like .biz or .tk. It makes you look unprofessional, and it makes your website harder to remember.

Design Tools

Graphical Web Design Platforms

The easiest way to create a website is using a graphical web design platform. These companies usually combine web hosting, web design, content management, and sometimes domain name services into one package. They are sometimes called WYSIWYG platforms, because when you are editing your website, What You See Is What You Get.

You edit your website through a friendly Graphical User Interface, or GUI. You can drag and drop elements of your web page and the tools will guide you in producing a working website.

WYSIWYG platforms require no coding to use. Some WYSIWYG platforms allow you to edit the code to some degree, while others do not. Even if you want nothing to do with the code, this is an important

feature to consider when selecting a platform, because you may want room to grow. There is a difference between platforms that allow you to insert code snippets, and platforms that allow you to edit the code of the entire site. Code snippets allow you to include objects like Soundcloud players. They allow you to add objects to your page, but not to tweak existing objects.

Some popular WYSIWYG platforms include Squarespace, Wix, and Weebly. See the table on the last page for a comparison.

Content Management Systems

Content Management Systems, or CMS's, offer a middle ground for people who want more control over the technical details of their website, but still want a preexisting structure to help with the basics of setting up decently formatted pages, etc.

CMSes are not drag and drop website designers. Think of a CMS as a machine: you put in the content (blog posts, articles, media), and it turns it into a site based on a predetermined format. CMSes generally let you modify the predetermined format by installing prepackaged themes or editing the theme yourself. Customizing your CMS-based website generally requires some tinkering with the HTML and CSS code.

The most popular CMS is WordPress. You can either install WordPress on your own web host, or use the free hosting they provide. Either way, you can use a custom domain, though you have to pay a small fee to use your own domain with the free hosting. WordPress allows you to install a variety of themes which apply a unique visual style to the existing framework. This makes it easy to experiment with different design approaches, while maintaining the same basic structure and content.

Design: Who is Most Likely to Visit your Website and Why?

The answer to this question should inform all your decisions about what to include on your site and how to organize it. Visitors may want to listen to specific recordings or get a general introduction to you as a musician. Others may want to buy sheet music or tickets to your performances, or seek information on private lessons.

Your goal should be to present visitors to your site with the information they want, clearly and quickly. The more clicks between a user and the information they are looking for, the more likely they will leave your site before finding it. Imagine yourself as a visitor to your website and ask yourself the following questions:

- What page did you start on?
- What did you see first?
- What were you looking for?
- Was it easy to find?
- Did you find yourself getting distracted?
- After you found what you're looking for, what else caught your eye?
- What is your impression of the person from the site?
- How does the visual design affect your experience?
- Does the color scheme make you uncomfortable or excited, turned off or curious?

Comparison of Two Web Design Platforms

Issue	Wix	Squarespace
Templates	Has tons, and many are great, but can't be changed later	Only 21, but designed very carefully, and can change later
Design	Intuitive and versatile, but many fine adjustments are impossible, since they do not allow you to edit the code	Extremely versatile, though sometimes a little overwhelming in possibilities, and can be a little buggy
Mobile Compatibility	Have to design separately (and pay)	Automatically works on mobile
Customer Support	Not as much, but extensive help built into the editor	24/7 and will answer emails within an hour
Pricing	Cheaper: unlimited=\$12.42/m, "combo"=\$8.25/m (with yearly plans). Combo package works well at this point	A little more: unlimited=\$16/m, standard=\$8/m However, you only get 20 pages and 2 GB storage for standard
Free Options	Free option, but limited: includes an ad and doesn't allow for your own domain name, limited storage and bandwidth	Free trial for 14 days, risk-free (no credit card info)
Bandwidth	Bandwidth Max of 2GB unless unlimited plan	500GB with standard, unlimited past that
Customization and Portability	Wix does not give you access to any of the actual files that make up your website. This means you will not be able to move your website to another host, if you should desire, and you will not be able to grow beyond the constraints of the beginner-friendly interface.	Squarespace gives you access to virtually all of the files and code that make up your website, allowing you to switch hosts and customize as much as you want.

Conclusion: Squarespace offers more in the long run, though Wix is cheaper if you aren't expecting tons of traffic for now (and it may be easier to use). Their styles are a little different, so try out both with the free options before committing.

You might also consider checking out Jimdo and Weebly.

Jimdo is great for e-commerce, so if you want to sell a lot of products it will help you keep track of them, open and close orders, allow for automatic emails to customers, set up discount codes, and in general, manage an online store easily.

Weebly is the easiest and most user-friendly drag & drop website builder, but it keeps things easy by being simple, and not overwhelming you with tons of tools. They do have a lot of templates, but their limited tools will make personalization more difficult.