

CHOOSING A **WEB HOST**

How To Choose The Web Hosting
Service That Is Best For You



Peter Laws

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THIS EBOOK GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP PEOPLE DECIDE HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST WEB HOSTING SERVICE WHICH IS RIGHT FOR THEM, AND BREAKS THIS DOWN INTO THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF WEB HOSTING WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING SUCH A HOST.

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Introduction

Welcome to this short guide to help you choose the web hosting service which is the best for your needs.

Selecting the host which is right for your needs is a very important decision. Sometimes it has been described as the nearest thing to a marriage. The relationship you have with your web host, and the ability of your web host to deliver what you want it to deliver, is paramount in the way that your website or websites operate. You need your host to be responsive and fast in resolving issues. (In a perfect world you don't need those issues to appear in the first place.) You want to know that your host has the capability to handle other things down the line which you may not have heard of yet.

There's quite a lot of information in this guide, so my suggestion is to read all of it right through first of all. Then go back to the start and go through each section, implementing my recommendations as you do so. By reading this ebook online you will be able to access the resources I mention directly from your computer.

Sincerely wishing you the best,

Peter Laws

Choosing a Web Host

When choosing a web host there are several things you must take into consideration. Some are more important than others; some may be of more importance to you because of the particular nature of what you have as a product or service (or even if you're just enthusiastic about something). Nevertheless, all aspects of the variety of things a web host has to offer should be considered. There may even be some things that you may not have thought about but which you may soon regard as essential a few months down the line.

You should compare hosts for each of the following aspects of their service.

If you lack any of the following then the effect could be detrimental to the functioning or appearance of your site or blog and the way in which your visitors may interact with it. If you have competitors then you will not want their hosts to provide them with the advantages and all the bells and whistles that you don't have. So it's very important to note that all the following aspects of hosting are important, irrespective of the type of website you have, or wish to have.

Broadly, these are:

- Reliability/Downtime and speed of access
- Data Transfer (Traffic/Bandwidth)
- Technical support
- Disk Space
- Control Panel
- Fantastico and Fantastico Deluxe
- SSL (secure server), Shopping Cart
- Email, Autoresponders, POP3, Mail Forwarding
- Multiple Domain Hosting and Subdomains
- SEO and Internet Marketing Tools
- Web Hosting Reviews
- Cost
- Monthly/Quarterly/Annual Payment Plans
- Web Hosting Coupons & Discounts

So let's consider these various aspects one by one.

Reliability/Downtime

First and foremost, this is one aspect which is completely non-negotiable! You need your website to be up and visible to anyone who wants to see it. This means that the site's 'downtime' needs to be as low as possible. Your site should load fast as well (there are a few things you can do to enhance load speed, such as have images which are not too large, pages which are not too long, etc., but the most important feature is the access time provided by your hosting service.

You should bear in mind that 99% uptime is too low; 99% sounds good at first, but it means that your website will be down for nearly four days a year. Is that acceptable to you? No, I didn't think so. It really should be 99.5% or better. Your host should be confident enough about this to guarantee a certain standard. In general, 99.9% uptime is acceptable to good. In reality, hosts who are confident enough to advertise 99.9% uptime are probably a lot better than that, if they are a well-known and reputable host.

Data Transfer (Traffic/Bandwidth) and Disk Space

Data transfer (sometimes known as "traffic" or "bandwidth") is the amount of information transferred from your site to visitors when they browse your site. This goes hand in hand with speed of access, so is really part of the same user-friendliness aspect of the hosting service. Certain types of website use up more bandwidth than others. For example, sites which have a lot of graphics on them use up a lot of space and bandwidth because of the size of graphics files, which are much larger than pages containing only text.

Most websites actually use less than 7 or 8 GBytes of bandwidth per month. Remember that your traffic requirements will probably grow over time. You want all those visitors, after all. So you don't want to keep having to check your bandwidth usage every other day. By hosting with a reputable company from the start you will find that you don't have to keep looking at this all on a regular basis.

Even though most websites will use only a few MBs of disk space, remember that you may want to put several sites on the same account at some later stage. You may also want, at a later stage, to expand some sites – perhaps adding subdomains to them, or plugging in things like forums and blogs onto the site, and all these take up space. Similarly to the 'unlimited bandwidth' issue (see above) the unlimited disk space claims made by some hosting companies are not what they may seem to be. Again, check the small print. Establish exactly how much space is allocated per account. See if your hosting company offers differing sizes of space with differently priced accounts.

Breaking News: Hostgator has recently increased the amount of bandwidth and diskspace that it gives to its customers, even though their average customer only uses about 1% of their allocated resources, because Hostgator knows that this is one area where people seeking hosting are very wary of being caught out by Terms of Service surcharges for excess use. So this is as near to the 'limitless' description as you will get in the budget hosting world. But how do they do it?

As their CEO, Brent Oxley, wrote on Hostgator's blog:

Every web host has a Terms of Service with CPU and memory limits. If your website consumed too much of its share of CPU or memory then most web hosts will require you to upgrade.... At HostGator, we pretty much get an unlimited amount of bandwidth from our provider thanks to having thousands of servers. We also have 10,000's of gigs disk space not being used. Giving away unlimited disk space and bandwidth doesn't really cost us anything. It's the CPU and memory that has a real value. A server will usually become extremely overloaded way before you ever get close to using the amount of disk quota and bandwidth it comes with.

Technical support

For most people this is the most important consideration. Having a well-trained and responsive technical support team is essential. They must be fast to respond to your initial query, whatever it is, and they must also be quick in fixing whatever it is that has gone wrong, if such an error exists.

My own experience of host technical support has been very varied; from the excellent to the almost non-existent! In general, technical help is one of the things that make an impression on consumers more than anything else. It's almost as if the support personnel are ambassadors for that company; they are representatives in a real sense as it is they who are your closest point of contact with that company. For this reason, a hosting service which has an inadequate support response is seen as

slovenly and poor. They just couldn't be bothered. I can't believe that hosting companies don't realize this, and pay so little attention to their support system. The best technical support (by far) I've ever experienced with a budget hosting service is from Hostgator. They are far and away the keenest, fastest and most knowledgeable. They're in a completely different league to some of the nightmare techie support technicians of some other hosts (again, who shall be nameless) who seemed to be making it up as they went along!

So there are certain questions you need to ask of your hosting service. Does their technical support operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week all year round? (This includes weekends and public holidays.)

Control Panel

Any hosting service worth its salt will have a control panel. I've noticed that the best and most organized hosts have a control panel standard known as cPanel as a regular feature within its user account. This is because everything seems to be included here in the same location: cPanel is a user friendly interface which allows hosting customers to have access to all sorts of facilities and services within their account. Its scope is huge. These are some of the facilities available from cPanel:

- Support center: live chat, tech support, billing, web templates, ticketing system;
- Preferences: change the look and feel of your interface;
- Mail: email addresses, mail forwarders, spam filtering, autoresponders, mailing lists, webmail;
- File Manager (including backups, disk space manager and FTP accounts);
- Logs: check bandwidth and your visitor numbers, integration with Webalizer and Awstats;
- Domain Manager: addon domains, sub domains and domain redirects;
- Security: password manager, IP blocking and various security necessities;
- Databases (MySQL databases for serious data handling and other applications);
- SEO and Marketing tools;
- Frontpage extensions, cron jobs (for timed events) and PHP;
- Perl, Ruby on Rails, Sitebuilder, error pages;
- Fantastico/Fantastico Deluxe.

So if your host comes with cPanel then they will also automatically come with all the above features, and possible more.

Fantastico and Fantastico Deluxe

In particular, Fantastico (or Fantastico Deluxe) is a must-have facility within cPanel which allows you to set up and install software applications on your site with just a few clicks of your mouse. There are equivalents of Fantastico called other things, including QuickInstall, which does much the same thing.

Basically, Fantastico allows you to quickly and easily set up applications which are integrated into your account without the additional and fiddly work normally needed, such as setting up databases, configuring accounts, etc. Because Fantastico is integrated as part of your specific account it knows exactly what to do in terms of integration and configuration and so works as a 'smart' tool requiring only a few clicks of the mouse and a few typed instructions from the user.

With Fantastico (or equivalent) you can easily set up the following facilities (these are the ones currently offered by my own version of Fantastico Deluxe on my Hostgator account:

Blogs (a choice of b2evolution, Nucleus and the excellent **WordPress**);

Classifieds (put a classified ad section on your site, featuring categories and subcategories in unlimited depth, image upload for categories and classifieds, variable fields per categories, customizable email notifications, locking categories, classifieds approval, auto-thumbnail generation, etc.);

Content Management (including Drupal, Geeklog, Joomla, Mambo, PHP-Nuke, phpWCMS, phpWebSite, Siteframe, TYPO3, Xoops and Zikula);

Customer Relationship (various helpdesks and ticketing systems including a choice of Crafty Syntax Live Help, Help Center Live, osTicket, PerlDesk and Support Logic Helpdesk);

Discussion Boards (create your own forum or bulletin board with phpBB or SMF);

E-Commerce (Your own shopping cart. You can use CubeCart, OS Commerce or Zen Cart with just a few clicks of your mouse);

F.A.Q. (A FAQ or Question and Answers section set up using FAQMasterFlex);

Hosting Billing (using phpCOIN or AccountLab Plus, which works with AccountLab works with PayPal, WorldPay (FuturePay), NoChex, 2checkout and offline payments such as checks or bank transfer.)

Image Galleries (An Image Gallery system featuring categories and albums, thumbnails and intermediate size pictures, search features, new and random pictures, user management (private galleries, groups), user comments, e-cards feature, slideshow viewer. Choose from 4Images Gallery, Coppermine Photo Gallery or Gallery which comes pre-installed into Fantastico.)

Mailing Lists: PHPlist is pre-installed.

Polls and Surveys (find out what your website visitors think, what they want to see on your site, etc. Three systems are available to use: Advanced Poll, LimeSurvey and phpESP.)

Project Management (both dotProject and PHProjekt are pre-installed.)

Site Builders (Soholaunch Pro Edition and Templates Express);

Wiki (install your own wiki on your site with TikiWiki CMS/Groupware or PhpWiki)

Auction (Have your own auctions on your site. Uses PHPauction.)

Other Scripts available which are all pre-installed in Hostgator's version of Fantastico Deluxe include Dew-NewPHPLinks, Moodle, Open-Realty, OpenX, phpFormGenerator and WebCalendar.

Some of the above software and other terms may be unfamiliar to you at the moment. But problems start when you learn that you need something and then you find that your host doesn't provide it! I've experienced this when I was a newbie several years ago and on several occasions.

Once was when I tried to install a blog on a site, and found that it didn't work. After lots of emails to the useless support center I was told that it was because I didn't have PHP 5. I didn't know what PHP 5 was. When I asked my (then) host I was told that they had PHP 4 but not PHP 5. In that case, I told them, why don't you upgrade to PHP 5? After a few days they wrote back to me and said that it wasn't their policy to run PHP 5, and that they would remain with PHP 4.

I switched my hosting company then and there to a better one.

But how do you know that you may need these things at some point in the future? Well, you don't. But I have a policy of making sure that my hosting service just has everything, just to make sure. That's the only way that I know I won't have to waste time switching hosts in the future. Just **go for the host which has everything**, including the best customer support, but which still has a budget hosting plan which is very affordable.

SSL (secure server), Shopping Cart

SSL stands for secure socket layer or secure server. If you plan on doing any sort of business through your site, you must make sure your host has this facility as you will certainly need this if you plan to accept credit cards on your site. Check that the hosting service (and the package or plan that you intend to sign up for) has this as an option. Sometimes it is available as an extra to your hosting plan, and sometimes it is included as part of the package. For example, the Hostgator Business package includes SSL and free SSL certificates, as it is expected that a business plan will be for business purposes including ecommerce!

Your SSL manager and documentation should be available with cPanel, if you have a host which has cPanel.

Email, Autoresponders, POP3, Mail Forwarding

You should ensure that your host offers you at least ten email addresses with each site that you host with the, though more than ten is better. For example, you might want a separate email address for admin@yoursite.com, enquiries@yoursite.com, sales@yoursite.com, technical@yoursite.com, accounts@yoursite.com, support@yoursite.com as well as several others. Even if there is just one person running the site, it's useful to separate these functions to know what each incoming email is about and to compartmentalize any tasks.

If you have other people working on or associated with the website you would be advised to have more than ten email addresses, so that you can give each person their own email address within the organization, for example bob.marketing@yoursite.com and so on. The better hosts usually have provision for up to 100 email addresses per domain (site).

You will also want to be able to redirect these email addresses to a main address, if you need to do that. This will be much easier to look after centrally than having to access different mailboxes all the time. Emails may be sent to one central address as well as to individual inboxes if required. Your host should be able to do all of this with no problem.

Does your host offer autoresponders? This is where anyone sending an email to you will automatically receive a pre-written email back thanks them or acknowledging their enquiry. This is not only courteous but professional, of course. It shows that you care about looking after people who enquire about your website.

You should be able to redirect your domain based emails to your regular email software client (such as Outlook, Outlook Express, Windows Live Mail, etc.) without any difficulty. You should also be able to add passwords to each email account, for extra security. You should be able to add, delete and manage all your email accounts from a central location, including changing your passwords in a secure manner whenever you wish to do so. All this needs to be simple; you don't want to have to contact Support every time you need to change a password. Such things should be intuitively laid out in a user-friendly manner on your control panel.

Incidentally, all of the above are available in the Mail section of Hostgator's cPanel.

Multiple Domain Hosting and Subdomains

It is quite possible to host more than one website per hosting account as long as that account is equipped to do so. Most hosting services worth their salt will have enough disk space and other facilities for accounts with provision for many sites (domains) and some for unlimited domains.

A subdomain is a domain resting within an existing domain. It takes the form www.subdomain.mainsite.com with a period separating the subdomain element from the main domain name. This is very useful if you want to have various subjects or sectors of interest within your website without having to register extra domains all the time. Subdomains used in this way are free (no need to pay to register them with a domain registration service) and the SEO advantages of having subdomains as opposed to inner pages on your existing site is that each subdomain is given equal weight and importance by the search engine, while the original domain maintains its own authority.

So, if you were to have an insurance site, you may want to have subdomains for the various types of insurance you have an interest in. For example:

www.buildingsinsurance.goodinsurancequotes.com
www.carinsurance.goodinsurancequotes.com
www.healthinsurance.goodinsurancequotes.com
www.holidayinsurance.goodinsurancequotes.com

Each of the subdomains requires no extra domain costs as it is 'piggy backing' on your main domain name. The other advantage of subdomains is that you don't have to worry about whether the domain name will be available for you to register; if it is tacked onto the front of your existing domain then it will **always** be available for you to use exclusively, whatever it is.

Another useful application of subdomains is where your website supplies can be described by several search terms and you can't decide which one to use for your domain name. With subdomains you can use all of them!

For example:

www.heatingengineer.engineeringservices-yourtown.com
www.centralheatinginstallation.engineeringservices-yourtown.com
www.centralheatingsystems.engineeringservices-yourtown.com
www.heatingexpert.engineeringservices-yourtown.com
www.homeheating.engineeringservices-yourtown.com

Your hosting company should be able to allow you to add subdomains to any of your existing domains quickly and easily through your control panel. Hosts which use cPanel have this all within the Domains section.

SEO and Internet Marketing Tools

SEO stands for search engine optimization (or optimization) and is the part-art and part-science which allows websites to get high positions or rankings within the search engines within the search engine results pages (SERPS). SEO is not difficult, although it has acquired the status of being a bit of a dark art recently.

On-page optimization involves getting the right elements onto your web pages so that the search engines know what your site or blog is about and emphasizing these elements so that they achieve prominence. It also requires a good internal linking structure and solid site architecture. Off-page optimization is basically getting links from other websites and blogs which all contribute to give your own website the authority needed for good rankings. SEO is a huge subject, so I won't even attempt to get more specific than this, except to say that both on-page and off-page SEO is vital if your website or blog is to be a success.

Most good hosting companies will go that little bit further and offer their customers SEO and Internet marketing (IM) tools of various sorts. This may vary from company to company, but will usually include some form of Google sitemap tool which can quickly be used to make a sitemap for your website(s) which you can then submit to Google to ensure that all the pages on your site(s) are indexed by that search engine.

Such tools also may include search engine submission services, directory submission services and data site (Alexa.com etc.) submission services. These are also useful for getting valid links back to your website and increasing the site visibility in the search engines.

The better web hosting services will offer more advanced Internet marketing tools. For example, Hostgator now offers a link building tool, a social networking tool (for Facebook and Twitter) and Google blacklist checker, as well as some highly useful instructional videos on SEO and Internet marketing in general.

More recently Hostgator, generally accepted as one of the most trusted and popular hosting services, have teamed up with Attracta to help Hostgator customers build authority links. Attracta offers a free account to all Hostgator customers and has a small armory of SEO and marketing tools that webmasters can use at no extra cost.

Most web hosts will allow you to see the major basic metrics of your website or blog. For hosts which use cPanel there is a section which gives you raw access logs which are needed for using certain third party software applications which tell you about visitor behavior, etc. Used in conjunction with marketing tools, these are powerful utilities to help you both get more visitors to your website and also to achieve a better conversion rate with whatever targets you have set.

Web Hosting Reviews

It is always worth the effort of checking out what others have to say about each web hosting service which catches your eye. There are forums dedicated to hosting where you can follow user's real life experiences of good and bad hosts and learn from these. There are also many newsgroups where you can enjoy similar experiences from first-hand knowledge. The thing about hosting is that it is so crucial to a website's performance that it gets under people's skin. All good experiences are praised and all bad experiences are damned. There is little room for grey areas: either a host is good or bad.

Standard reviews are also useful as well, but there is nothing like an impassioned thread in a forum to enjoy vicariously the real-life experiences of someone who has been let down or pleasantly surprised by what their host has done. Learn from all of these. Put yourself in these users' shoes. From what they've learned you can learn too, except it isn't going to cost you the money that they've already paid out to learn it!

One immediate advantage of going to the forums and newsgroups is that you will quickly learn which hosts to **avoid**. This is because there will be some many complaints about them. Usually these hosts will fall down in one or two areas, and these will be the areas that people will be complaining about most. The name of that host will come up again and again if it is associated with a particular problem or shortcoming.

You can also subscribe to threads on most forums and newsgroups, so that you are sent an email automatically whenever there is a new posting or someone has added to the debate.

You might also have a look at Yahoo Answers. Go to that site and then type in the name of the web host you want to find out about in the search box. You're bound to get some silly answers, but among the chaff there will be some nuggets of wisdom. Because Yahoo Answers will address specific questions relating to a particular function of hosting, you may well begin to see people recommending a particular host several times. So the chances are, if a host is recommended to customer service, technical support, software support, bandwidth, costing structure and bandwidth, then the chances are that this host is a pretty good one to follow up.

There are only a handful of hosting services that people are so happy with that they write about them in forums and newsgroups. There are even fewer hosts which people are actually passionate about. You can feel this passion in how they write about them. These are the hosts to really look out for, because these are the hosts which over-deliver and the ones you know you can trust all the time.

Cost

The old adage, "you get what you pay for" seems most appropriate when it comes to web hosting. But it is also true that some hosts give you better value for money than others. Many people will find themselves drawn to the host with the best customer support or technical support, and it's not necessarily true that the most costly hosts are the best.

Certainly you will want to make sure that any host you consider has all the above attributes, and room for more: because there's no point in paying even a minimum amount per month and getting a hosting service which doesn't totally work to your satisfaction. Customer and technical support is also an important consideration; otherwise what are you paying for?

Unless you want a dedicated server for your website (which is not at all necessary) we'll be looking at budget plans that are within your pocket. The good news is that you **will** be able to get a hosting package for **less than \$6 a month** which offers everything you could possibly want, with unlimited domains (websites), unlimited bandwidth, cPanel with Fantastico Deluxe as well as superb customer service which will treat you as if you were the only customer in the world. This low cost is possible if you opt for a long billing cycle and use a coupon code to get a discount (which we can help you with here). There's more on that later.

Monthly/Quarterly/Annual Payment Plans

This relates to the length of the billing cycle, or whether you choose to pay every month, quarter of year (and some hosts have longer billing cycles than that). This is entirely your choice, but the different billing cycles are designed so that it is cheap for you to have a longer billing cycle than a shorter billing cycle. So an annual billing cycle will work out cheaper per month than if you had a monthly billing cycle. It makes sense for the hosting company to offer you an effective discount for being with them for a longer time; it shows commitment, and also that you mean business.

Hosts who offer three year billing cycles are the most committed to entering into a reliability pact with you, as they are willing to give you the highest discount in return for your extended willingness to work with them. Only the best hosts tend to do this because only they know that the chances of their customers pulling out and going with another supplier will be very small indeed.

If you have doubts about the host's reliability or worthiness then I would only pay on a monthly basis, even though it is more expensive to do so. Only if you have sufficient trust in a hosting company should you enter into yearly billing cycles from the start. Then later (perhaps after a couple of years), when I'm satisfied with my host, I may change my billing cycle to the discounted yearly plan.

So let's have a look in detail at what this means in real money. As an example let's take a look at the billing cycles for Hostgator, and their three budget packages Hatchling, Baby and Business.

Example of Costs of Hostgator Packages

Here I have used Hostgator as an example of a hosting company with different levels of packages, because it is one of the most popular and best-loved hosting services in the world. Their three shared hosting plans, all budget plans, are Hatchling, Baby and Business. You can jump in at any stage and upgrade as you need more resources. Here are the costs of each package according to the length of billing cycle.

Hatchling Plan

*Single Domain, **unlimited** Disk Space, **unlimited** Bandwidth, and Shared SSL Certificate*

3 Years	\$3.71/mo
2 Years	\$4.46/mo
1 Year	\$5.21/mo
6 Month	\$6.71/mo
1 Month	\$6.71/mo

Baby Plan

***Unlimited** Domains, **unlimited** Disk Space, **unlimited** Bandwidth, Shared SSL Certificate*

3 Years	\$5.96/mo
2 Years	\$6.71/mo
1 Year	\$7.46/mo
6 Month	\$7.46/mo
1 Month	\$7.46/mo

Business Plan

Unlimited Domains, unlimited Disk Space, unlimited Bandwidth, free Private SSL, free IP and free Toll Free Number

3 Years	\$9.71/mo
2 Years	\$10.46/mo
1 Year	\$11.21/mo
6 Month	\$11.21/mo
1 Month	\$11.21/mo

Please note: the above costs quotes have the **25% discount applied to them** by using the coupon HOST25REDUCE and they are not the regularly costs as advertised (details of exactly how and where to enter this coupon at your application stage are given later in this guide).

Alternatively, you could use the coupon GATOR1PENNYHOST to get hosting for just 1 cent for your first invoice.

Web Hosting Coupons & Discounts

The more sought after hosting services will have lots of people looking to use their services. Equally, a lot of the better companies vie for customers by making coupons or special code discounts available. These will usually be eligible to users who have never used their hosting service before or who want to transfer from another service.

Web hosting coupons give you a discount on the first invoice you pay to the new host. Usually this is between 10% and 25%.

If you use the HOST25REDUCE coupon to get 25% off your first invoice with a Hostgator hosting account, for example, then the amount you save will vary according to the billing cycle you have chosen (the differences in billing cycles are explained above).

Or, as explained above, you could use the coupon GATOR1PENNYHOST to get hosting for just 1 cent for your first invoiced bill (monthly or whatever your billing cycle happens to be). A lot of people find this a popular choice because of the immediate savings in the short term.

Briefly, the longer the billing cycle, the more you will save per month anyway, but if you use the coupon then that discount will apply for the entirety of the billing cycle, so you will save more on the discount as well.

The more you know about choosing the right host then the more confident you will be in your choice. This means that you should have more confidence in choosing a longer billing cycle from the outset, which in turn means that you will qualify for a greater discount in using your coupon. This is just human nature. So the more information you have about your chosen host the more money you will save.

The Most Popular Hosting Service?

At this point you will have noticed that I've mentioned Hostgator a few times. I've also tried to locate a good web host comparison site but had to search for a while before I found one that seemed both unbiased and which concentrated on all aspects of a web host's service which you should consider, and not just the cost. For some reason there are loads of comparison sites which seem to be based on cost alone (they do not mention where there are any surcharges for extra site hosting, extra bandwidth etc.)

My own recommendation for Hostgator is based on my own experiences, both with using Hostgator and the awful experiences I've had with other hosts, yet I can't understand why these other hosts should even get listed in these 'Top 10' web hosting comparison sites. However, it didn't take too long to find a review of Hostgator which concurred with my own:

HostGator is one of the most widely known web hosting companies in the world, and has earned their reputation by offering an abundance of products and services, the best and most popular features on the market, and an easy to use control panel. They only staff the best customer service and technical support team to assist you with any and all of your business needs, and maintain a 99.9% uptime guarantee at all times.

(From www.FindMyHosting.com website review)

That's better than I could put it myself.

By all means do your own research. Write down a shortlist of hosting services and compare what they have to offer. Make sure you have checked out all the sources mentioned above and do searches on Google (or your search engine of choice) by using the following search terms:

"name of hosting company" + "terrible"
"name of hosting company" + "excellent"
"name of hosting company" + "bad service"
"name of hosting company" + "good service"
"name of hosting company" + "downtime"
"name of hosting company" + "payment problems"

You get the idea. After a while you'll see a pattern emerging. You'll also begin to get a feel of what those hosts are really like by reading peoples' comments about them. My guess is that you'll end up with a very high opinion of Hostgator: probably as high an opinion of them as I have. I can honestly say that I've been a customer of Hostgator for over 10 years and I have not had one problem with them. Not one.

By contrast, I've also used several other hosting companies and I have had problems with all of them at one time or another; sometimes they have been problems which have dragged on and on, because the Support staff didn't understand what I was telling them because they were either improperly trained or their proficiency in the English language was not good. When you are using a service to host your website(s) you must be able to communicate with them and they must be able to respond quickly, efficiently and fix the problem or solve the query, whatever it is. Some hosts outsource overseas where it becomes obvious from the first that the main language is not English and that (worse than this) little effort has been made to introduce a level of language proficiency which is at least tolerable.

Your Decision

I'm assuming that once you have read to this point you have done your comparative research after having drawn up your own shortlist of preferred web hosts. Or it may be that you'd just like to opt for the best hosting service around for a budget price, and you'd like the idea of the discount coupon as well.

If this is so, then what follows is an easy step-by-step guide to getting your hosting, from getting your domain name to signing up for your discounted Hostgator hosting account. You're on your way!

How to Use Your Web Hosting Coupons

All Hostgator coupons are designed to be used at the point of sale, in other words, when you buy your hosting package from Hostgator. Be sure to enter your coupon at the point of opening your hosting account, as you cannot enter your coupon retrospectively.

Therefore it is important to know exactly how to use the coupon. For this reason, it's worth illustrating exactly how to do this, which I'll do over the next few pages.

Firstly You Need To Have a Domain Name

You should choose a domain name which as close as possible to the search phrase that you wish to be found for on the search engines. It should be a search term that someone would use if they were on the Internet and trying to find such a product or service that you offered. You may want to pick a domain which incorporates your city if you offer a local service (i.e. 'Tax Advisor Cambridge' or 'Landscape Gardening Boston'). You may find that your domain name is not available because it has been registered by someone else. If that is the case then pick another variant of the search term. You can always use hyphens between words if you wish. You can use a .com variant (called a Top Level domain or TLD), or a variant local to your country such as .us, .co.uk, .ca, .ie and so on.

Search engines like Google may classify your market as where your domain name is registered. So you might want a .com name, but you might want it for the UK market if that's where your market is. In this case we recommend getting your .com domain from [123-Reg](#) and then hosting it with Hostgator as normal.

Similarly, you may live elsewhere and may want a domain with another extension altogether. Whatever the case, if your domain name is registered outside Hostgator, or already been registered previously, then it goes in the box on the right. Note that there is no drop-down menu for an extension, as any extension will be happily accommodated.

Please note that many people prefer to register their domain names with [NameCheap](#), because it is less expensive than Hostgator, and then use Hostgator purely as the host. This is my own recommendation. I have over 200 websites: those which are not registered with 123-Reg are registered at NameCheap, and I can personally vouch for their fast and efficient service. None of

my domains are registered with Hostgator, although I have had dozens of sites hosted with them. This is my own recommendation and is what I personally do; this combination of 123-Reg or NameCheap for registering domains, and then Hostgator for the hosting, is the optimum combination and has worked for me over the years very successfully.

With NameCheap you can register domain names with .com, .net, .org, .co.uk, .mobi, .cc, .biz, .ca, .tv, .eu, .de, .in and .org.uk extensions, as well as several others.

Remember that the general rule is to register your domain in the country in which your **market** is located. So register your domain name first, with the registrar of your choice and according to the location of your market.

As soon as you have a suitable domain name then open an account with Hostgator [here](#). You can open a Hatchling plan at only \$7.16 a month if you pay monthly (it reduces to \$3.96 a month if you pay annually 3 years in advance, but this is entirely your choice). They also have other hosting plans; have a look round to see which you prefer.

The 3 Step Hosting Process

Click [here](#) to go to Hostgator. You'll see a screen like the one below.

The screenshot shows the HostGator website homepage. At the top left is the HostGator logo with a blue dinosaur and the tagline "we eat up the competition". To the right, contact information is provided: Toll Free: 1.866.96.GATOR, Local: 1.713.574.5287, and "Now hosting over 7,000,000 domains!". A "LIVE CHAT" button with a woman's image is also present. A navigation menu includes HOME, WEB HOSTING, RESELLER HOSTING, VPS HOSTING, DEDICATED SERVERS, SUPPORT, and AFFILIATES. The main banner features "Unlimited Web Hosting" with the subtext "Web Hosting made EASY and AFFORDABLE!". A list of benefits includes: UNLIMITED Disk Space, UNLIMITED Bandwidth, FREE SiteBuilder (Try Demo), EASY Control Panel (Try Demo), 1-CLICK Script Installs, 4,500 Free Website Templates, 99.9% Uptime Guarantee, 45 Day Money Back Guarantee, 24/7/365 Technical Support, and \$100 Google AdWords Credit. A "Now 20% OFF!" badge is shown. A price tag indicates "STARTING AT \$3.96*/mo". A large orange button says "VIEW WEB HOSTING PLANS". Below the banner are three sections: "Reseller Hosting" (Make money with your own web), "VPS Hosting" (Get dedicated functionality without), and "Dedicated Servers" (Feel the power and flexibility of a).

Click on the big orange button VIEW WEB HOSTING PLANS >

You'll then be taken to the next screen where you can choose which hosting package you'd like. It looks like this:

Unlimited Web Hosting

Web Hosting made **EASY** and **AFFORDABLE!**

- ✔ **UNLIMITED** Disk Space and Bandwidth
- ✔ **FREE** Site Building Tools and Templates
- ✔ **24/7/365** Award Winning Technical Support

Starting at **\$3.96***/mo

HostGator » Web Hosting

Get Started with HostGator Web Hosting Today!

Hatchling Plan	Baby Plan	Business Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Domain UNLIMITED Disk Space UNLIMITED Bandwidth Shared SSL Certificate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNLIMITED Domains UNLIMITED Disk Space UNLIMITED Bandwidth Shared SSL Certificate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNLIMITED Domains UNLIMITED Disk Space UNLIMITED Bandwidth FREE Private SSL & IP FREE Toll Free Number
Starting at \$3.96/mo*	Starting at \$6.36/mo*	Starting at \$10.36/mo*
Compare All Hosting Plans	Compare All Hosting Plans	Compare All Hosting Plans
ORDER NOW	ORDER NOW	ORDER NOW

The three basic plans are Hatchling, Baby and Business. You will only need a Hatchling plan for just one domain (one website), but if you get a Baby plan you'll be able to host unlimited sites on the same account with unlimited bandwidth (Hatchling can only accommodate one website or blog). You decide which you'd prefer.

The next screen asks you to enter the domain name of your choice.

Toll Free: **1.866.96.GATOR**
Local: **1.713.574.5287**
Now hosting over 5,000,000 domains!

Step 1: Choose a Domain

Step 1 » Step 2

<p>Register a New Domain</p> <p>Help me register a new domain name.</p> <p>Enter Domain Name:</p> <input type="text"/> .com	or	<p>I Currently Have a Domain Name</p> <p>Use an existing domain name.</p> <p>Enter Domain Name:</p> <input type="text"/>
CONTINUE TO STEP 2		CONTINUE TO STEP 2

Enter a Coupon Code

You should enter the coupon code HOST25REDUCE directly below this where it says "Enter a Coupon Code", above, to qualify for a 25% reduction in hosting costs off the first invoice. (Or use the coupon GATOR1PENNYHOST if you want to pay just 1 cent for your hosting's first billing cycle, as explained above.)

Note that if you choose to register your domain name as part of the Hostgator sign-up process then you'd enter it in the box on the left, then select whether you want it to be a .com name, a .net name or an .org name. Hostgator do not register other types of domain. So if, for example, you were in the U.K. and preferred a .co.uk name to a .com, then you'd have to register that domain at another registrar ([such as 123-reg if in the UK](#)) and then use Hostgator for the hosting.

Step 2 asks you to confirm your hosting plan and provide a username and password (which they call a Security Pin) and your billing information. You can pay by credit card or Paypal. Below is a screenshot of the top part of that screen.

The screenshot shows the Hostgator website interface for Step 2: Billing Information. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Hostgator logo (a blue alligator) and the slogan "we eat up the competition". To the right of the logo, it displays "Toll Free: 1.866.96.GATOR" and "Local: 1.713.574.5287", along with the text "Now hosting over 5,000,000 domains!". A "LIVE CHAT" button with a woman's headshot is also present. The main heading is "Step 2: Billing Information" with a progress indicator "Step 1 > Step 2". The form is divided into three sections: 1. "Please confirm your hosting package information:" containing a "Package Type" dropdown menu set to "Hatchling" and a "Billing Cycle" dropdown menu set to "1 Month @ 7.16/mo 20.00 Percent OFF!". 2. "Please choose your account information:" containing a "Username" input field with validation rules: a green checkmark for "May not contain capital letters", a red X for "Must start with a letter", a red X for "Must be 2-8 characters long", and a green checkmark for "May not contain special characters". The "Security Pin" input field has validation rules: a red X for "Must be 4-8 characters long" and a red X for "May only contain numbers". 3. "Please enter your billing information:" which is currently empty.

Note that the default discount when using Hostgator's own default code is 20%. But if you use HOST25REDUCE you will get a 25% reduction in costs. At the time of writing, Hostgator's own default code is SPRING, so just delete that and type in HOST25REDUCE for the full 25% off your first invoice.

You should decide what type of billing cycle to choose. I hope I have given you sufficient confidence to stay with Hostgator for the long term, and so qualify the greatest discount.

Scroll down below that after you've entered your chosen username and Security Pin, and in the lower part of the page enter your billing information. Here is what the lower part of the screen looks like:

Please enter your billing information:

Billing Information	Payment Information
First Name <input type="text"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Credit Card <input type="radio"/> PayPal
Last Name <input type="text"/>	    
Email <input type="text"/>	Name on Card <input type="text"/>
Company <input type="text"/>	Credit Card Number <input type="text"/>
Home Phone <input type="text"/>	Expiration Date
Cell Phone <input type="text"/>	01 <input type="text"/> 2010 <input type="text"/>
Address <input type="text"/>	CVV Code <input type="text"/>
Address 2 <input type="text"/>	Help: Where is my CVV Code?
City <input type="text"/>	
State <input type="text" value="Alabama"/>	
Zip Code <input type="text"/>	
Country <input type="text" value="United States"/>	

Please review the order details below:

Scroll down further and you'll see a short summary of your account. Check that all details are correct then make sure the Terms & Conditions box is checked (by all means **read** the T&C and query anything that doesn't sound right to you: Hostgator are a reputable and honest company, but it never hurts to keep them on their toes!).

Then click on Create Account and you're all set. You'll instantly be given access to your own cPanel and instructions on how to proceed. Hostgator also has a very useful series of videos on just about every aspect of their system imaginable so you won't be lacking in training. But of course, if you do need to contact their customer support team at any stage then their legendary support team are available round the clock.

Conclusion

I hope you've enjoyed reading this short guide to choosing a web hosting service. Hopefully by now you will be in a much better position to match one host against another, and – even better – have decided on which is the best host for you.

I have weighted the debate heavily towards Hostgator in these pages, as my own experience dictates that this is the best host for most purposes. They certainly offer everything I've ever needed in my 12 + years of hosting websites and blogs. I only hope that you have chosen Hostgator as well and that you have just as fine an experience of them as I've done over the years.

Sincerely wishing you the best in all your endeavors,

Peter Laws