

WEBFORLESS · SINCE 2003

Website Hosting Buyer's Guide

Hosting is the operating environment behind a website. The right choice is not simply the plan with the largest storage number. It should match traffic, application complexity, security, support, recovery needs and the level of technical ownership the organization can sustain.

Use this guide to:	Clarify priorities, assign ownership, identify risk and verify implementation.
Website:	webforless.ca

Project / website: _____

Owner: _____ Review date: _____

1. Understand what hosting provides

A hosting platform supplies compute, memory, storage, networking and supporting services. Some plans also manage operating systems, patches, caching, backups and support. Comparing plans requires knowing which responsibilities belong to the provider and which remain with the website owner.

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| ■ Clarify the support boundary. |
| ■ Confirm control-panel, SSH and deployment access. |
| ■ Understand resource limits, not only advertised capacity. |

Notes / evidence:

2. Match the hosting model to the workload

Shared hosting is economical for modest sites but resources are shared. VPS and cloud instances offer more control and isolation. Managed platforms reduce administration. Dedicated infrastructure suits specialized workloads but increases responsibility and cost.

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| ■ Use the simplest model that meets requirements. |
| ■ Avoid paying for theoretical scale without a plan. |
| ■ Consider team capability and support response. |

Notes / evidence:

3. Domains and DNS must remain under control

A domain is a critical business asset. Registration, DNS and hosting may be supplied by different companies. The organization should know where each is managed, use protected accounts and document records before changes.

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| ■ Keep registrant details current. |
| ■ Use multifactor authentication and renewal alerts. |
| ■ Lower DNS TTL before planned migrations when appropriate. |

Notes / evidence:

4. SSL protects transport, not the whole site

HTTPS encrypts data in transit and supports browser trust, but a certificate does not secure application code, passwords or servers. Certificates should renew automatically and redirects should consistently send visitors to the secure canonical version.

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| ■ Monitor certificate renewal. |
| ■ Use modern protocols and secure cookies. |
| ■ Remove mixed-content requests. |

Notes / evidence:

5. Backups and disaster recovery are separate

Provider snapshots are helpful, but recovery planning should consider independent copies, database consistency, retention and the possibility of a provider account compromise. Recovery objectives define how much data and downtime the business can tolerate.

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| ■ Confirm backup frequency and retention. |
| ■ Store an independent copy when risk requires it. |
| ■ Test restoration into a clean environment. |

Notes / evidence:

6. Performance begins close to the server

Hosting affects response time, concurrency and reliability, but it cannot compensate for unoptimized code and media. Caching, a content delivery network, efficient databases and measured application behaviour work together with infrastructure.

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| ■ Measure time to first byte and real-user experience. |
| ■ Choose data regions appropriate to users and obligations. |
| ■ Scale based on evidence and alerts. |

Notes / evidence:

7. Email deserves separate planning

Website hosting and business email are different services even when bundled. Reliable email needs domain authentication, mailbox security, deliverability controls and clear ownership. Transactional website messages may benefit from a dedicated delivery provider.

■ Configure SPF, DKIM and DMARC appropriately.
■ Do not rely on local PHP mail for critical delivery.
■ Monitor bounces and form-delivery failures.

Notes / evidence:

Launch and follow-up review

Item	Owner	Status / date
Critical journey tested		
Access and ownership documented		
Backups or rollback verified		
Analytics and monitoring confirmed		
Outstanding risks recorded		
30-day review scheduled		

Good websites and software are never finished. They are monitored, maintained and improved as evidence and needs change.