

Choosing a **Web Host** for Your WordPress Site

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Choosing a

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You've registered a domain name, and you know you want to use WordPress to create your online presence. The next question is, **where are you going to build your website?**

This report will help you choose the best web host for your WordPress site. We'll tell you the nine features that any WordPress host must have, and we'll also give you our two top choices for web hosting.

First of all, let's define a few terms, because there's some confusion out there about the web hosting world.

When we talk about a WordPress site, we're referring to **a self-hosted WordPress installation of the free WordPress software available at WordPress.org.**

"Self-hosted" means that you have your own web hosting account. We have two recommended web hosts to tell you about later in the report — but first, what exactly is web hosting anyway?

What is web hosting, and why do you need it?

Whenever you type a URL into your browser, your browser dutifully goes and finds the website associated with that URL (for more on URLs and domain names and how they work, be sure to get our free report on Choosing and Using a Domain Name).

That website is made up of text, images, and computer code, and those files have to exist somewhere, on a machine connected to the internet, so that web browsers can access them and display them to viewers like you.

A web server is basically an enormous, souped-up hard drive that's plugged into a super-duper-high-speed internet connection.

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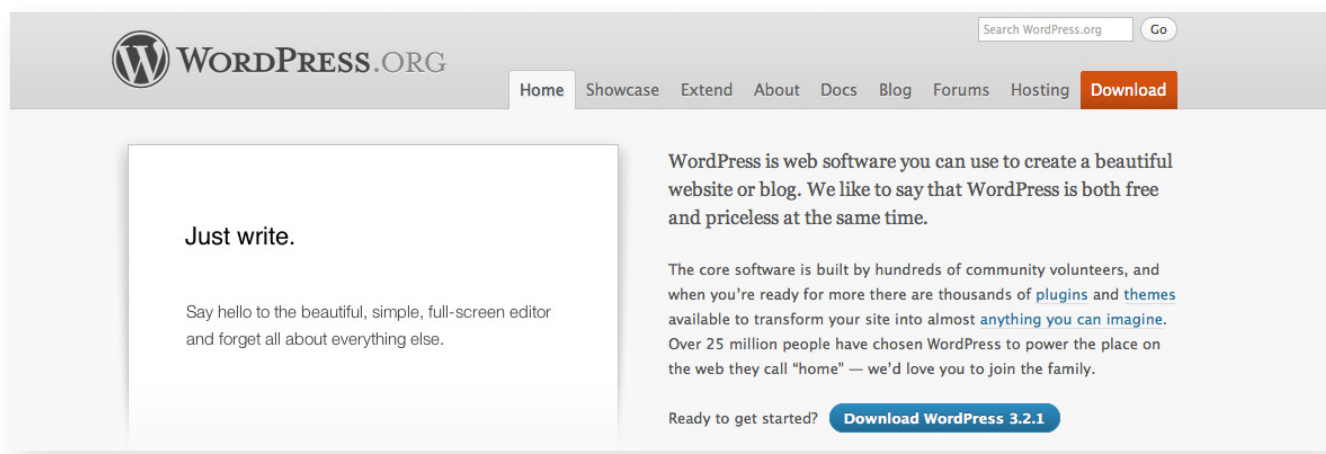
Technically, it's possible to use your home computer as a web server if you have the right software (or you could even buy your own web server machine), but in order to keep your website accessible all the time, your computer would have to be turned on 24/7, and even then, your site would probably load slowly because everyone in the world who wanted to view it would be using your (probably not super-duper-high-speed) internet connection.

This is why we have web hosts. These are companies that own lots of web servers, housed in big climate-controlled buildings called data centers. They rent out space on these machines to people like you and me who want our websites to be visible to the world.

Signing up for a web hosting account is like renting out a certain amount of server space for your files. These files, including software programs like WordPress, are then referred to as "self-hosted."

What about WordPress.com?

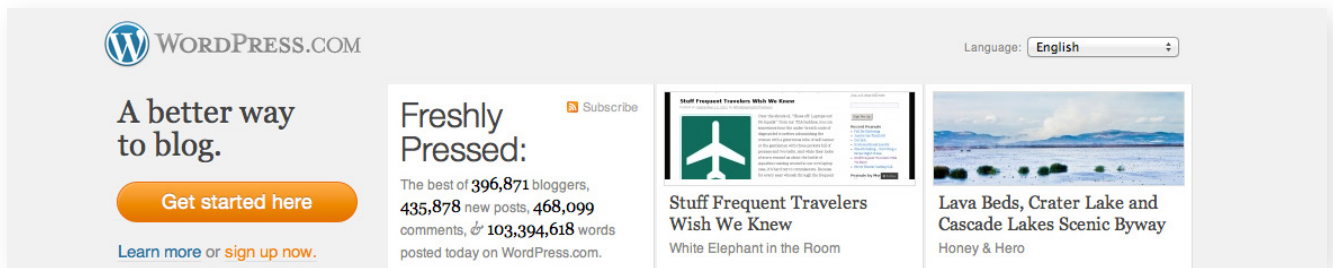
We don't want to mix up WordPress.com and WordPress.org. They are related, but they are different, and the differences are important.



The screenshot shows the WordPress.org homepage. At the top left is the WordPress logo and the text "WORDPRESS.ORG". To the right is a search bar with "Search WordPress.org" and a "Go" button. Below the logo is a navigation menu with links for "Home", "Showcase", "Extend", "About", "Docs", "Blog", "Forums", "Hosting", and "Download". The "Download" link is highlighted in orange. The main content area features a large white box on the left with the text "Just write." and "Say hello to the beautiful, simple, full-screen editor and forget all about everything else." To the right of this box is a paragraph of text: "WordPress is web software you can use to create a beautiful website or blog. We like to say that WordPress is both free and priceless at the same time." Below this paragraph is another paragraph: "The core software is built by hundreds of community volunteers, and when you're ready for more there are thousands of plugins and themes available to transform your site into almost anything you can imagine. Over 25 million people have chosen WordPress to power the place on the web they call 'home' — we'd love you to join the family." At the bottom right of the main content area is a blue button that says "Download WordPress 3.2.1".

WordPress is free, open-source software, which means anyone can use it, distribute it, and modify the source code. WordPress.org is the official home of this software and information about it.

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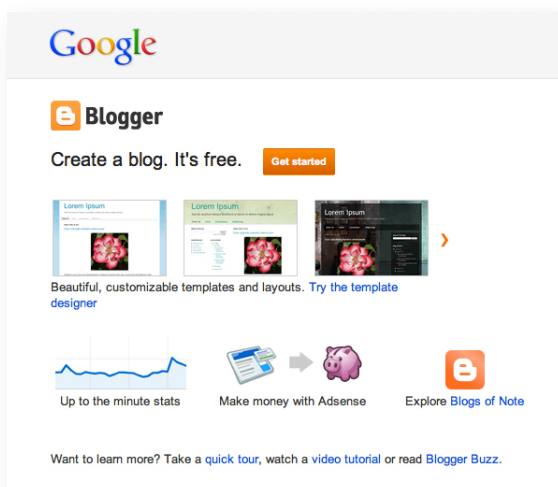


WordPress.com is owned by some of the same people who developed WordPress, and it's a hosted version of WordPress. There's no *self-* before "hosted" because the hosting is all on servers controlled by WordPress.com.

Instead of renting server space where you install the WordPress software, you sign up for a free account on WordPress.com, and you get a hosted version of the WordPress software that is installed and maintained for you.

You want full control over everything about your website.

Sound good? A free WordPress.com account is a great deal for non-commercial websites. **But for businesses, the trade-offs are too great.** If you are running a business online, you want full control over everything about your website, and even the paid add-on features of WordPress.com don't give you that control.



Blogger.com is another popular free service, and the same reasoning applies. If you're running a club or a hobby blog, and you are happy to trade full control for hosting and maintenance, Blogger.com is a wonderful service. But you're in business, and your website needs to be owned and controlled by you.

Put simply, **your best course of action is to sign up for a budget hosting account and install the self-hosted version of WordPress.**

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Budget hosting? What's that?

You can pay thousands of dollars per month to have your own in-house hosting solution. You can pay hundreds of dollars per month for “business hosting.” But most small businesses simply aren't in the market for expensive hosting — at least not when they're first starting out.

Budget hosts charge budget prices — less than \$10 per month. You're paying such a low price because you're sharing server space with other budget hosting customers. This is why budget hosting is also called **shared hosting**. Even though the server is shared, no one can access your hosting control panel but you — and you can't see who else is on your server.

In sharing server space, you're taking the risk that someone else on the same server will experience a traffic spike and bring down the whole server — and subjecting your server-mates to the same risk if your latest blog post goes viral. Good hosts will at least attempt to balance the server load to prevent these events, and they also respond quickly when it does happen. They also offer tools and upgrades to help you as your site traffic grows.

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No host, no matter how much you're paying, is error- or outage-free. We feel that budget hosting is “good enough” for most small businesses.

So how do I choose a host?

Now that we've defined hosting, and explained why self-hosting is ideal for businesses, you're probably wondering how to choose a web host. After all, there are thousands of hosts out there, and every single one of them has both raving fans and former customers with horror stories to tell.

Nine must-have features in a WordPress budget host

If a web host you're considering does not meet these criteria, don't even think about signing up for a hosting account. Any budget host you're considering for a WordPress site needs to:

1. Mention WordPress prominently in its sales materials. Look for phrases like “one-click WordPress install” or “WordPress support” or “easy WordPress install.”
2. Allow hosting of multiple domains for no extra charge. Note that we're talking about hosting, not registration. Even if you're only planning on running one site, having the ability to build a test site (for instance, at a subdomain like testsite.yourdomain.com) or promotion-specific sites is important.
3. Offer unlimited storage space and bandwidth. This is a loaded topic, because really, we all know that on a shared server, these resources can't *literally* be unlimited. The point is that you do not want to be worrying about whether your latest blog post will push you over your bandwidth limit.
4. Provide an easy way to communicate with them — to ask questions, submit a trouble ticket, etc.
5. Provide an easy way to check the host's system status, so you can quickly find out if your server is experiencing an outage and what's being done about it, without having to submit a trouble ticket and wait for a response.
6. Offer a free trial period or a (limited-time) money-back guarantee. You should be able to evaluate the service over at least a few weeks to figure out if you're comfortable there.

Look for phrases like “one-click WordPress install” or “WordPress support” or “easy WordPress install.”

The next three requirements are technical, so don't freak out! Just look for these words and phrases somewhere in the web host's sales material. If need be, just copy this list, paste it into an email to the web host, and ask them to confirm that they meet these requirements. Good hosts will be happy to do so.

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7. Linux web servers (*not* Windows) with the Apache mod_rewrite module enabled.
8. PHP version 5.2.4 or greater (that's the programming language that runs WordPress — you don't have to know that language to use WordPress effectively).
9. MySQL version 5.0.15 or greater (this is the database that powers WordPress)

Our research includes installing, maintaining and troubleshooting WordPress on a wide variety of hosts.

Now that we're armed with some criteria, who meets it? Many hosts do, but even in this elite group, some hosts are better than others. Our research includes installing, maintaining and troubleshooting WordPress on a wide variety of hosts, and we're confident in our top two contenders.

Here are our top two recommended budget web hosts:

Our top choice for budget hosting is DreamHost

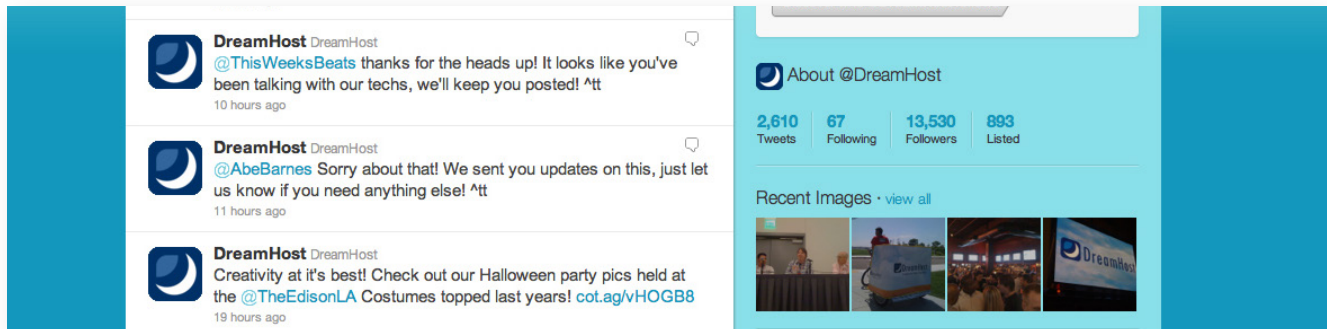
The screenshot shows the DreamHost website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Domains, Web Hosting, Servers, Affiliates, Partners, About Us, Support, and Contact. A search bar is also present. The main content area features a 'Start your 2 Week Free Trial' form with fields for Email, Confirm Email, Password, and Confirm Password. To the right, there's a 'Dedicated Servers' section with an image of server racks and text describing high-performance, business-class hosting with unlimited bandwidth and options for every budget and application.

It should go without saying that this host meets our nine criteria, but we're saying it anyway. Some features we like about DreamHost:

- Good security. Every WordPress installation uses a unique database prefix, which is something WordPress experts highly recommend.

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- Lots of support/information websites: DreamHostStatus.com, a support wiki, community forums, and an official blog that's equal parts tech, customer service, and humor.
- Did we mention humor? It's a core value at DreamHost. Every time you change your settings on the control panel, the "success" message comes from "the happy Dream-Host robots." And that's just one example.
- A single shared-hosting plan that's all-inclusive, instead of tiers that force you to choose what level of service you think you're going to need.
- A custom control panel and custom one-click WordPress install that are user-friendly and written in plain English.
- Two-week free trial PLUS a 97-day money-back guarantee (that's the longest one we've seen) gives you the freedom to change your mind for three whole months.

DreamHost has a custom control panel and custom one-click WordPress install that are user-friendly and written in plain English.

The one possible downside to DreamHost is that they don't include phone support (you can pay extra for it, though). If you are happy to communicate with your host by email or through the control panel, this might not be a downside for you. [Get Dreamhost hosting.](#)

But if you want to be able to reach your hosting provider 24/7 on the phone, consider our other top choice:

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Our second recommended host is Hostgator

This is another host that meets our criteria and then some. What we like about Hostgator:

- 24/7 phone support, which you can even use to call before you sign up to ask any questions you may have (we suggest asking them about our nine criteria, of course).
- Support options include a company support portal, discussion forums (including a Network Status forum) and a fairly detailed library of video tutorials.
- Quickinstall WordPress installation script makes installing the latest version of WordPress easy.
- Although Hostgator doesn't offer a free trial, their 45-day money-back guarantee gives you plenty of time to check out the company's support (such as forums that are only available to customers) and features.
- We recommend the middle hosting tier (the "Baby" plan) because it includes hosting of unlimited domains.
- If you're moving a site from WordPress.com, Hostgator support will transfer your site content for free!

[Get Hostgator hosting.](#)

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MANAGED WORDPRESS HOSTING THAT MEANS BUSINESS

Experience the enhanced performance and security that comes from the synthesis of WordPress-optimized servers and the expertise of serious online publishers serving other serious online publishers.



Synthesis Web Hosting by Copyblogger Media isn't budget hosting. But it's a good choice if:

- You expect your site to get a lot of traffic, and you want to be absolutely sure it will stay online.
- Page load speed is important to you: this is a priority at Synthesis.
- You'd like 24-hour monitoring and maximum 30-minute response time to any issues.
- You want to enjoy support options that include chat, screen sharing, phone or Skype.
- You're interested in web hosting that is specifically designed and tuned for WordPress websites.

[Get Synthesis hosting.](#)

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Full disclosure: If you sign up for web hosting via one of the links here, we will receive an affiliate commission from that host. But we're so confident that these hosts are solid that we'd recommend them for nothing.

Unfortunately, even some hosts that claim to support WordPress don't make good on that promise. If your chosen host has a free trial or money-back guarantee, make sure you use the trial or guarantee period to review and actually use the host's support system. Do your questions get answered? In language that you understand? In a decent timeframe?

Make sure you use the trial or guarantee period to review and actually use the host's support system.

Make sure you choose a web host you're comfortable with. Your website, your readers, and your pocketbook will all benefit!



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