

Choosing a Web Server: To Share or Not to Share?

When evaluating options for web servers, you'll most likely be faced with the dilemma of whether to run your website on your own private **dedicated** server, or whether a **shared** (a.k.a. virtual) server will be enough for you.

To help you understand the differences between these two types of web server solutions, we've assembled a brief overview of each.

Dedicated Web Servers

If you're operating a website that caters to a very high volume of visitors, or if you're serving up classified information that you want to restrict to only certain users, a dedicated web server may be your best bet. It's also a common choice for webmasters who have very specific, specialized requirements for software or applications. When you have a dedicated web server, this means that your server will be used only by you and your website.

Among the advantages of using a dedicated web server:

- Increased security measures keep your site protected from hackers and breaches of sensitive data
- You'll have full control of password settings, firewall configurations, and the operating system of the web server
- Dedicated web servers have the capability to implement complex databases, e-commerce applications, shopping carts, and other advanced functionalities

On the flip side, a dedicated web server doesn't come without its caveats. They're generally more expensive to secure and operate than their shared equivalents, and they require a certain level of technical aptitude to configure and maintain. Also, you and you alone are responsible for predicting surges in site traffic and ensuring that the web server can handle the extra load.

Shared Web Servers

When you run your website on a shared web server, the resources and responsibilities are spread across multiple clients. If you're running a small- to mid-size business that does not serve up highly sensitive content, a shared web server will probably suffice for you.

There are a couple of main benefits in using a shared web server. They're generally more economical than dedicated web servers, as the cost is diffused across multiple entities. Plus, you don't have to be a typical "techie" webmaster to run a site on a shared server.

Shared web servers, too, have their drawbacks:

The type of operating system (i.e. Windows, Linux, etc.) and software suite will be limited by whatever the web hosting service provides. Access to the operating system and firewall configurations will be limited. Shared web servers are generally not as tight when it comes to security, so your data and content is more vulnerable to breaches. You'll have little to no control over the amount of traffic that runs on your web server, as it will balance the load of several websites at once.