

Internet Service Providers/Hosting Best Practices

1. **Understand the technology and what options exist.** It's important to educate yourself on what type of hosting technology is available in the market (Shared, VPS, Dedicated, Managed, Co-location, Cloud, Clustered or Grid). Having an understanding of these will benefit you when making the decision.
2. **Many (if not most) application providers are moving toward software-as-a-service (SAAS) models.** They provide the hosting along with the application. However, traditional hosting operations offer many services that can support the IT and data management of your business.
3. **Unless you have a deep IT staff with time available to manage your infrastructure, the value from a hosting/ISP provider will come from their providing managed services and consulting.** Bare-bones co-location or dedicated hosting will be more pain than you can handle. But as a provider of technical expertise, the hosting/ISP provider can pay for itself many times over.
4. **Select a provider that can provide personal service and knowledge of your account.** Whether you use a nationally-known company or a local/regional provider, this is a service-oriented business. You should be able to pick up the phone and reach someone familiar with your account at anytime.
5. **Get an escalation list and process from your provider, with phone numbers (including cell phones).** When a crisis is costing you significant dollars by the minute, you want everyone to be reachable.
6. **Work with your hosting provider to achieve PCI DSS compliance.** This can be one of the greatest values of this relationship. PCI DSS compliance involves practices that the host follows, that you follow, and that are shared. A good hosting partner lives this stuff and can facilitate the process significantly.
7. **Define your objectives, not your technologies.** Let the provider work out the details. There are many ways to achieve your goals (e.g., quick response to shoppers' clicks, high security, burst campaigns) and, for each, there are cost/benefit trade-offs. If you define the technology, you may constrain your provider from offering a better solution.
8. **Work with your ISP to develop a comprehensive disaster recovery plan** Start with the basics and add to the plan over time. Don't wait until it's perfect to implement. Define what is important, from an IT perspective, for running your business and focus on it. Not all DR plans are the same. It is important to understand the different options and levels available to you. Be sure to explore other options with your ISP, like mirrored hot sites and redundancies in the event of a crash, overload and/or oversaturation.
9. **The technology and knowledge required to run a diverse eCommerce business is changing rapidly.** Some outsourcing of your IT functionality makes sense, and the hosting/ISP provider is well-placed and well-prepared to help in this area. Work with them to proactively plan to support your technology needs.
10. **Cover the security basics for your internet access network.** Invest in corporate-level firewalls, spyware, virus protection, encryption (for wireless), etc..
11. **Keep your hosting provider in mind and in discussions as you plan campaigns.** Adding capacity for a new campaign will be much less expensive if you give your provider time to prepare. They can do things at a moment's notice, but it will cost you more.