

ISP/Hosting Key Questions to Ask Providers

Company

1. How long have you been in this business?
2. How many clients have you sold? How many have you lost, and why?
3. What size or types of clients fall into your “sweet spot”?
4. What is your company’s strategic direction? As hosting becomes more commoditized, will you focus more on becoming (or expanding your role as) an applications provider or will you focus on hosting and the IT management space?

Products/Services

1. Do you consider yourself a hosting company, first and foremost, or are you an application or service provider that offers hosting?
2. Describe your physical data centers. Do you own and manage them? Describe your redundancy plan. How many different networks are you linked into? Is there a single point of failure? How many data centers do you have? Domestically? Globally?
 - a. What type of hosting models do you provide? (Shared, Virtual Private Server/Virtualization, Dedicated, Managed, Co-location, Cloud, Clustered, Grid). What are my options to move from one to another as my business grows?
3. Is your service geared more toward big businesses or toward the small and mid-sized?
4. Do you provide a free strategic assessment? What does it include?
5. What technical support services are available?
 - a. What happens in a crisis when time is money?
 - b. Are there human beings I can reach 24/7 by phone or do I have to wait for email response or callback?
 - c. Are there one or more key individuals who know my account or will I be starting from scratch on every call?
 - d. Is your support team located in the US or abroad?
6. What SLAs do you have? Are the penalties really material?
7. What will happen when I need to change providers? How do you package up my data and ensure it gets to me (or my next provider)?

Features

1. What key features are included in your service?
 - a. What features are currently missing?
 - b. What features are on your roadmap?
 - c. What features does management love?
2. Where is your product’s competitive advantage over other hosting/ISP packages?
 - a. Price? Service? Support? Uptime? Don’t say “all of the above”.
3. “Managed Services” is often undefined. What does that mean for your offering?
4. Please describe what type of software (OS, web app, database, reporting, monitoring, etc.) is used and supported? What are my options if you don’t support a specific software technology?
5. For which types of applications (e.g., eCommerce, web servers, email, microsites) do you provide the greatest expertise? Do you also provide application implementations and optimization?
6. What type of certification and compliances have you achieved? (SAS70, PCI, ISO, etc.)
 - a. What do you do to help me achieve and maintain PCI DSS compliance? Your data center may be PCI compliant, but that’s not even half the battle.
7. Please explain your security model and approval process for obtaining access to the control panel, servers, specific reports, and modification of reports or the service.
8. What do you do proactively to ensure optimal performance?
9. When an application is not working properly (e.g., slow response times, error messages), can you look past your hosting center and into the application to help determine if the problem is there, or do you refer me to the application provider?
10. Describe your backup and recovery, disaster contingency plans, and SLAs to restore back to normal operating conditions in the event of a problem.
11. Do you have a management console?
 - a. What can I manage with it?
 - b. Does it include reporting and a dashboard?
 - c. Is it web-based, application-based, other?
 - i. What level of control do I get?

Pricing

1. Pricing is generally quoted on a customized, case-by-case method. Describe your pricing approach.
 - a. Do you charge for traffic served, fixed plus variable charges, set up fees, etc.?
 - b. Are there different levels?
 - c. Why do I want to pay to upgrade to the next level?
 - d. How do you price for overages, spikes and burst campaigns?
2. How do you charge for annual support? What about maintenance?
3. Are there any hidden fees (e.g., implementation, bandwidth or storage overages, number of transactions, transfers)?
4. Please describe the typical length for your contract?
5. Do you have a ROI calculator or metrics calculator to determine my site(s) needs?

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