

Managed Hosting Checklist

Now that you have chosen to work with a managed hosting provider, you have an even more important decision to make: which one? Although it may be tempting to go with the least expensive bid, here are some other aspects to consider when interviewing prospective providers.

1 Facility Reliability

The foundation of your hosting service is the data center facility. Quality of the facility's infrastructure and networking is very important. On the most basic level, the data center facility in which your services will be hosted needs to have redundant electrical and cooling infrastructure. A rating of N+1, where N is the primary system or piece of equipment, means the facility has what it needs to operate, plus one full spare. A well maintained N+1 facility can operate to achieve 99.99% availability for your hosted services.

2 IP Service Quality

A second source of concern is the reliability and redundancy of the Internet connections, as well as the caliber of the providers to the facility. Ask if your provider uses multiple carriers or is "carrier neutral." Carrier neutral means the provider employs many carriers in the event that one goes down. In addition, find out if the provider offers any Website Performance Optimization (WPO) technologies such as Intelligent Route Control (IRC), WAN acceleration or TCP acceleration. These technologies can speed up your application or website delivery significantly.

3 Facility Security

There are two types of security to consider – physical and logical. Physical security focuses on the data center where the actual environment is housed. There should be 24/7 security staff on-site, electronic or

biometric scanners and video cameras. In a dedicated managed hosting environment, only the provider will have physical access to your equipment, and all access should be logged.

Your provider should access your equipment through Secure Shell (SSH) and/or through a Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP), which ensures a secure interaction with your data. Avoid providers that use Telnet or direct connections, as these are indications of a less secure operating environment. Find out who will have access to your servers, how passwords are distributed and stored, how often passwords are changed and if passwords are reset after employee churn. Request a copy of a SAS 70 or SOC 3 audit report from the data center provider, which represents a third-party validation.

4 Network Population

Network population density can be defined as the number of different customers who have traffic passing through the same infrastructure. It is important to understand how your infrastructure is being shared. Multi-tenant, shared or aggregate are just a few terms that reveal there is a shared layer by multiple customers. Infrastructure shared in this way can have a negative impact to the overall performance of any solutions attached.

5 Hardware Quality

What type of hardware will be used to host your business? Ask questions about the specific equipment, including why this equipment is right for your business and the number of spares that are generally stocked. It is important that the equipment is reasonably new name-brand hardware. Name-brand equipment is supported by the manufacturer, which thoroughly tests products prior to their release. Getting repairs and replacement parts is easier with name-brand equipment than with a “white box” solution. It is comforting to have the technical support of both the manufacturer and your hosting provider available in the case of a catastrophic event.

6 Monitoring

Once you are satisfied with the physical aspects of the hosting environment, you should investigate equipment monitoring. Ask exactly what the hosting provider will monitor. Look for providers who monitor CPU usage, memory and disk usage and who allow you to check your log files, processes running and ports responding. These features help determine if your applications are functioning properly and can often prevent or minimize downtime. The provider also should provide historical data trends rather than snapshots so you can view the health of your environment over time and be able to predict your growth.

7 Technical Support

Make sure that your provider has the data center and the support centers staffed 24/7. Technicians should be reachable by e-mail and phone in the event of any problem. Avoid automated e-mail attendants, and make sure your tickets are immediately sent to a human being who is physically looking at your equipment to determine the nature of your problem. Talk to the Tier II engineers, and raise some hypothetical questions about what you might experience to see how they respond. Finally, contact references that can attest to how the provider responded in a failure situation.

8 Account Teams

While you are investigating your technical support team, get to know the people who will be on both your sales and your engineering technical support teams. Look for redundancy of roles. If one person

Why Internap?

Transform your IT Infrastructure into a competitive advantage with IT IQ from Internap, intelligent IT Infrastructure solutions that deliver unparalleled performance, flexibility and support. Since 1996, thousands of enterprises have entrusted Internap to deliver their online applications across our platform of connectivity, colocation, managed hosting and cloud services.

For more information, visit
www.internap.com.

should leave, can someone else on the team pick up easily? If a key team player leaves the vendor's employment, a good knowledge base will guarantee there is little, if any, transition period.

9 Financial Health and Company References

Make sure that you understand the company's financial condition, how it is audited, the number of years it has been in business, and its overall performance track record. Ask the provider for references, and then call them all.

10 Costs

There are many ways to save money when going with one provider over another, but the lowest bottom line isn't necessarily the best for your business. It's important to understand the trade-offs that you are making when saving money. Lack of support, insufficient product lines, or unreliable data center facilities can end up very costly for your business. Some providers, for example, will give you a very low price. However, non-covered items can quickly add up to an amount equal to or above what another vendor may have offered as a part of the solution package.

After considering these ten different areas, you should be well prepared to pick the best vendor for you based upon a combination of features provided at a price that is right for your business.