
5 things you're NOT getting from your hosting provider...

...that you need TODAY.

A Whitepaper for Agencies

As an agency Owner, Managing Director, CIO, Account Manager, you know how crucial it is to create online experiences that impress your clients, and more importantly their prospects and clients. Most hosting providers ensure that the site you build is up, accessible, and working 24/7, but is that enough? Wouldn't you rather have a hosting *partner* than a provider? One who goes beyond just hosting when delivering an online experience?

This whitepaper explores 5 things that you're likely not getting from your hosting *partner* that you really should have today.

1. **Agency experience.** Most hosting providers and data centers are staffed with IT engineers that understand servers and networks, and that's great. Heck, it's required. But can they troubleshoot, or recommend, a Digital Asset Management System? Do they know enough about development to recommend that right combination of servers, load balancers, firewalls, and etcetera, to provide your end users a great experience? Are they privy to dev and proofing environments?

Your hosting partner should be savvy enough to work with you while you're strategizing your client campaign and recommend the best hosting solution to fulfill that campaign. You shouldn't have to be the hosting expert, dictating to a hosting provider what they need to offer. Your job is to build smart, successful campaigns.

2. **Support for a wide variety of applications common to agencies.** Does your hosting partner have onsite Application Deployment Engineers? Can they support:

- Flash
- Video
- Silverlight
- CRM applications
- Content Management Systems
- Ecommerce
- .NET
- PHP
- Windows Apps
- Web Services

Can they also support analytics platforms and provide reporting?

- DeepMatrix
- Webtrends
- Urchin
- Google Analytics
- WebSideStory
- AWStats
- ClickTracks

Are they experts with traditional agency offerings and solutions?

- Sitefinity
- Joomla
- DotNetNuke
- StoreFront.Net
- Sitecore
- Sharepoint
- MailBuild
- ExactTarget
- Wordpress
- Constant Contact

Application support and management are services that traditional hosting providers may not provide, but they are offerings that can make a huge difference in the success of your client programs and campaigns. Be sure to explore the depth of your hosting provider's expertise.

- 3. Empathy with the frantic pace agencies work under and the ability to deliver requests quickly.** Trying to keep clients and internal teams on schedule is nearly impossible in most agencies. The client may use four, or even five, rounds of creative revisions when the timeline called for only three. That doesn't mean the campaign can launch later. After all, call centers have been lined up. Sales teams have been notified. The finance teams have projected sales increases this quarter – not next – and shareholder expectations are at stake.

Yeah... it's a big deal, so you can't let your campaign launch late just because your hosting provider can't make a simple DNS change instantly. In fact, there are a lot of quick turn requests your hosting partner needs to be able to make, and more importantly they need to be keenly aware of the consequences. Load balancer and firewall rule changes for example can kill a site as traffic builds, so an agency savvy hosting provider is imperative to your success.

- 4. Flexibility and creativity when putting together contracts.** When an agency is launching a campaign for a client, it's likely got a shelf life. Three months? Maybe six or nine months? It's likely not going to be a yearlong campaign yet that's typically the terms that most hosting providers use. Look for a hosting partner that can offer 3, 6, or 9 month terms; a partner that can rent equipment and/or offer virtualization solutions, which are easy to provision and scale real time.

As an agency, you're providing ongoing additional business to your hosting provider. Are they rewarding you for it? Do they offer spiffs for new business? Consider using a hosting provider that provides their solutions in a white label format, so you can brand it as your own. It's a great way to enhance the value you offer to your clients.

- 5. The ability to offer best-in-class technology solutions.** The agencies that are growing in this economy are those that are pushing the envelope and providing a web experience that creates stickiness and hopefully a viral following. This is great for agencies and their clients, but puts pressure on your hosting provider. Unexpected demand for bandwidth requires the ability to scale resources in real time. You'd better hope that the technology they use is as solid as your campaign.

When it comes to virtualization solutions, you can't beat VMware. When it comes to server design and reliability, you can't beat HP. When it comes to chip architecture and computing speed, it's hard to beat Intel. When it comes to virus and spam filtration, IronPort is hard to beat. Your hosting provider maybe staffed with really nice techs, but be sure to look under the hood. It doesn't so much matter what the engine looks like (the data center or server environment) as much as the quality of the driver at the wheel (agency knowledge and know-how).

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