Web Hosting Terms Explained: A Simple Glossary for Beginners

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In short: A quick guide to the hosting and server terms you will meet every day: shared hosting (many sites on one server), dedicated server (a whole server for you), cloud server and VPS (virtual servers with guaranteed resources), bandwidth, cPanel, WHM, DNS, SSL and more. Start here if you are new to websites.



This glossary explains the terms you will see most often when you buy hosting or manage a server.

1. Shared hosting

Shared hosting lets many websites use the same server. Each customer gets a limit on how much of the server's resources they can use, depending on the hosting plan. It is the most affordable way to host a website. Read more: what is shared hosting?

2. Dedicated server

A server that belongs to you alone, with no other websites on it. You have full control, choose your own operating system, and can run heavier applications such as large databases and media files.

3. Cloud server

A virtual private server created on a platform made of many physical servers. It behaves like a real server, and its resources can be upgraded quickly. Read more: what are cloud servers?

4. VPS (Virtual Private Server)

A virtual server created in a virtualized environment on a physical machine. It has its own resources and root access and behaves much like a real server, at a lower cost.

5. Bandwidth

The amount of data transferred between your site and its visitors. Every page view uses some bandwidth; pages with more images and media use more. Read more: what is bandwidth?

6. Cloudflare

A service that sits between your visitors and your server. It caches static files such as images and JavaScript on servers around the world, which reduces the load on your server and speeds up your site. Read more: what is Cloudflare?

7. CloudLinux

An operating system for hosting servers based on RHEL-compatible Linux. It isolates each hosting account and controls its CPU, memory and other resources, so a problem in one account does not

slow down the others. Read more: what is CloudLinux?

8. Control panel

A general term for the interface you use to manage something: your website's admin panel, your hosting account's control panel, or the server's control panel.

9. cPanel

The most popular control panel for shared hosting accounts. It contains all the tools you need to manage your hosting account: files, email, databases, domains, SSL and backups.

10. WHM (Web Host Manager)

The control panel used to manage many cPanel accounts on one server. With WHM you can set the resources of each account, such as disk space and bandwidth. It comes with reseller hosting and servers, and lets you offer hosting to your own customers.

11. Domain name

The name that identifies a website on the internet, such as example.com. No two websites can have the same domain name. Read more: what is a domain name?

12. DNS (Domain Name System)

A distributed system that stores information about domain names, most importantly the IP address each domain points to. It translates names into the numbers computers use. Read more: DNS records explained

13. DNS cluster

A group of DNS servers in different locations that share the same records, so every visitor is answered by a nearby server and the domain keeps working if one server fails.

14. KVM

A term with two meanings: a virtualization technology used to run VPS and cloud servers, or a Keyboard-Video-Mouse device that lets you control a server remotely through your browser as if you were sitting in front of it.

15. Console

A remote screen for your server that works through the browser, even when the server has no network access or SSH is not working. Read more: how to open the console on a cloud server

16. Rescue mode

A network-based recovery environment you can boot a server into to fix problems that prevent normal startup, or to install custom Linux distributions. In rescue mode you can mount the server's disks and repair them.

17. Reboot

Restarting the operating system, usually after a system update or after installing a service that needs a restart.

18. Rebuild

Reinstalling the server's operating system from an image you choose. A rebuild stops the server and replaces its disk contents, so back up your data first.

19. FTP (File Transfer Protocol)

A protocol for uploading and downloading files between your computer and the server, usually with a program such as FileZilla. Read more: how to upload files via FTP

20. SSL certificate

A certificate that encrypts the connection between your website and the visitor's browser, so your site works over HTTPS and data travels securely. It is essential for trust, especially on sites that take

payments. Read more: what is an SSL certificate?

21. Linux

A free, open-source operating system known for its stability and security. Most web servers in the world run on Linux.

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