

Introduction to Virtual Web Servers

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A *virtual Web server* is a server that appears to be yours, but in reality it is someone else's. In fact, it may not even be an individual computer, but rather a space reserved for you on a very powerful computer that maintains several virtual server accounts. Virtual servers are run and maintained by an outside source such as an Internet service provider. Virtual servers provide you with an opportunity to maintain a commercial, highly-sophisticated presence on the World Wide Web without having to maintain your own server or full-time connection.

FEATURES OF A VIRTUAL SERVER

A virtual server account relieves you of the responsibility and expense of setting up your own server, yet it enables you to set up and run your own Web site on the Internet. To those who are connecting to your home page, it appears that you have your own Web server and your own dedicated connection to the Internet. Just as though you had your own server, virtual servers also let you access detailed statistics about who is visiting your Web site and how often.

VIRTUAL SERVER PRICING

Virtual server accounts run as low as \$6.95 per month, or as high as several hundred dollars per month depending on the features you choose. Most services have a onetime setup charge of \$25 to \$150. Monthly fees vary depending upon several factors: storage space, traffic, bandwidth, and special features such as shopping cart services. The amount of disk space offered on a virtual server varies from one provider to the next and you will be charged accordingly. Typically, accounts are available with as little as 10MB of permanent storage to as much as several 100 megabytes. In this disk space, you store your Web pages, graphics, and CGI scripts.

Many service providers limit how much data can be downloaded or "transferred" from your Web site monthly. The less expensive monthly packages allow for 2GB to 5GB of traffic. More expensive accounts allow up to 20GB of traffic. If you exceed your allotted amount, some services charge in the range of \$.05 to \$.15 per megabyte over your base allotment.

APPLYING FOR A DOMAIN NAME

If you don't already have a domain name, you have to apply for one. Some service providers procure a domain name for you free of charge except for the standard \$70 two year InterNIC Registration Fee (\$35 each year after). A domain name provides an Internet address for your organization and gives your organization its own identity on the Internet. For example, the Washoe County Library System has as their Web address <http://www.washoe.lib.nv.us>

When you don't have your own domain name, your address appears differently. For example, the Ocean City Public Library has as their Web address *http://www.acy.digex.net/~oclib*. The tilde sign (~) preceding *oclib* signifies they have an account on someone else's system, in this case an Internet Service Provider named DIGEX, and they are using that organization's domain name address which is *www.acy.digex.net*.

WestHost Pittsburgh OnLine, Inc. is an example of a service provider that enables you to setup your own virtual Web server with your library's own domain name. For example, you could have a virtual web server named *www.my-library.com*. When accessed, the Internet connection would really connect to Pittsburgh OnLine's site at *www.pgh.net*, but your home page would be viewed and not Pittsburgh OnLine's home page.

BUSINESSES OFFERING VIRTUAL SERVER ACCOUNTS

The South Shore Memory Project uses a hosting service called WestHost at <http://www.westhost.com/>. The monthly fee is \$8.95 for 15MB of disk space. Setup fee is \$19 and domain name registration is the standard \$70 for two years, \$35 each year thereafter. Here is a small sampling of Websites that can assist you in finding other hosting services on the Net.

FINDaHOST.com <http://www.findahost.com/hosts/default.cfm>
HostFinders.com <http://www.hostfinders.com/>
Host Investigator <http://www.hostinvestigator.com/go.asp>
HostReview.com <http://hostreview.com/>