Chapter 4

What About Web Hosting?

You’ve created a website; now you need to have a place on the Internet to put it! After the hard work you’ve done so far creating your content and marking it up in HTML, this part of your site creation will prove much easier. Until now, you’ve been looking at your site locally; that is, on your own, local computer. However, in order for the rest of the world to see your site, you have to upload it to an external computer, or server. Maintaining a web site requires two very different things. First, you need a host that will hold the files you create for visitors to see. Second, you must have a domain name that serves as the website address people type into their web browsers to visit you. You must have both of these vital components to publish your site, and you will need to decide on both a domain and a hosting provider. This is a critically important decision, and you must consider your options carefully. In the majority of cases, you pay for domains on a one- or two-year basis. Hosting agreements can range from monthly payments to yearly contracts (unless you go with a free host, which I will cover later in the chapter). When spending money, it behooves you to be sure about what you want because it will help you get the best service possible for the best price (within reason).

In this chapter, you’ll learn how to do the following:

- Choose, purchase and protect the perfect domain name
- Evaluate your hosting options and choose the best provider for you
- Determine what functionality and features you should look for in a web host

There’s No Place Like Home

Finding the perfect domain name can be a tough challenge; especially with the frustratingly high proportion of names that are already registered or taken (many of these are little more than vehicles to deliver spam vs. a proper web
site). The web address you choose will appear in all search engines, user favorites, and bookmarks, and it’s the address visitors will type into their browsers when they come to your site, not to mention what people will link to when referring to your site. Your web address is the visible symbol of your site for all to see. While picking a domain name is important, trying to develop a strong, unique brand on the Web in a roiling sea of competition can be the bigger and more important challenge, requiring solid research and a willingness to try different things to achieve the results you want.

The Web Site Addresses

Your online presence is dominated by a web site address; without it, your visitors would be unable to find you, which would cause all sorts of problems! The domain name you pick will give people something to type when they want to take a look at your site. The problem with there being so many sites is that it can be hard to stand out, which is why picking the right name and the extension to match is such an important aspect of making it as easy as possible for visitors to find you. Of course, you have various options when it comes to a domain name, including a wide variety of extensions you can use (there is more to the Web than .com, .net, and .org!). Some of these extensions are fairly generic, and you can use them on a worldwide basis, while others are intended for people residing in specific countries. The important thing to remember is that whatever you choose, you need to choose a domain (and extension) that mesh well with your needs.

Domains and Subdomains

Domain names are considered the primary location (central point) of a site. Whenever you visit a site that either starts with www or uses a simple site address such as google.com, you are visiting the main domain of that site. The purpose of a subdomain is to help separate different sections or areas of a site by splitting them off from the default location. The way this works is simple: Most places you visit will have a value placed between the http:// and the domain name (such as google.com). This could be the famous www that acts as the default subdomain to show the main site, or it could be something of your own choosing (such as images.google.com) that redirects users to a special area of the site you set up for a specific purpose. Subdomains are important because they can give individual sections of your site some unique branding and a sense of individualism that can help you target your audience better.