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# **What Accountants Should Be Aware of In Regards to Hosting Services**

If you've never actually set up a website for an accounting firm before the details can become fairly frightening. There are a number of basic secrets that will make your journey into the current marketplace a great deal easier. Building [accounting websites](#) is like any skill. It's easy once you understand how it's done. There are some hosting businesses that have spent years developing websites for CPAs, and they have a few helpful insights for your consideration...

### **Reliable Hosting and Good Content :**

Keep an eye out for a good package deal. Lots of companies provide features like free domain names registrations or email hosting when you host your website with them. Of course I don't need to tell you that nothing is really free, only bundled into the service offering, so don't buy a package with features you don't need. Search engine submission is a popular offering that NOBODY needs any more (search engines no longer use submissions to rank pages), and features like shopping carts may be useful to retail businesses but it's useless for a professional service like an accounting firm. Shop around by doing a Google search for "web hosting" and research the top few results.

You'll find that if you arm yourself with some basic information choosing hosts for accounting websites isn't nearly as scary as it might seem. For example, most GoDaddy web hosting plans come with email and a certain amount of server space that you can store your data on (images, videos, etc). Network solutions offers a free domain name registration with their package. GoDaddy charges extra. Other packages frequently offered by website hosts include Google advertising credits, File Transfer options, and other features.

One bundled hosting feature that seems quite useful is Email, but many users don't really need it. A lot of accountants ultimately choose to use a "freemail" account, or a more sophisticated free solution like Google Apps.

### **What's in a Domain?**

Picking a good domain name is key for your business. You don't want something that's too long, because then people won't remember it and it may not fit on business cards if it's too many characters long. Using important keywords in your domain name can be helpful in getting your website a better ranking in the search engines. If you're looking to score well in the search engines try to include your local market as a keyword (Brownsville, Tampa, Atlanta, etc) and a keyword like "CPA", "accounting", or "tax". Most of the simple combinations are already taken, but it's fairly easy to include a variation or specialty like "BrownvilleCostructionAccounting" or "TampaAccountingSolutions". Always use a ".com" domain name, and if you must use punctuation to break the words up know that dashes are better than underscores. You do not have to get your domain name through your website host, and there are even risks in doing so. Get the domain name yourself using a service like GoDaddy, NetworkSolutions. There is even a domain registrar specifically oriented towards tax professionals called at DomainsForCPAs.com. In general, each has separate fee, although some companies will package them together. Domain registration fees are usually done on an annual basis, whereas web hosting is often done on a monthly basis.

Be cautious if a company allows you to register your domain name as part of a package with your web hosting. Often website hosts will register your domain in their name instead of yours. Whether this is done as a retention strategy or out of sheer laziness is irrelevant: in the end you won't actually own your domain name. It's your responsibility to make sure the domain is being purchased in YOUR name.

### **The cPanel:**

You absolutely MUST have access to a cPanel. If you don't have administrative access to your domain controls you can't make changes to your domain settings and this means you don't really own your domain. For example, your cPanel can be used to change where your email is routed and which web site it directs to. There are all kinds of advanced features on your cPanel. It can be used to redirect pages and even point multiple domains to a single website. Most web hosting companies give you cPanel access, but some don't. Even though you may never need to use a cPanel, it's a good idea to find out if your web hosting company has one and if you're able to access it.

## **Online Security:**

This is something the beginner-user may not be concerned with, but if you're going to be storing QuickBooks files online, or accepting credit card payments, then you'll want to listen up. An SSL certificate is more than an assurance that files and information being transferred to and from your site is secure. It's also an integral part of a sophisticated online encryption protocol (Secure Socket Layer) that actually protects the information. A lot of companies offer SSL certificates. GoDaddy, VeriSign, and DigiCert are the largest. Visitors will look for a security Certificate (usually indicated by a small lock symbol in one corner of your internet browser) when they're making a purchase through a site. Failure to properly protect your client's private info won't just cost you clients, it can also get you into terrible legal trouble. Accounting firms are financial institutions under the Gramm–Leach–Bliley Act and are lawfully required to take proper steps to protect their clients' private information.

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