Agency Hosting Guide.

Top 10 Tips For
Agency Hosting

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NimbusHosting

Hello agency people.

Here's your hosting guide.

We love working with agencies, and we want you to love working with us. That's why we've put together this whistle-stop guide to hosting, just for teams like yours.

Over the next few pages we'll look at some of the big questions you might have, like how to manage your hosting or get into re-selling, how to streamline your workflow, and how the right hosting can even bump up your profits.

We'll also look at some of the handy ways we can make you happy. Because at the end of the day, that's all we want – happy customers. And we're pretty sure it's all you want too.

Like a chat? Just call us on 0203 126 6767 or drop us a line at sales@nimbushosting.co.uk

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A bit about us.

We're Nimbus Hosting, and we think running great websites should be really easy – even if you're doing it all the time, for all sorts of people. So we're here to help.

We've been hosting for over 20 years, working with customers to give them the kind of package they really need – from cloud-based systems to dedicated servers, and everything in between.

We've invented our own hosting platform, just for you agencies and developers. Designers, developers, freelancers and agencies – we built it for you. It's called STORM and it's designed to take the stress out of looking after your clients' websites, so you can get on with the work you love.

Every agency's different, but whatever makes yours a happier, more efficient place to be, we'll help you find it, and we'll be right here with all the support you need.

01 How can I help my clients with web hosting?

If you're designing websites for your clients, they're going to need hosting. Which means they're going to be paying someone for that service – and it might as well be you.

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Hosting might not be a core part of your business, but it's actually really easy to offer it as an extra service, without having to weigh in on the technical details. By working with a managed hosting provider (more in question 4!), you can offer clients space on your server – or a whole server of their own – and wrap their hosting costs into a monthly or annual website maintenance fee.

We call it reselling and it's an approach that makes life easier for them, and creates a regular revenue stream for you. Day to day, you can focus on creating great websites and maintaining them through a simple, straightforward dashboard. While you're doing that, your hosting provider (us, if you like) will handle all the techy stuff and give you any support you need.

If that's not for you, there's also a more hands-off way to help your clients get great hosting. If you're getting good service from your own hosting provider, just ask whether they run a referral scheme. You'll often be able to recommend them to your clients, get a small reward for doing so, and let them handle the whole hosting package, including billing and support.

We work with our creative clients in both ways, so if you'd like to talk it through, just get in touch.

02

What type of hosting should I choose?

There are three main types of hosting out there: shared, cloud and dedicated. Each comes with its pros and cons, and has the potential to impact your agency in different ways. First things first, let's clear up what we really mean by each of those terms…

Shared Hosting.

Shared hosting is just that – you share a server with a whole number of other businesses, sharing the same resources, like memory and CPU. It tends to be a cheap option, because hosting companies often cram as many websites onto each server as they can get away with – thousands even. So, if you've seen ads for £5 hosting, or even less, this is what you're getting.

While tiny hosting bills might sound great, they do come with downsides. If any of the total strangers sharing your server start to dominate

its resources, that can slow your websites down massively. And if any of them have a security breach that gets them blacklisted, your websites could be too – dramatically compromising search rankings for you and your clients.

Basically, when you share hosting, you're not in complete control – and you're easily impacted by other people's mistakes. You're also less able to tailor what you're getting, so if you need a certain piece of software to make your website work, your hosting provider might not be able to help.

Cloud Hosting.

Cloud hosting is one of those vague terms that we've all heard, but most people can't quite pin down. At Nimbus, when we talk about cloud hosting, what we actually mean is cloud VPS hosting, with the VPS bit standing for virtual private server. Yes, it's a bit of a mouthful, and that's why we tend to just call it cloud hosting. No actual clouds involved.

Like with shared hosting, you're using a server. But this time, it's split into several virtual private servers, each with a dedicated amount of resource, unable to impact, or be affected by, anyone else on the wider server. So whatever

they get up to, your resource and search rankings are protected – giving you extra peace of mind.

It tends to be a little more expensive than shared hosting, but a whole lot less than dedicated hosting (which we're coming to next). For creative agencies, it strikes a great balance between manageable overheads and the kind of security and reliability you can build your business and reputation on. We'd always recommend it over the shared route.

A quick word of warning though – there's cloud hosting and there's cloud hosting. If someone's offering you unlimited disk space, steer clear. In reality the server space absolutely will be limited, they're just counting on other clients not using their full capacity.

That's a real gamble. And that's where those three little letters come in – VPS. They guarantee you separate, private space other people can't impact, so don't settle for anything less.

Dedicated hosting.

Dedicated hosting is kind of like the Rolls-Royce of the hosting world. You get your own completely private, physical server, shared with nobody at all. It dramatically reduces risk, giving you complete control and tonnes of resource.

A dedicated server isn't cheap, but if the websites you build handle loads of traffic or expect rapid growth, it could be a wise investment. You'll get a massive amount of power, the capacity to handle any amount of multimedia traffic and better performance than any other kind of hosting.

While it's possible to have a dedicated server on your own premises, it comes with a whopping great price tag and you're 100% responsible for its upkeep. That brand-new bells-and-whistles server might be top of the range today, but this time next year? Not so much.

So, getting a dedicated server from an experienced hosting provider is a more affordable option for most agencies. You still get your own server, but

it's based at their data centre and if anything goes wrong or needs fixing, they'll foot the bill, not you. Before you commit, ask what kind of server hardware they're using – look for a reputable manufacturer like HP. Our tech team won't settle for anything less.

One more benefit of a dedicated server? You can add a virtualisation layer and split it into several virtual servers, helping you manage your agency's clients and websites really flexibly. Unlike with cloud VPS hosting, where you'll usually have to pick from a range of packages with fixed amounts of RAM or disk space, having a dedicated server means you can custom-build your virtual servers so each one gives you the exact spec you need.

Here at Nimbus, we have a variety of dedicated server solutions, with the option of adding a platform like STORM to make managing them easier. Each one comes with expandable hardware and all the support you need to create your very own virtual servers or clouds.

A quick analogy (buckle up)

There's a handy analogy we like to use for the different types of hosting. It involves an imaginary long-haul flight, a crying baby and a choice of tickets. Ready?

Let's picture shared hosting as the economy class ticket. Not much room. Minimal baggage allowance. Lots of noise from your neighbours, and a crying baby giving everyone nearby a cracking headache. It might not be the baby's fault, but that doesn't make it any more fun.

Now let's think of cloud hosting as the first-class ticket. You get your own closed-off area that can't be encroached on by anyone else. You get more room, more baggage allowance, more attention from the crew and a load more peace of mind. Comfy, right?

Finally, let's think of dedicated hosting as a ticket on a whole different plane. A private jet, completely sealed off from the rest of the world. You can do what you like, with loads of space and freedom. Pretty luxurious. But probably not in everyone's reach.

Continued...

Weighing things up.

For a lot of agencies, the dedicated route is just a non-starter. And for the reasons we've just looked at, that's not necessarily a terrible thing. There are cheaper, more flexible routes out there, and if you pick the right hosting company, you'll get a bunch of extra benefits too.

While shared hosting providers are often the pile-em-high, sell-em-cheap kind, who'll offer you very little in the way of support, cloud hosting providers usually offer a lot more. Pick a good cloud hosting package and you won't just get a better server setup, you'll also get a team you can call on for troubleshooting, tech advice and all sorts of everyday queries.

It's a great way to get things fixed fast, which means you'll spend more time earning money and less time scratching your heads. In turn, that means you'll be able to look after your clients better, building the reputation you need to scale up, and up and up.

03 — What about hosting my clients' email?

Website hosting and email hosting are two entirely different kettles of fish. Yes, historically, if you offered one you'd offer the other, but these days keeping them separate makes much more sense.

Here's why. When you use the same IP address for a client's website and emails, you're running the risk that if there's an issue with one of them, they'll go down together. So if there's a technical hitch, or the website gets hacked or blacklisted, you're in big trouble. No website, no emails, just a lot of panicky phone calls from your not-very-impressed client.

One option is to host their emails on a separate server to their website. Risk reduced. But even when the going's good, the maintenance involved in email hosting is massive. Whenever your client can't open an email, it's you they're going to call. It's a never-ending task that sucks up huge amounts of time and energy you could be pouring into your creative projects.

That's why we always recommend agencies tell their clients to go for alternative email hosting like G-Suite or Office 365. Both use a pool of IP addresses to host emails, so if an issue crops up with one IP, it can be removed before it becomes a problem. These systems handle email really efficiently, without any involvement from you. Even better, they offer a whole lot more with great setup and support services.

We've written about this topic on our blog, so if you'd like to find out more, take a look.

04 — What's managed hosting – and do I need it?

There's hosting and there's hosting. What you get with one provider might be a million miles from what you get with another. And that difference could make, well, all the difference – to the way your website performs and to the work on your plate.

At Nimbus, we only offer managed hosting, because we believe it's absolutely 100% what's best for our clients. But what's the difference between managed hosting and plain old unmanaged hosting? And what does it actually get you, day to day?

First up, managed hosting doesn't just mean a spot to sit your website on. It means a team that helps you look after your servers, do your thing and deal with whatever comes your way. Unmanaged hosting is just server space. No services, no support. If you're a tech genius with bags of time on your hands, it's a great cost-saver. But if you're not, managed is the way to go.

But even within managed hosting, there can be big differences in what hosting companies provide. It's really important to know what's included in your package, what's going to cost extra, and what's beyond your hosting provider's scope.

With that in mind, here's what managed hosting means at Nimbus…

Fast, friendly support

Whatever you need, we've got your back, with a friendly team of super-experienced tech experts based right here in the UK. Chat to us on the phone, log a support ticket or drop us an email – whatever works for you – our response times are really nippy and our reviews are pretty great.

Easy peasy dashboard

Whether you choose cPanel, Plesk or our very own hosting platform for creatives – STORM – we'll give you a smart, simple control panel for managing your servers, software, users and access.

Server hardware

This is the physical server your website sits on at our data centre in North London. With super-robust security and intelligent design, the centre's set up for optimum power, all the time.

Network infrastructure

Your network infrastructure is the connection that gets your users to your website. We'll create it for you and keep it ship shape.

Continued...

Virtualisation software

If you don't need a full server of your own, we can use the latest virtualisation software to split a server into dedicated, secure, separate sections. You'll get all the space you need, completely protected from downtime dramas.

Server operating system

Whether you're using Windows or Ubuntu/ CentOS Linux, server operating systems need updating every now and then to keep them performing. We'll do it automatically, so you don't have to.

Monitoring

We'll proactively monitor your network and servers to make sure they're live, as well as keeping an eye on memory and CPU, sending alerts when they're low and fixing crashes before you spot a problem. For extra security and transparency, we even do it from our second data centre.

Power boosts

We give every Nimbus customer four free power boosts every year, super-charging your memory and CPU for a week at a time to get you through traffic spikes (Black Friday anyone?), help you fix memory issues or test out new ideas before taking them live.

Extra services you can add to your package

Domains

If you like, we can manage your domain and link it to your website using our DNS (domain name system) servers. We can even remind you when it needs renewing so you don't let it lapse and rack up any extra costs.

Backups

Opt into our backup service and we'll backup your website every night, keep a 30-day history and help you with any restores, if you need them.[5] It's free if you're on our STORM platform, or available for a small monthly cost if you're on Plesk, cPanel or Windows.

PCI compliance

If you run an e-commerce site, PCI compliance is a real must for security. Step one is to make your server compliant. We can do it for you, or if you're using STORM you can do it fast and free from your dashboard, with just one click.

SSL certificates

Getting an SSL security certificate is another great way to boost your website's security and we've got a range of brilliant options for all budgets. If you sign up to STORM, you can get a free Let's Encrypt SSL in one click, or buy any of the others, direct from your dashboard.

So, that's a quick overview of what managed hosting means here at Nimbus. If you'd like to find out more, first hand, just drop us a line or call us on 0203 126 6767. We're always here with friendly, personalised help and advice, and we'd love to hear from you.

05 What's a hosting control panel – and which one should I go for?

A hosting control panel is the dashboard you use to manage your servers and websites. It's where you'll see how much space you're using, find alerts if something needs attention, and be able to choose what you're alerted about (and how often).

Historically, there have been two big control panel providers – cPanel and Plesk. Both help you control Linux servers. If you're using a Windows server, it'll come with an in-built interface, so you won't need a separate control panel. We've offered cPanel and Plesk since we first opened our doors, and a lot of our clients still love them. But a few years ago, we decided the agencies we worked with deserved something built just for them. A product they could shape and be a part of. So we developed STORM, giving them a faster, more intuitive control panel that made it easier to get everyday tasks done.

Today, STORM helps more than 1000 agencies manage their digital projects more efficiently and streamline their workloads with a whole bunch of one-click functions. If you're new to hosting, it's a simple, speedy, secure way to find your feet and do great creative work.

We know how important it is to find a dashboard that feels right for your team, so if you'd like a quick overview of the differences between cPanel, Plesk and STORM, take a look at the comparison chart below, put together by independent website HostingAdvice.com.

And if you'd like to talk it all through, just give us a ring on 0203 126 6767. We'll be really happy to help. You can even take STORM for a free, no-strings 14-day trial to see how it works for you.

Control Panel Reviews	Backend Language	PCI Compliant	Cloudflare	FTP	Databases	Ipv6	Multi-Server
cPanel	Perl, PHP			X	X	X	X
Plesk	PHP, C, C++			X	X	X	X
STORM	PHP	X	X	X	X	X	X

07 Does it matter where my servers are based?

In a word, yes. And the long and short of it is – keep them close. While you might be able to buy cheap hosting from hundreds of hungry businesses across Europe, America and beyond, don't be fooled into thinking the distance doesn't matter. Because it 100% does.

If your agency and its clients are based in the UK, chances are your clients' customers are too. But if your hosting provider's in the US, all the websites you create for those clients are on servers in data centres over 3,000 miles away. So, every time someone in the UK tries to view their websites, the data has to travel from the UK to the US – and back. That takes time.

It might not take hours, or even minutes, but it'll take longer than it should, and that's likely to cost your clients customers, business and money. People just don't want to wait. In fact, around 40% of people will abandon a website if it takes more than three seconds to load. Three seconds. Not long to make a transatlantic return trip.

This delay in transferring data between your site and your server is called latency, and unfortunately it grows with distance. The upshot is, if you want to minimise latency, you've got to keep your server in the same country as your agency – giving it the ability to work faster and harder for your clients.

But speed isn't the whole story. If the websites you create capture data for your clients, keeping them close makes it easier to comply with GDPR and stay on the right side of UK law. It also means you won't have to untangle the legalities of another country, or risk falling foul of them.

The right UK-based hosting company will house your websites on quality servers in secure local data centres, reducing latency, maximising uptime and making it easier to fix glitches. They'll take a responsible approach that reins in spam and adds credibility to your clients' brands.

They'll also have a UK-based support team, who'll give you advice, help you stay up to date and be there to talk you through anything tricky. With a good understanding of your market, their advice will be more readily available, accurate and relevant than you might get from overseas. It'll also be reachable at the right time of day – and in the right language.

> **Got overseas clients, or websites with a lot of international traffic?**
> You could choose an overseas hosting provider, but if you'd like the support of a UK-based team, we'd recommend adding Cloudflare to your hosting package for extra speed and security. Regardless of where your servers are sitting, it'll store a copy of your website in the same country as your key audience, removing latency and improving performance.

06 How do I decide what server spec I need?

Whether you want hosting for your own website, or for a whole portfolio of clients, working out the right server spec comes down to the same handful of factors. It's all about the amount of resource those websites are currently using – and how likely they are to expand in the future.

First up, check how much disk space and memory each website's using. Then work out how much bandwidth they're taking up at the moment – and might need soon.

Finally, find out what CMS (content management system) they're using too. Simple websites or blogs might be on WordPress, while more complex e-commerce sites might be running on Magento. Some types of CMS work better on particular types of servers, so knowledge is power here.

Don't forget, all this is just your starting point. A good hosting provider should be able to help you upgrade a little down the line, as your agency grows and your websites expand.

If you're struggling with any of these things, we're always happy to help you figure it out, so just give us a ring on 0203 126 6767. Likewise, any potential hosting provider should be able to talk you through your options – and asking for their advice is a good way to work out whether they feel like the right fit for your business.

08

How can I keep my servers secure?

Security is huge. It's massive. For the sake of your reputation – and your clients' – it's got to be right. Luckily, there are a few straightforward steps you can take to protect everybody…

1. Avoid shared hosting

It might be cheap, but shared hosting can open up a whole can of worms when it comes to security. There's no real separation between your websites and potentially thousands of others, which means you're only as protected as the least protected website. You're at increased risk of hacking, blacklisting and a whole range of headache-including problems. Avoid, avoid, avoid.

2. Keep applications up to date

It's really important to install the latest updates to your CMS and any plugins you're using otherwise you're not addressing vulnerabilities that hackers will know about – and exploit. If you're on our STORM platform, you'll get Wordpress alerts when it's time for an update. You can also tap into our handy checklist of out-of-date plugins and their pitfalls.

3. Get some good plugins

There are lots of great plugins out there, for example WordFence for WordPress, or MageWorx SEO for Magento. Adding the right ones to your applications can protect you from attacks you might not even notice happening – things like hackers adding spam links to your code, or using your website to send them to thousands of people.

Both of these can result in your IP address being blacklisted, taking your website down for as long as it takes you to get it reversed. If your email's on the same server, it'll go down too – which is why we always recommend keeping the two things separate.

4. Sort out an SSL certificate

SSL is an encryption technology that protects sensitive data as it travels across the internet. It makes sure hackers can't interrupt the connection between you and your customers, accessing things like personal information or bank details. An SSL certificate proves you've put that security in place and customers can trust your website. So, pretty important stuff.

We offer a whole range of SSL certificates, from free basic options like Let's Encrypt, which you can enable in seconds in STORM, to more premium certificates. Generally, the more you pay, the more secure your SSL will be, and the more visible that protection will be to your customers, giving them greater confidence.

5. Use web application firewalls (WAFS)

Adding a WAF gives you an extra layer of protection against common attacks like cross-site scripting and SQL injections. Some WAF providers like Cloudflare see so much of the internet's traffic, that they can often stop an attack before they even reach your site.

6. Backup regularly

Backups won't make your websites more secure, but they will make life easier if things go wrong.

While updates, plugins, SSLs and firewalls help protect against external threats, regular backups mean that if all those things fail, or you make a mistake that brings a site down, you'll still be able to restore it quickly, with minimal panic.

Basically they securely save the latest version of each website, so you can go back to it if you need to. At Nimbus, we run onsite backups daily, every night, and for a little extra you can add offsite backups daily too. This saves your website at our second data centre, giving you the extra reassurance that if anything happens at our (very secure!) main data centre, you're still backed up.

If you'd like any advice on security, we're always happy to talk things through, so just give us a ring on 0203 126 6767.

09

How do I move my clients' websites to a new hosting provider?

It really shouldn't be difficult to move to a new hosting provider, even if you've got hundreds of websites on your books. The vast majority of providers now offer a free migration service, and it's a real must if you want to make the process as stress-free as possible.

But, as with all things, the level of service you get can really vary. Look for a company that offers free, managed migrations, with a real, live person to support you. While a lot of companies say they offer managed migrations, what they really mean is they'll hook you up with a migration tool. Yes, it might help a bit, but it's not going to pick up the phone if you're getting flustered.

At Nimbus, we allocate you a member of our support team who'll take you through the migration from start to finish, manually moving all your files and databases, updating DNS records and checking your sites are working properly before asking you to give them a final check through. Better than a bot, right?

10 What happens when I need to upgrade my hosting?

When you first start working with a hosting company, they should match the spec and cost of your package to what you currently need. But things change, and as you grow, take on new clients and work on different projects, you'll probably need to upgrade.

Watch this space

Keeping an eye on disk space, CPU and memory will help you anticipate when that time's coming, so you can get upgrades in place before you start seeing problems.

If you're using our STORM platform, you can choose to get free alerts about all of those things. They'll pop up in your inbox, taking the pressure off you to remember. If you're not on STORM, there are other handy third-party tools like Pingdom and NodeQuery, which can show you the same kind of information, quickly and clearly.

Powerful quick fixes

Websites often see peaks and troughs, so if you find you're sometimes running short of space, CPU or memory, you might want to try a short-term fix in the first instance. We offer our customers four free week-long power boosts every year, which they can use to boost their cores and memory when they know there's a traffic spike on the way.

Similarly, you might want to explore Cloudflare, a heavyweight, hacker-fighting tool that sharpens up your security at busy times, helping your websites stay up – and stay fast.
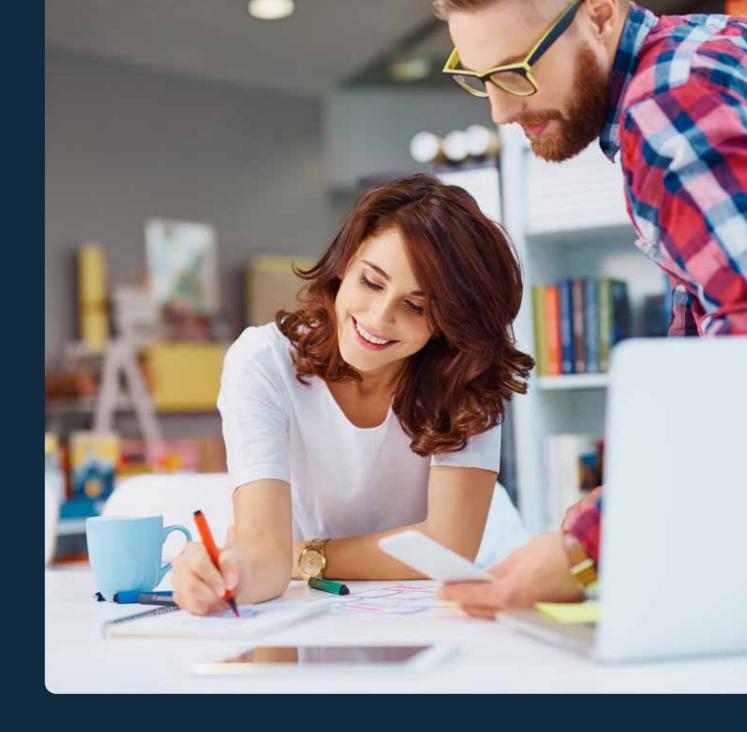
Tailored upgrades

If you're finding it's a busy time, all the time, you might be ready to upgrade in a more long-term way. If you've got cloud VPS hosting, it should be pretty straightforward for your host to increase your server's resources, without much interruption to your sites.

How much of an upgrade you need depends on how much disk space, RAM and CPU you're regularly using, how many hits you're getting per day, and the growth you know is coming.

Your hosting company should be able to advise on all of these things, make recommendations and give you accurate costs. If you can, go into these conversations armed with as much information as possible – that way you're more likely to end up with a package that suits your needs, rather than paying over the odds for resources you'll never use.

Friendly hosting for everyone.

If you're an agency or freelancer, you might want to try STORM, our homegrown hosting platform we built for creatives. We bult it just for you, and you can take a free 14-day trial, any time you like. No strings, no pressure and no obligation.

But whatever you do, wherever you do it, if you'd like a no-nonsense chat about hosting, we'd love to hear from you. We're here to cut through the techy stuff and help you work out what's really right for you.

Different people need different hosting. That's just the way it is. So we offer a whole range of hosting options, service and support, designed to make you happy.

So, give us a ring on **0203 126 6767.**

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