

Choosing a Host

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WordCamp Jax 2016

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About Me

- I'm a proud father of 2 and have been married to my wonderful wife for almost 14 years.
- My first website was 100% hand-written html.
- My oldest domain was registered 8/5/1999
- My oldest active hosting account started on 5/5/05
- I currently have hosting accounts with six providers.



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Choosing a Host

- I am not going to tell you the perfect web host for you today (but I might).
- You might leave with more questions than answers.
- Your site is always changing so selecting a host that works for you for the long haul is important.



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What is “Hosting”?

- Instead of trying to give someone a dropbox link or usb thumb drive with your latest article, you give them an address they can type into a browser.
- Hosting is paying someone else to make sure your website is available to the world.
- Your host sets up and manages **servers** that are connected to the internet.



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What is a server?

- Websites run on Servers.
- A server is **computer** that provides a service (or multiple services).
- What makes a server different from a regular computer?
- Reliability, Modularity, Form Factor, Cost, some other stuff...
- So...Nothing that really matters
- An android device could “serve” a website.



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Should I host it myself?



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Let's talk numbers!

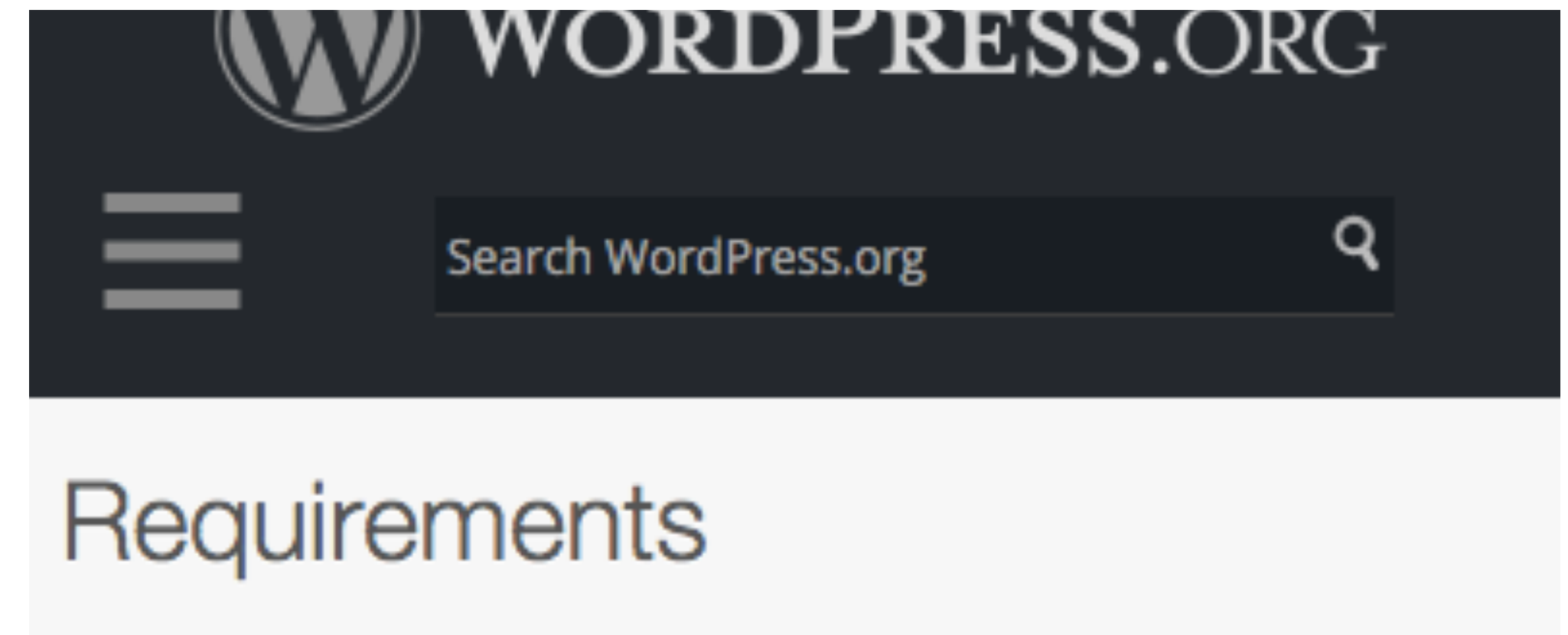
- So...a server must be just like buying a computer right?
- How much Memory (RAM) do I need?
- How much Storage do I need? (SSD!)
- Do I need a fast processor? CPU... maybe
- WRONG QUESTIONS TO ASK



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What does WordPress Require

- PHP 5.6 or greater
- MySQL 5.6 or greater
- Um....
- And a link to a hosting page with one provider?
- ...
- So...that's not really helpful



To run WordPress we recommend your host supports:

- [PHP](#) version 5.6 or greater
- [MySQL](#) version 5.6 or greater

That's really it. We recommend [Apache](#) or [Nginx](#) as the most robust and featureful server for running WordPress, but any server that supports PHP and MySQL will do. That said, we can't test every possible environment and [each of the hosts on our hosting page](#) supports the above and more with no

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What I Believe to Be True

- If you work with any host that sponsors a WordCamp on a budget \$25/month you will be reasonably happy.
- You can certainly spend much less (or much more) each month, but you need to be aware and selective about what is important to you.



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What I Believe to Be True

- Hosting is WAY MORE about the people at the host than it is about the infrastructure and servers.
- Hosting is a relationship.
- All relationships have problems on occasion.



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7 Keys to Long Term Relationship Success

- Do you Trust Your Partner?
- Are You and Your Partner Compatible?
- Are You Your Best Self with Your Partner?
- Does Your Partners Communication Lift You Up or Bring You Down?



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7 Keys to Long Term Relationship Success

- How do You and Your Partner Deal with Conflict?
- How do You and Your Partner Deal with Adversity?
- Do You and Your Partner have Compatible Financial Goals?



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Do you Trust Your Partner?

- Does your partners website look legit?
- Do they support WordPress?
- Do they support WordCamps?
- Do you know anyone that has used them? What was their experience?



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Do you Trust Your Partner?

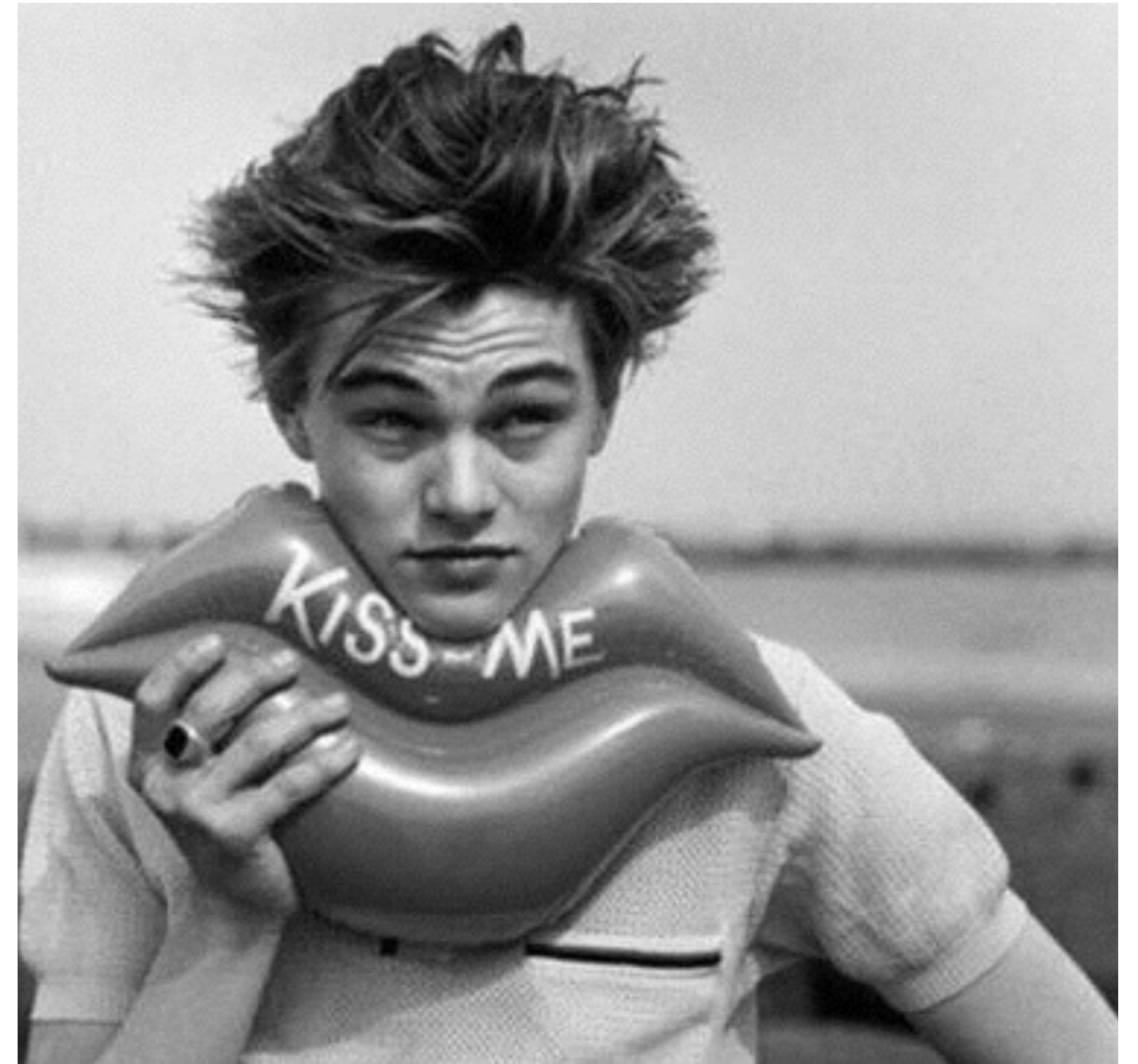
- Would You Let Them Log In as Admin to Your Site?
- Are They a Big Host? Do they Host a Lot of WordPress Sites?
- How Long Have They Been Doing This?
- What's their uptime like?



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Are you and Your Partner Compatible in the Dimensions of Intimacy?

- What Features do They Have?
- What Features do You Need?



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Are you Your Best Self with This Host?

- Take a serious look at what your site requires to run. Can this potential partner meet those requirements?
- See if you can find some people doing something similar with this host and see how their sites perform.



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Does Your Partners Communication Lift You Up or Bring You Down?

- Sign up for their mailing list.
- Read their help forums if they exist.
- Think about how they are communicating with you in the pre-sale questions you are asking.
- Do you speak at the same technical level?



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How do You and Your Partner Deal with Conflict?

- Conflict arises when upgrades break things.
- When you violate TOS.
- When you have a problem plugin or theme that's using more resources than it should be.



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How do You and Your Partner Deal with Adversity?

- How much capacity can your host handle?
- What happens when your post goes viral?



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Do you and Your Partner Have Compatible Financial Goals?

- Your host is a business...they have to make money to pay their employees.
- Your expectations should change based on how much you are paying them.



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What You Should Consider

- Support - Your host, **hosts**. You **publish**. Expect your host to know about HOW your content gets to your readers NOT how you create it on the server (there are exceptions).
- Backups - Computers break...What happens then?

Our Disaster Recovery Plan Goes Something Like This...



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What You Should Consider

- Security - Do they warn you when you put in a dodo password? Do they store their data securely? Do they keep the bad guys out?
- Capacity - Just how much can they handle?



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What is WordPress Hosting?

- ALL hosts can be WordPress Hosts
- WordPress hosting can mean...”here we installed WordPress for you”
- BUT, in a lot of cases it means they have experts that tune their servers and WordPress installs to run more efficiently.
- Whether a host has a page about hosting WordPress with them or not, they are hosting a WordPress site.

What Features Should I Consider?

- How do I contact support? How much support do I think I'll need?
- Am I limited in how often I can contact support?
- What do I do when something stops working?
- How do I restore something I deleted?



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WP Specific Features!

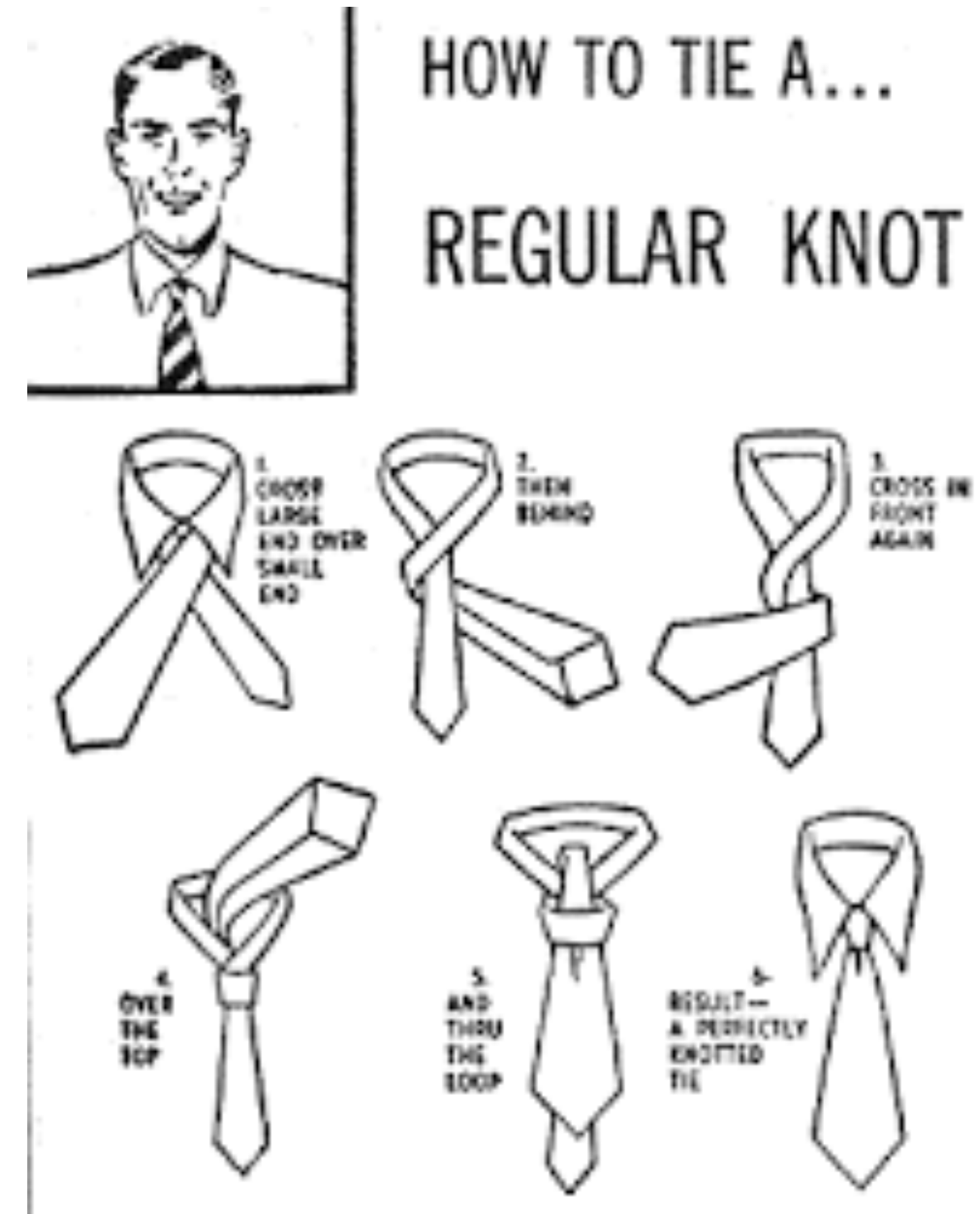
- Core Updates
- Backups
- Caching
- WP-CLI
- Do they support the WordPress community?



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What to ask?

- Where can I read your downtime reports?
- How often do you backup my site?
- What's your favorite flavor of ice cream?
- Here's what my site does...which plan do you think I need?



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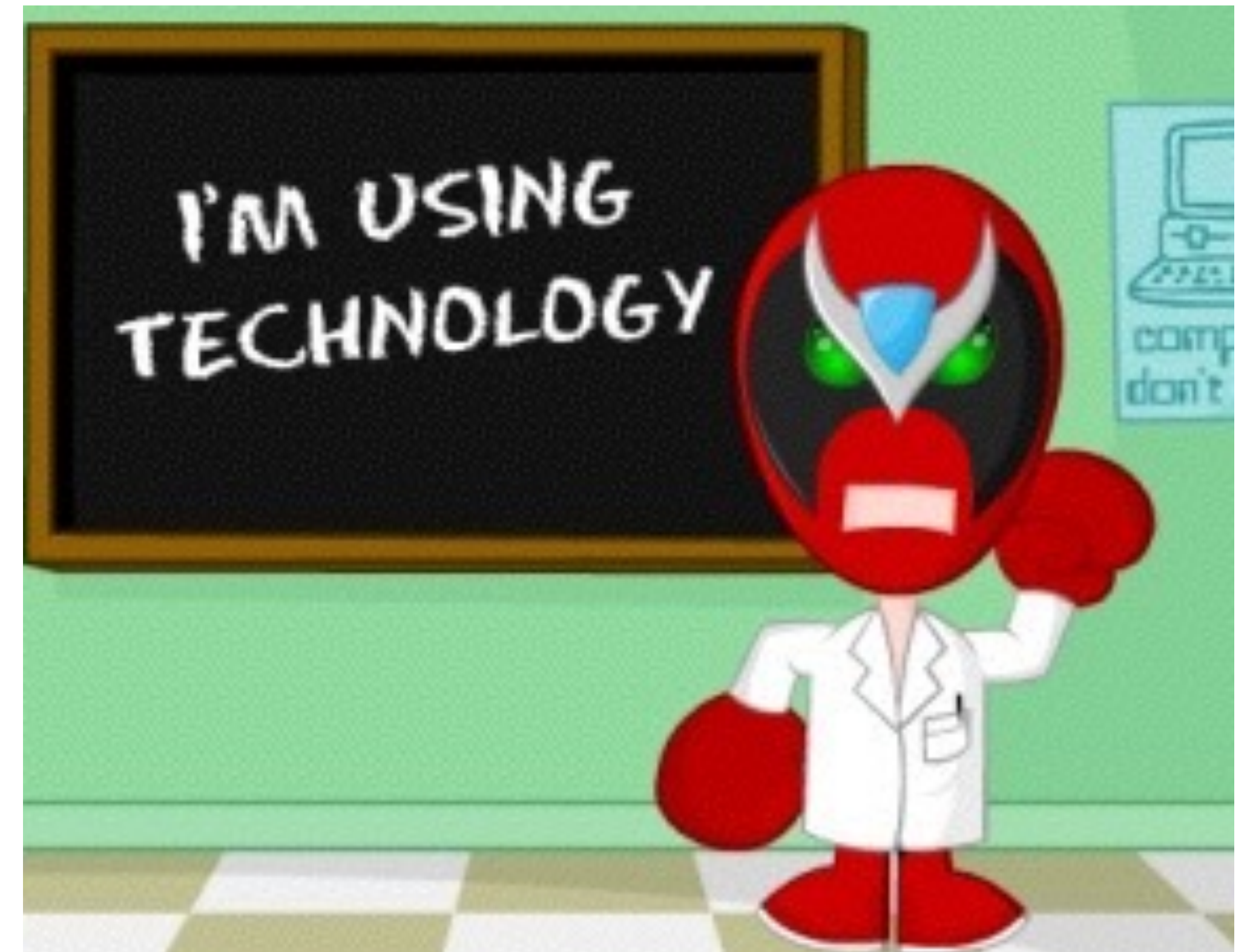
Warnings

- Read reviews...but with a healthy dose of skepticism.
- Understand that because a host is good for one person, it might not be right for you.
- If you see a host everywhere, it's because they have a big marketing budget.
Visibility != Stability
BUT visibility also doesn't NOT equal stability.
- Offers that are too good to be true probably are.



So, what are some real requirements?

- A site is always available and responsive (fast).
- A backup and retention policy you understand
- A way to keep bad guys out
- A way to test changes without breaking things
- A person to talk to when things break
- A price you can live with



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Categories of hosting

- **Shared Hosting**
- **Virtual Private Servers (VPS)**
- **Managed Hosting**
- Dedicated Server
- “The Cloud!”
- High Availability Clusters
- Self-Hosted



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Shared Hosting

- Lots of customers on one server
- Usually inexpensive
- Not very customizable
- Sometimes slow
- Think of shared hosting like your first apartment...you've gotta live somewhere and you probably won't like your neighbors.



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Shared Hosting - What do I get?

- Usually Include email
- Great for low budget sites.
- Great for low traffic sites.
- The host probably has the lowest expectation of your knowledge as site owner
- **Perfect place to start for your first site**



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Shared Hosting - Alright Bubba, I Want Names

- GoDaddy - Active in the WordPress community and contributing back. Big change in the brand.
- Dreamhost - Uses a unique control panel and are snarky!
- Siteground - I haven't used, but support the hosts that support WordCamps! Many people I know are thrilled with them.
- Nearly Free Speech - Like, darn near free but the most technical

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Shared Hosting - Not Always Smooth Sailing

- Support options are often chat only.
- You can bump into trouble when another shared user has a busy site.
- You should use caching!
- Expect the admin part of your site to be a bit slower.



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VPS

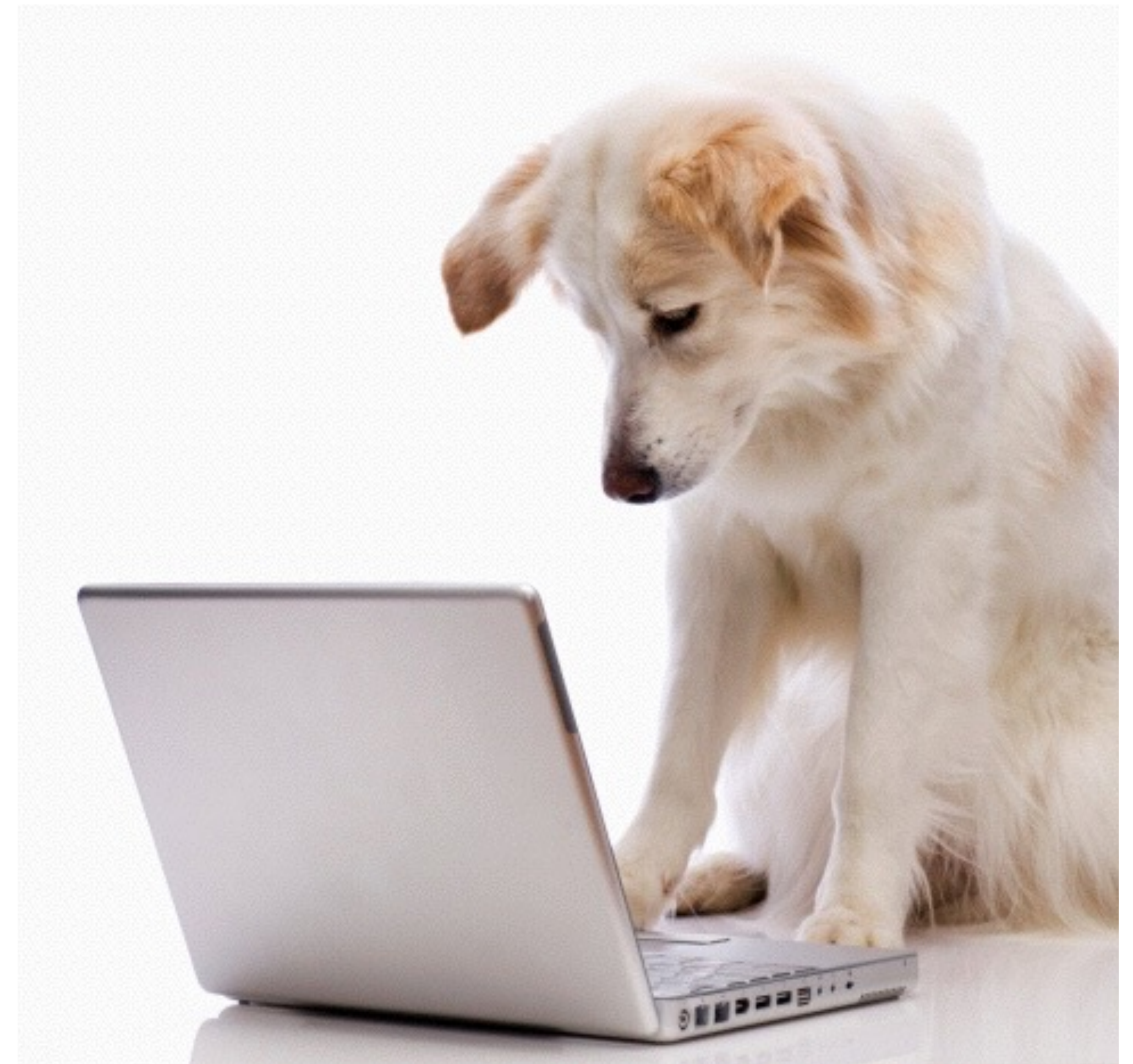
- A server is split into isolated chunks with guaranteed resources. That means your site can run faster, longer.
- Usually fairly inexpensive, but more than a shared host.
- Sometimes extremely customizable (dangerously so)
- More like a condo...you can't hear your neighbors, but when their stupid dog poops in the communal hallway you know about it.



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VPS - What do I get?

- Your own space for your stupid dog to make a mess!!
- Want to run a long-running query or something?
- Have a bunch of traffic?
- Need to do something a bit more customizable?
- email...probably not....
- Shell access...command line...nerd control
- Single Point of Failure



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VPS

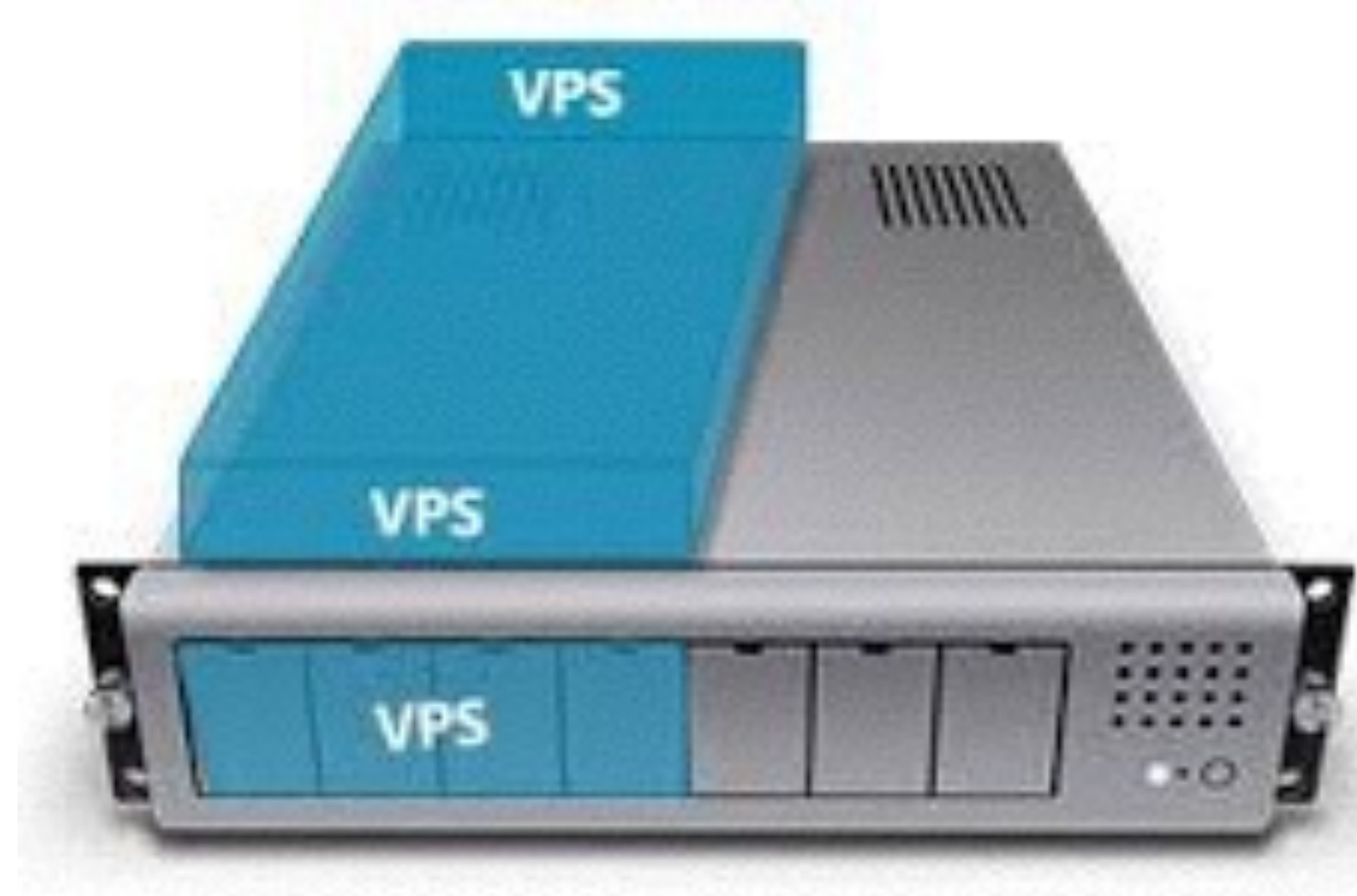
- a VPS is a server...
- running inside a server...
- so...as long as the “bare metal” server is functioning...the virtual server is functioning.
- Typically a bare metal machine is only hosting 8-32 “neighbors” all with guaranteed resources.



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VPS - Who do I? (some overlap)

- Dreamhost
- Pantheon
- GoDaddy
- Site Ground
- Most shared hosts offer VPS as an upgrade when you outgrow shared.
- Digital Ocean and Linode - 1 click install and good luck!



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Managed Hosting

- Managed hosting has very specific server configurations that are optimized for WP
- Experts in WP hosting
- Caching, Backups, Staging, Migration Assistance, Automatic Core Upgrades
- More expensive than Shared and VPS, less than Dedicated
- Less customizability, but you probably don't need that.



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Managed Hosting

- Someone that will lay awake at night with you and worry about uptime!
- Typically the support team is going to be really knowledgeable about WP and speed
- You can probably tell them what you are trying to do and they have a customer doing something similar.



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Managed Hosting - The Ugly

- Banned plugins. Some of the banned plugins make sense...they're offering caching, you don't need your own caching plugin anymore.
- Many times the pricing is keyed to page views and the metrics aren't what you're used to seeing with google analytics OR you may not know what your metrics are.
- You may be relying on an invisible 2nd partner. Your managed host is paying Amazon AWS or Linode or Google Cloud or Digital Ocean...this means you've increased your exposure.

Managed Hosting

- liquidweb.com
- getflywheel.com
- wpengine.com
- pressidium.com
- pagely.com
- dreamhost.com DreamPress 2



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Hosting for Each Person

- Shared: The only thing that matters to me is cost...for now.
- VPS: I have outgrown shared hosting (or know I will). I'm unfazed by the command line.
- Managed: This site is important to me and I'm willing to pay a bit more so that my customers can always see it.



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Dedicated

- Dedicated is like VPS...but you are the entire server
- It should be turbo fast!
- Many VPS hosts have a dedicated option as a step up
- Same benefits of a VPS but orders of magnitude faster due to access to the bare metal machine.



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Dedicated - OK Turkey, Out With It

- Dreamhost
- Host Gator
- Peer 1
- Rackspace
- macminicolo.com



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The Cloud!

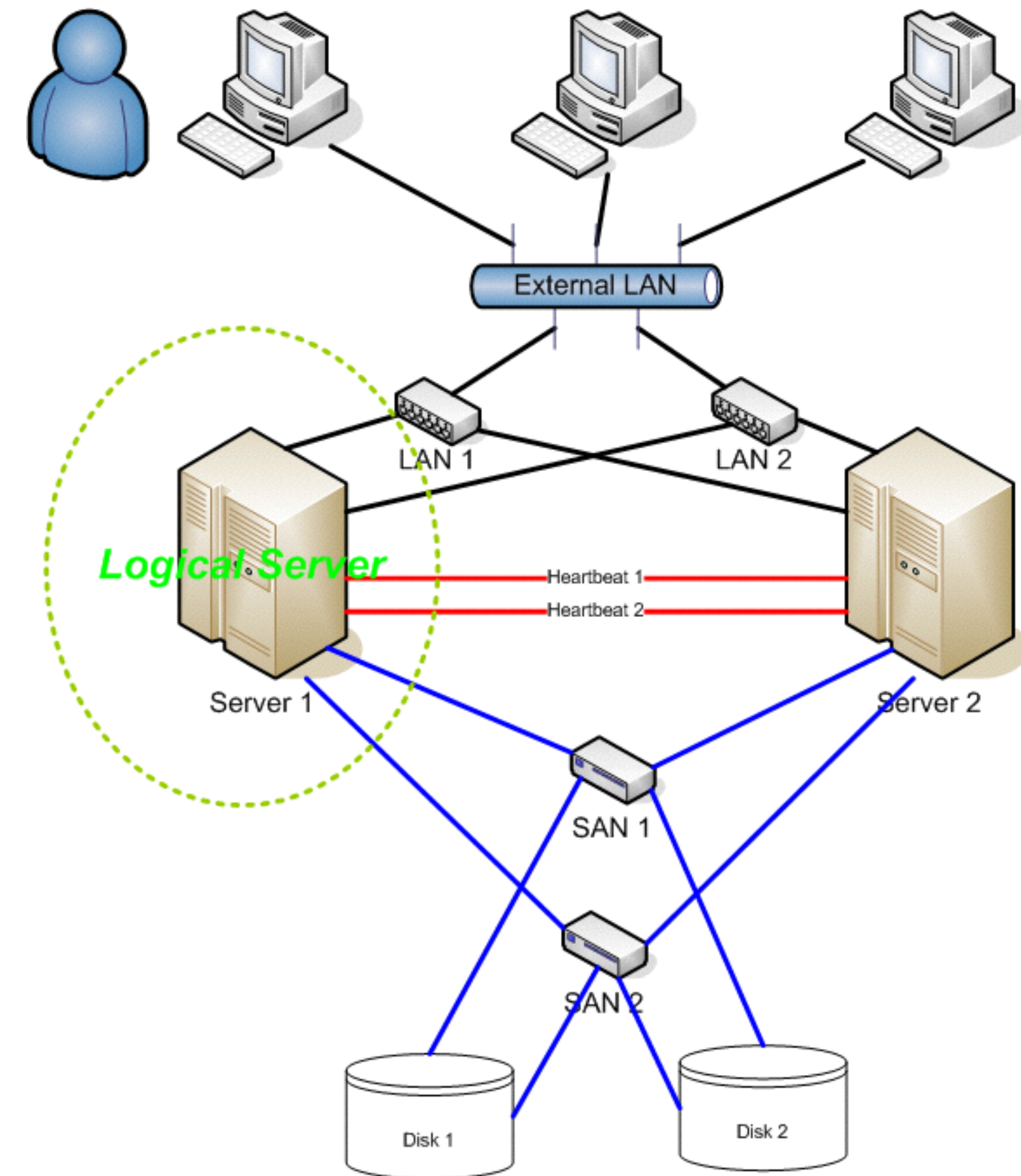
- We've already talked about the cloud...
- The cloud is...mostly...VPS and managed services that are built to grow/contract based on loads.
- One could argue that shared hosting, VPS, and managed hosting are all forms of cloud computing.
- “The Cloud” is a marketing term to avoid having to explain...



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High Availability Clustering

- Shared hosting these days mostly doesn't have a single point of failure
- VPS is a single point of failure
- Dedicated is a single point of failure
- Pending the structure of the managed host may or may not have a single point of failure.



Self Hosted

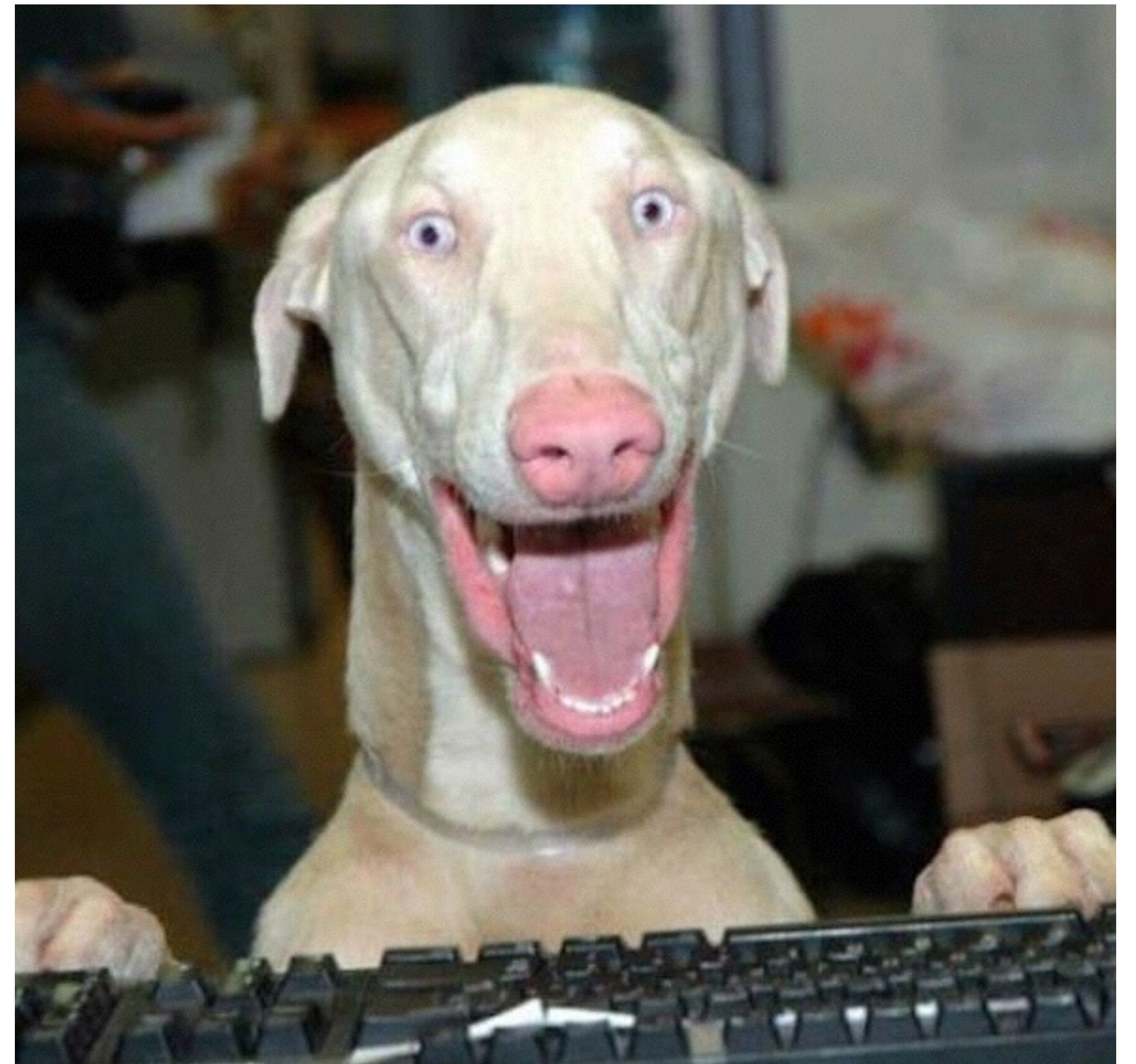
- Self-hosting can be extremely educational.
- You're on your own!
- Don't self-host a site where uptime matters.
- Your knowledge, your ISP, your power company, your ability to fix mis-configurations are all single points of failure
- Just because something is a bad idea doesn't mean you can't learn by doing it.



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Third Party Tools

- So...you've found the perfect host except they don't offer [feature].
- You can usually find a plugin for that!
- For Backups: VaultPress, BackupBuddy, Duplicator
- For Staging: ManageWP, Desktop Server, WP Stagecoach
- For Caching: ~~W3TC~~, WP Super Cache, WP Rocket



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Resources

- Jeff Matson: Choosing a WordPress Host <http://wordpress.tv/2014/10/13/jeff-matson-choosing-a-wordpress-host-2/>
- Mika Epstein: Working with Hosting Companies <http://wordpress.tv/2015/07/12/mika-epstein-working-with-hosting-companies/>
- Brian Krogsgard: Post Status Draft Podcast: <https://poststatus.com/wordpress-hosting-draft-podcast/>
- Kevin Ohashi: Review Signal WordPress Hosting Performance Benchmarks for 2015: <http://reviewsignal.com/blog/2015/07/28/wordpress-hosting-performance-benchmarks-2015/>

Questions?

- Follow me on twitter @binarygary
- If you want to talk hosting, especially super nerdy stuff...join me in the lunch line.



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