

## Silence is Golden

I've worked for many large Internet Service Providers: local, regional and national. I've been fully immersed in the industry since 1995, the time around most people first began hearing about the Internet. What follows is some of the tricks big hosting companies use. But don't take my word for it. You can easily investigate and research many of these points on your own, often by simply visiting the ISP's website. My general word of caution is this:

**“Silence is Golden”**

What does that mean? “Silence”, or the lack of information, allows the observer to make his/her own opinion based on impressions of the company. The marketing department's job is to project the best possible image. They are chasing the “Gold”. The less details they reveal, the more you can project your own assumptions. It seems the less one says, the more professional one appears.

**Their Silence can lead to Your Gold.**

## Minimal Support Experience

I've worked for many large Internet Service Providers: local, regional and national. The general employment progression is this: the lowest paid employees and the ones with the least experience answer the support calls. When they cannot solve problems with their script, they escalate to Technical Support. Technical Support can only solve Customer side issues. If the problem is on the ISP's side (which it often is) they have to try and convince the Operations Team of the problem. The Operations Team themselves have a call center, often called a NOC, where the least experienced and lowest paid employee routes the issue to the appropriate System Administrator. If there is a software bug involved, he has to route the issue to his Operations Manager. A Project Manager is contacted and then works with the Development Team to assign Developers and Testers to fix the bug. Here's the progression of the call:

## Big Guy Support Layers From Customer Call to Resolution

<i>Step</i>	<i>Role</i>
1.	Customer - YOU
2.	Customer Support Representative
3.	Customer Technical Support
4.	NOC Support Representative
5.	System Administrator
6.	Operations Manager
7.	Project Manager
8.	Development Manager
9.	Software Developer
10.	Software Tester
11.	Project Manager
12.	Operations Administrator
13.	NOC Support Representative
14.	Customer Support Representative
15.	Customer

## Minimal Support Experience (continued)

### Advantages

- This model supports high volume.
- Is scalable to millions of customers.

### Disadvantages

- Time to resolve is very slow.
- There are so many layers the original problem the Customer had may be misunderstood by the people who actually fix it.
- **The support person talking to the customer is usually the least experienced employee or contractor working for the ISP.**

## Redundant Staffing

One concern with choosing a small company with only a few employees is lifetime availability. What if they get hit by a bus? What happens when they go on vacation?

Big Company insider tip: the same concern applies no matter how large the company is. Most Internet services are managed by individual administrators. They might have a staff of 100 I.T. professionals, but each one is responsible for a subset of the business services. When there is an email server problem, they usually have one main guy they call to fix it. There is seldom in-depth cross-training. Because of this, most of the system administrators are required to carry pagers while on vacation. When something on their server goes wrong, they have to reconnect with the mother ship to fix it. When the dedicated support people can't be found, resolution can be delayed.

## Hide & Seek

Most web design and web hosting companies hide who they are. Doesn't that make it easier to avoid you when there's a problem? What are they hiding?

Next time you're on another website see if you can discover who's running the show, where they're from, and what's their experience.

## 99.999% Uptime Claims

Many web hosting companies claim 99.999% uptime. They are claiming that their services are down for less than 5 minutes every year. Down only 5 minutes out of the 525,600 minutes in a year. Who do they think they're fooling?

Did you know they don't include maintenance downtime. The game they play is that if they scheduled the downtime in advance, it doesn't really count. Oh really? Did your customers get notified of the downtime? Will your web visitors care why your website is down? Of course not! They'll just go somewhere else.

## 99.999% Uptime Claims (continued)

### Uptime Percentage to Downtime Conversion

<i>Uptime (%)</i>	<i>Downtime per Year</i>
90%	876 hours (36.5 days)
95%	438 hours (18.25 days)
99%	87.6 hours (3.65 days)
99.9%	8.76 hours
99.99%	52.56 minutes
99.999%	5.256 minutes
99.9999%	31.536 seconds

Let's keep it real. I define downtime as the amount of time a customer cannot access their provider's services due to an outage on the provider's side. Professionals will know and record their emergency and maintenance downtime each year.

## Backups

Who is backing up your email, website, and database? If your provider doesn't say they are then the answer is **no one**. How expensive and painful would it be for you to lose your website, email archive, or database? The old saying about Death and Taxes being the only two unavoidable events could be complimented with this new age issue: Hard-drive Failures. It doesn't even require a catastrophic event. Server hard-drives might have a 2 to 6 year life span. The problem is, once one fails, it's too late to do something about it if you don't have restorable backups.

## Over-Selling Bandwidth and CPU

Many web hosting companies sell resources on their servers in blocks called Virtual Hosting. The trick to maximizing profits is stuffing as many Virtual Hosts on to one server as possible. The fewer servers a provider has to manage, the lower the hardware and support costs. This makes sense and everyone does it in some way or another. Network Access Providers (the framework for the Internet) want as many customers running through their links as possible. Datacenters want as many servers in close proximity as possible. Server owners want as few servers as possible to manage their customers' needs.

The problem is that not every provider is going to ramp up their resources to meet their customers' demands. When demand exceeds resources the customers' websites get slow. Internet users are notoriously impatient. When websites slow, web visitors go. No one wants to wait 60 seconds for a web page to load.

Make sure your provider monitors server resources and response times.

## Unlimited

Unlimited doesn't exist. It defies reason and the laws of science. If you aren't limited by the policy, you'll be limited by the technology. Guaranteed.

## Non-traceable Testimonials

First off, why are testimonials used? Testimonials are used to remove one or more fears in the potential buyer's mind preventing them from purchasing. Many companies display non-traceable or anonymous testimonials. A credible testimonial is one that can be verified: A full name and a method for contacting that person to verify their satisfaction.

If you can't prove the endorsement was really said by a real customer then how could it remove any fears in your mind? Anonymous testimonials do the opposite for me. They raise concerns. Why would the provider's happiest and most satisfied customers want to remain anonymous? Talk about things that make you say, "hmm..."

## Who Are Their Customers?

Few companies publicly list their client list. Maybe they don't want other companies stealing their customers. Maybe they don't want you to know what other types of websites are on the same server. While this isn't important to everyone, it is important to some.

## Build It Yourself

Many web hosting companies offer low priced introductory services to point and click your way to a new website. These interfaces are cumbersome and not capable of custom designs. Also, business owners seldom have time to polish their website and keep it up to date. Search engine visibility takes expert knowledge and there are few simple tricks. As with most things in life, it takes a professional to build something professional.

## #1 Position in Search Engines Guarantee

If you hear or see that claim, run away with your wallet! There is science behind Search Engine placement but it's not simple. There are many complex factors involved in getting high search engine placement. The major search engines, Google, Yahoo, and MSN all have different rules. Using quick and easy tricks, called Black Hat SEO techniques, to get a top position for competitive search phrases can get your website banned from the search engines. Most SEO experts won't tell you that. **Another common gimmick** is to sell you top positions to phrases that aren't even searched for on the Internet. That's the equivalent of placing a billboard on a road no one ever drives down.

## Domain Ownership

There are many web hosting companies who will register a domain for you and then hold the domain hostage. They then demand you host with them forever or yank the domain out from under you when you try to switch hosts. Get very specific with your domain registrar... who owns it, you or them?

Transferring domains doesn't really cost anything. When you tell your new provider you want to transfer a domain, you will have to pay to renew the domain another year but that new year gets added to the expiration time on the domain. So you don't lose anything. If you own a domain then you can transfer it away at any time without paying. Will your provider confirm that in writing?