

Linux vs. Windows web Hosting, does it make a difference?

One of the most confusing decisions someone new to web hosting will have to make is which platform their server should be on. There are a number of different choices out there but the main two are Linux and Windows web servers. There are also a lot of sources of information about hosting, but the majority of them are tainted by the author's biased personal opinion unfortunately confusing the issue. Having just put in some solid hours researching the topic I have come to the conclusion that in general it quite probably does not matter which server you use. For the majority of people it will be far more important to choose a really good web host than to worry about the server-type that they implement.

Microsoft developed and owns the Windows operating system. Linux is open source and generally free. This means it can often be more expensive to set up and run a Windows server. However, this fact doesn't really affect you unless you are actually setting up a server for yourself and if you're reading this article then I'm guessing that it's safe to assume you're not. This article is going to offer information for those trying to decide which hosting company to go with. The cost involved in running a server does not affect the cost of a web-hosting package as much as you may think. Despite the general opinion that Windows servers are more expensive to run, buying a Windows hosting package can often turn out to be just as cheap or even cheaper than an equivalent Linux hosting package.

Some people naturally assume that because their PC runs Windows they need to buy a Windows hosting package. This isn't true. Access to your web account will most likely be through FTP or a control panel and both servers support these methods. The main difference is that some of the FTP commands are slightly different between Linux and Windows and some FTP programs will be designed with one or the other in mind. This means you may occasionally find that when you try and get your FTP program to do something it returns an error message, but it won't happen very often.

Your choice of server platforms should be dictated by the use to which you intend to put it. The majority of web features run fine on both platforms including PHP, MySQL, POP3 etc. If you intend to create your site using ASP, FrontPage, the .NET environment, Windows Streaming Media, Access, MSSQL, or any of the other Microsoft proprietary technologies then you probably need to use a Windows host. There is limited support for a number of these technologies in Linux, but they can be expensive and are usually lacking in features. It is probably worth considering the fact that if you use server specific technologies and then change hosts you'll have a much harder time of it than if you use technologies that can be run on any system. Having it run generic technologies removes the need to focus on specifics and allows you to focus on the quality of service itself.

The reliability and stability of the different platforms have been the topic of many long arguments. The main reason that Windows is seen as being insecure is that it is the most widely used operating system for home PC's. People spend more time looking for flaws in the most common system. With Linux being the most common server type, it has a surprising number of successful hack attempts made on it. In the end the security of both platforms comes down to the competency of the system administrators. If you are security minded then you'll do better to make sure that the hosting company is reputable and highly skilled than to worry about the server they use.

In terms of performance there's not a huge difference between the two servers. Linux reportedly performs faster because Windows (as usual) attempts to offer an 'all in one' package instead of the extendable Linux implementation. You'll generally not notice a difference but if performance is of utmost importance to you then maybe this will influence your decision.

I've come to the conclusion that unless you are specifically using features that are unique to one platform or another your time will be much better spent looking for a really good quality host than a really good quality server. Developers are constantly improving both Linux and Windows so they should be fairly close in terms of features, security, and reliability for a long time. It's the people implementing them that you should be basing your decision on.

About the Author

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