



Networks & Servers

What is a Computer Server?

Server Basics for Beginners

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We depend on computer servers — whether large or small, single task or multi-task — every day. They form the hub of all business computer infrastructures. Even so, many of us don't understand what exactly servers are and why they are important to business.

A server is a powerful computer that "serves out" applications to a network of users. For instance, if you use the Internet, then you are connected to a system of servers. In fact, it's a server that provides you with an IP address and provides a firewall — a form of digital protection — to bar external threats from your computer.

If you're considering a server purchase, start out by looking at the size of your company. Then, make sure that the server is customizable in terms of memory size, processor speed and hard drive storage size. It's also important that your company's server is optimized for your company's needs and matches both your current size and your plans for growth.

A server is either "dedicated" or "shared." A dedicated server performs only one task — such as hosting a Web site. A shared server, on the other hand, might be accessed by multiple users for multiple purposes.

A dedicated server works best for larger businesses that require a server to be heavily customized to specific needs. Dedicated servers provide faster data access and allow higher traffic rates. Security can also be more closely controlled on a dedicated server.

Below is a brief overview of ways that servers can benefit your business. Depending on the size of your business, you might be need only one server, or you might need multiple servers.

1. **Application Server:** An application server is dedicated to running one or more software applications. For example, a company might share files through a network application using a server.
2. **Web Server:** A Web server hosts Web sites. You can, of course, pay to have a Web site hosted. Purchasing a server for your company allows you to host your own site without incremental costs. The more powerful a Web server, the faster it will load Web pages for your customers. If you are expecting a high level of traffic to your Web site, you should purchase a server that can support your needs.
3. **Mail Server:** A mail server hosts e-mail just as a Web server hosts a Web site. A mail server is especially handy if your business receives a lot of spam mail, as the mail server can be set up to block certain IP addresses. Many commercial mail servers have virus and Trojan filters built in as well.
4. **E-mail List Server:** E-mail newsletters can be a powerful marketing tool, but sending out a mass number of e-mails at once requires a powerful piece of hardware on the back end. An e-mail list server is a great way to maintain different mailing lists without having to tie up the bandwidth that hosts your Web site or in-house e-mail system for hours at a time. A list mail server can also come in handy if you want to give your clients the ability to opt-in and opt-out of your newsletters.
5. **Virtual Private Network (VPN):** A VPN allows you to access your secure private network from anywhere in the world, over the public Internet. By hosting a VPN on an in-house server, you, your employees, clients and subcontractors can create a shared office space online — accessing the same files and applications with ease. A VPN can even give you access to secure email programs and other secure applications from any remote location.

However you choose to use servers in your business, they offer plenty of potential for benefit.

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