

Web hosts are **not as welcoming** as the party variety, finds Paul Smith and his roaming site.

Mine host



This month, I've been mostly changing web hosts. I have gone through half a dozen since I was rumbled by my previous host, but have finally, I hope, found a new home. It turns out that choosing a host, or at least a goodly host, is not

as simple as originally expected. And it all started with a bit of churlishness on the part of a previous employer, unwilling to host my site on the grounds that my connection with them had been severed.

I used to work on a computer magazine, which august title no longer exists. While there, I bought myself a vanity domain name, in the full expectation that this would be a cool thing to do, and that adoring but savvy young women would throw themselves at me solely on the basis that I had a domain name. I would be able to brush them aside imperiously, hardly affording them a glance, thereby earning the adoration of both wifely Del and Edward (who is particularly sensitive to these sorts of things, especially for a cat). As it happens, nubility brings its own sort of imperiousness, and the throngs have yet to show much in the way of adoration. But, anyway... Working for this company, I was able to persuade the IT department that their servers would be a good place to host my site. It wouldn't be a big site, it might not even be that active (how much bandwidth, I mused, would a few hundred thousand hits a week take up?). But it would be of great value and significance.

Actually, www.paulsmith.com took up so little in the way of bandwidth that it was over a year after I left before they noticed that my site was still taking up a small corner of one of their corporate servers. A polite, restrained email notified me that I might want to find my own server now and thus the chase was on. I call it a chase. What actually transpired was this: they sent me the notification... and, um, that was it. The site just died through sloth. I don't know what the opposite of 'webmaster' is, but I was it. Then I got an email from a reader saying something about how wonderful the column is — you know how they do — and wanting to know who hosted my web site. Funny question, but in the circumstances, intriguing. Looking at his email address, I noticed that his host was his surname

appended with 'net.com'. I was more intrigued now. Of course I replied to the gentleman. I do with all my readers' email, although the order in which I reply is determined by a complex pattern of heuristics that involves those emails containing the phrase 'I love your column', Soundex-parsed and moved up the list, while those which contain 'Your column sucks' take a bit longer to get to.

Anyway, I explained my position and the guy told me he is actually a young web host. Ah, I think: not long in business, keen, eager. No, he corrects me; and here he makes his crucial marketing flaw: young, as in only fifteen years old. Gulp! Can I trust my site to someone still in school? Or am I being ageist? Finally, I decided that anyone who has to ask his mum's permission to stay up for Seinfeld ('I *know* it's a school night') really has better things to do than look after my site. I've been doing some work for Carlton Online and they kindly offered to host the thing for me. Perfect, I thought, until it transpired that the otherwise really laid-back IT manager wouldn't give me ftp access to the server. I would have to email him the files and he'd upload

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them as and when he got round to it. The kid was starting to look good again. But I've gone back to Virtual Internet <www.vi.net>, a company I've used for clients before. I immediately got a horrible page up there, just something to get an email link. Then I was knocked back: another email, this time about what a waste of space the site was and how very disappointed the reader was. 'But nice column, by the way.' So I replied, quickly, by fixing up the site, quoting his email and linking to his, frankly, lesser site. VI has my site running smoothly now, with FrontPage Extensions which means there's a cool little search page and a feedback page. But those who decide to feedback, please note: heuristics still apply.

www.paulsmith.com