

# Comparative Analysis Report

## for A2 Hosting

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## 1. Executive Summary

For this report, we evaluated the A2 Hosting support area via comparative analysis with its direct, partial, indirect, and analogous competitors: GoDaddy, Squarespace, Stack Overflow, Content Management System Documentation, Google search, YouTube, Twitter, and GitHub. All the competitors are examined along 25 criteria that spanned over the categories including interactivity, aesthetics, cost, organization, usability, and target population. A Competitor Feature Evaluation Matrix was created for effective comparison.

We came up with the following 7 findings: 1) the A Hosting support service has not taken full advantage of social media; 2) the A2 Hosting support area provides neither much reviewability, nor much customization capability on the landing page to its users; 3) the support area lacks the system to encourage peer engagement; 4) the support pages lack customer engaging material; 5) it is easy for users to get lost while looking for the help they require; 6) the search function on the support area lacks expected internet search features; 7) A2 Hosting offers very little education to users who are totally new to website development.

## 2. Introduction

A2 Hosting is a hosting service company based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. They were established in 2001 and have grown rapidly for a small company ever since. A2 Hosting's reputation revolves around their quality customer service, fast hosting server speed, and excellent server uptime. The company offers a variety of hosting services such as web, reseller, VPS, managed, cloud, and dedicated hosting. In addition to offering these services, A2 Hosting is dedicated to supporting the newest technologies related to the web including Wordpress, Drupal, Joomla, PrestaShop, and MODX. Since A2 Hosting supports so many different types of services, their audience is equally as diverse. They are able to support single users managing personal websites to large companies hosting a large amount of websites.

Our group is primarily interested in evaluating A2 Hosting's support areas. These areas broadly include a blog, community area, tickets area, contact area, and their Knowledge Base. Each of these support areas is comprised of specific information that is meant to better service customers. The blog provides customers with recent information about anything new regarding A2 Hosting. Knowledge Base is A2 Hosting's personal database filled with resources on how to resolve most problems customers may experience. The community area is a forum where customers are able to interact with each other and A2

Hosting staff to help solve a variety of problems or just to discuss new technology. The tickets area is where customers are able to formally submit a ticket with information about their problem and request aid from A2 Hosting staff. The contact area is where customers can contact A2 Hosting staff through a variety of ways including live chat, email, or phone call.

At this point of our research, after conducting interviews and distributing a survey, we have gained a large amount of knowledge about what users think of A2 Hosting's support areas and how they solve their problems. Moving forward, we desire to understand specifically how we can improve the support areas and identify the successes and failures A2 Hosting exhibits. Therefore, we have decided to conduct a competitive analysis. This method is used to compare and contrast similar support services in order to provide insight into what could be improved for A2 Hosting's support areas and generally how they provide their users with help. This method will also help us discover and pinpoint certain norms and design patterns utilized by well-known support services so that we can suggest the implementation of the most successful ones. We specifically identified competitors in four categories: direct competitors, partial competitors, indirect competitors, and analogous systems. From our collective research on the competitors, we composed a Competitor Feature Evaluation Matrix where we compared A2 Hosting and the competitors on various criteria that we believe are vital for a support service. Analyzing the comparisons with the matrix is vital in understanding where A2 Hosting succeeds and where the company can improve on. Our findings and recommendations draw from all the information gathered about the most successful portions of the competitors.

### 3. Methods

In this stage of our research, we conducted a competitive analysis in order to examine the successes and failures of A2 Hosting's service area. This method helped us determine what makes A2 Hosting's service area unique when compared across other similar services and products. By identifying A2 Hosting's competition, we are also able to realize what is generally expected in service areas.

Firstly, we had to identify the specific companies, products, and services that would serve as points of comparison with A2 Hosting. We collaboratively brainstormed on as many competitors as we could and also referred to our previous survey question that asked users to list other hosting services they have used. We then narrowed our choices down to 10 competitors and distributed them evenly between the 5 group members to research. In this time, we also developed certain criteria that we would rate the competitors on as we conduct the research. We created a list of 25 criteria that spanned over the categories interactivity, aesthetics, cost, organization, usability, and target population. From our previous knowledge and other analyses, we decided these categories are the most appropriate to use when making comparisons and the most useful to find information on.

In the space below we have provided a table that illustrates the categories and criteria we have chosen, and which category the criteria belong in.

Interactivity	Aesthetics	Cost	Organization	Usability	Population
Engagement	Consistency of design	Price	Clear categorization	Multiple languages	Variance

Availability	Image use	Time vs cost	Content relevance	Novice friendly	
Methods of contacting	Color scheme	Membership / registration requirement	Clear navigation	Multiple channels / devices	
Information access methods				Direct vs hierarchical access	
Response time				Redundancy	
Peer integrated content				Variety of formats	
Reviewability				Use of outside resources	

After conducting a substantial amount of research on the competitors, we came back together as a group to discuss and compare the information we found on the competition. After we went more in-depth with our discussion, we decided on 8 final competitors. The ones we chose are GoDaddy's service, Squarespace's help section, Stack Overflow, Content Management System (CMS) Support Documentation, Google, YouTube, Twitter, and GitHub's help center. GoDaddy was identified as a direct competitor of A2 Hosting, while Stack Overflow, Squarespace, and CMS Support were seen as partial competitors. Google, YouTube, and Twitter were all considered indirect competitors and GitHub was the only analogous system identified.

In the space below, we have given descriptions of each of the identified competitors in order to provide a better understanding of who they are.

- **GoDaddy:** primarily an internet domain registrar and web hosting company
- **Squarespace:** a software as a service content management system specifically composed of a website builder, blogging platform, and hosting service. generally allows users to create and maintain websites and blogs
- **Stack Overflow:** a question and answer website that acts like a technical forum for people interested in programming
- **Content Management System (CMS):** any system that allows publishing, editing, and modifying content in addition to maintenance from a central interface
- **Google search:** the most popular web search engine on the web
- **YouTube:** a video sharing website where users can upload, share, and view videos
- **Twitter:** an online social networking service that allows users to send, post, and view "tweets", short messages limited at 140 characters
- **GitHub:** a web-based hosting service that enables version control for software development projects

Using the information we gathered, we created a Competitor Feature Evaluation Matrix in order to most effectively compare the competitors with A2 Hosting. The matrix contains a list of criteria that was carefully chosen by our team. The criteria demonstrate features that we critically reasoned were vital for a

support area. Every chosen competitor and A2 Hosting were all rated on a scale of 1-5 for each of the distinct criteria. We represented 1 as being very low or almost non-existent and 5 as being very high. In addition to rating the competitors and our client, we also included a brief note to aid us when analyzing the information we collected. After the ratings were complete, we analyzed how each competitor compared with A2 Hosting. For each criteria that a competitor rated higher than A2 Hosting, that criteria was noted and discussed more in-depth. This allowed us to pinpoint areas that A2 Hosting fell short in and areas that we could make potential recommendations for. Analyzing the ratings also revealed the areas that A2 Hosting was really successful in. We made subsequent recommendations and findings based on these analyses.

Please refer to the appendix for the complete Competitor Feature Evaluation Matrix. It's composed of the specific criteria and categories each criteria belong to on the left column and the names of our client and the other competitors on the top row. Each cell contains the rating, as evaluated by a member of our group, with some note about that specific criteria as it applies to the competitor.

## 4. Findings & Recommendations

### **Finding 1: The A2Hosting support service has not taken full advantage of using Twitter. (Severity - 4/5)**

Users of A2 Hosting, love to get the sense that they can get their problems solved through person-to-person communication. That is why users would prefer to use the ticket and the live-chat services. However, actually by utilizing Twitter, A2 Hosting can also ensure such person-to-person communication service to its users, and at the same time it can reduce overhead on tickets. In addition, based on Twitter's own functional and social features, users using twitter to ask questions would not have a high expectation of A2 Hosting's reply time. We have found that although A2 Hosting has already used Twitter to solve some problems of its users, but it has not yet actively taken full advantage of using Twitter. Also, the location of the "tweets of A2 Hosting" widget in the support page of the website is not noticeable enough, and the title of the part ("Our Latest Tweets") does not give enough hint on the exact services A2 Hosting provides through its twitter account(giving technical instructions and support services).

#### **Recommendation 1:**

A2 Hosting can make better use of twitter to provide technical instructions and support to its users. For instance, it can show more presence on Twitter and improve the reply time to users' tweets. Furthermore, in order to call its users' attention to its Twitter service, A2 Hosting should place the "tweets" widget in a more noticeable area in a nicely looking way insides its support area. Also, A2 Hosting can change the title of its part to words like "Contact Us and Find Solutions via Twitter" so as to encourage users to raise questions that are casual and easy to attend on Twitter.

### **Finding 2: The A2 Hosting support area provides neither much reviewability, nor much customization capability on the landing page. (Severity - 5/5)**

If users find some articles very helpful to them in the Knowledgebase, they cannot easily record those articles inside A2 Hosting for future reference. Also, A2 Hosting does not record their reading history within which users may find those useful articles as well as recognize what they have read so as to avoid repetitive reading. Furthermore, there is no customized landing page for each user, which indicates there is a chance that users cannot immediately get to the tools and the areas they each finds most useful.

**Recommendation 2:**

Reviewability and customization capability are both important to users. The A2 Hosting support area should enable users to record Knowledgebase articles and forum posts they find useful. For instance, there can be a sentence “save for future reference” under each Knowledgebase article, and once a user clicks on this sentence, the related article would be recorded into a “Reference List” shown in the support area which users can refer to in the future. Also, the A2 Hosting support area should automatically record users’ reading history and make it visible to users. Whenever a user reads an article, this article would be recorded to a list called “Articles I Read Before” provided to users inside the A2 Hosting support area. The title of that article can also have a different color from titles of other unread articles just as what Google does to the pages its users have visited, so that A2 Hosting’s users can avoid repetitive reading. Furthermore, A2 Hosting should provide a customized landing page for each user. A2 Hosting should analyze its users’ behavioral patterns in the support area and show the tools and areas each customer use most to him/her on the support area landing page so as to improve its customers’ efficiency. Squarespace has done a good job and may be a reference in terms of providing customized landing page.

**Finding 3: The A2 Hosting support area lacks peer engagement and the system to encourage peer engagement. (Severity - 4.5/5)**

Users do not have the capability to rate the usefulness of Knowledgebase articles, and neither can they rate feedback from other users in the forum. Consequently, users cannot get useful information from each other.

**Recommendation 3:**

Users should be able to rate the usefulness of Knowledgebase articles in the A2 Hosting support area. It can be like what Godaddy does, that under each article there could be a button “it’s useful” which every user can click. Then users can filter search results based on each article’s “usefulness” provided by crowdsourcing. Furthermore, users should be able to rate feedback from other users in the forum, so that feedback with more values could stand out and customers can take better use of such feedback. Also, the reputation system can be utilized to encourage peer engagement. Active users in the Knowledgebase/forum can have badges indicating their contribution.

Is this article helpful?



Still got stuck?

OPEN A TICKET

*Figure 1 - User feedback, helps understand the engagement*

**Finding 4 : The A2 Hosting support pages lack customer engaging materials.(Severity - 4/5)**

Although there is a plethora of information available on the A2 Hosting support pages, they have virtually no videos, images, or interactive elements to allow clients to be able to solve their problems in a less mundane way.

**Recommendation 4:**

Included videos, and other interactive learning tools to allow clients to solve their problems as well as solve other issue they may come across in the future. There are many competitors that offer videos and interaction, but the site that does it the best is squarespace.com. This site has interactive learning modules that clients can use to not only solve problems, but to learn new ways to do things. In addition they have visual step by steps that read more like furniture directions than technical advice. This allows the user to follow along in an intuitive flow.

**Finding 5: It is easy for users to get lost while looking for the help they require(Severity - 5/5)**

The A2 Hosting Knowledge base lacks any real categorization standard. There are no identifiable categories or subsets of information. This can create a circular navigation effect for users who are searching the same topic over and over again. Having to navigate this way may be frustrating to users who will then search another site for the information they seek.

**Recommendation 5: Create clear and identifiable categories based on the information users seek most.**

We feel that an evaluation of submitted tickets combined with anecdotal knowledge from the support staff would yield a list of categories that customers seek information about most. Once these categories are defined, a hierarchical structure can be used to create an easily navigable series of pages. GoDaddy.com does this fairly well. Immediately upon entering their support page, they offer quick links to the categories that users are most likely to seek. In addition to this GoDaddy.com also recommends other support pages based on the most closely related topics. This is the same type of predictive structure that online retailers



use to determine what customers may want to purchase based on the items they have recently viewed.

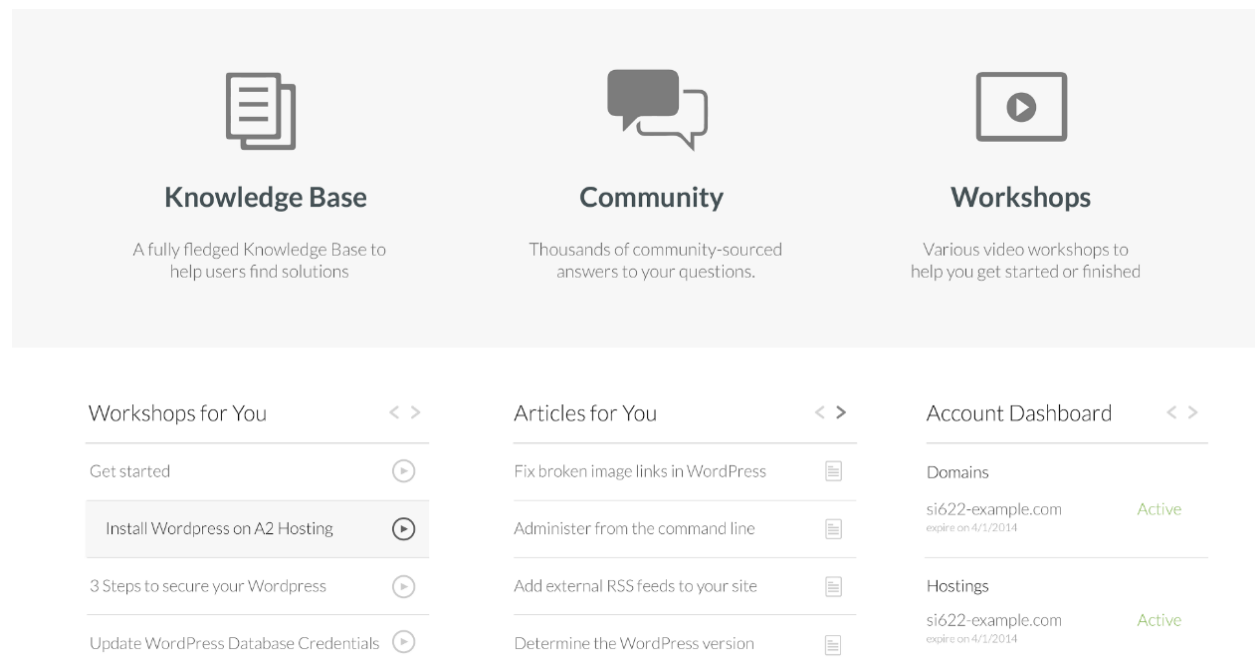


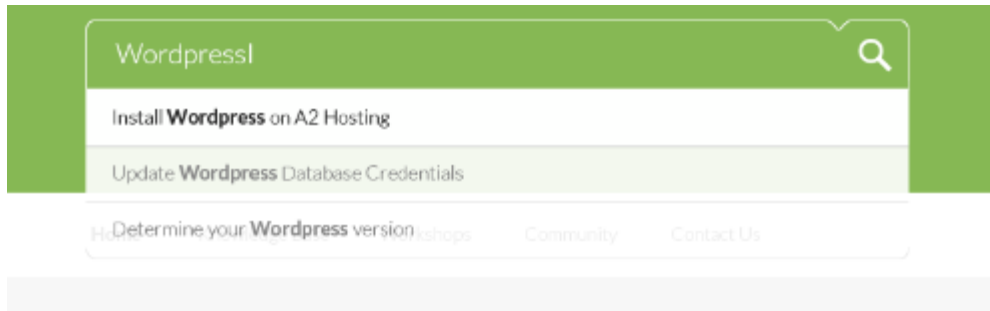
Figure 2- Redesigned landing page showing clearer categorization

**Finding 6: The search function on the A2 Hosting support site lacks the expected internet search features. (Severity - 4/5)**

While A2 Hosting does have a search bar, it lacks basic internet functionality. The most important of these functions are autocomplete and popular answer ranking. Not only must the user type the entire word or phrase, they must also decide on their own which are the most relevant links for their problem. While these may be ridiculous first world problems, they are things that customers have come to expect from top tier web pages.

**Recommendation 6: Incorporate Google search or a similar search method into the A2 Hosting support page.**

Google makes it very easy to embed a search bar into any web page. A2 Hosting should take advantage of this and utilize existing technology to create the ideal user search experience. Sites such as GoDaddy.com and StackOverflow.com have used these features very successfully. In addition, the results are then ordered by the most relevance and the most popular.



*Figure 3 - A modern and helpful search*

## 5. Discussion

The competitive analysis generally provided useful insight into the successes and failures of A2 Hosting's support areas. However, there were some shortcomings of the study we would like to address. The first shortcoming is that our team is made up of a relatively small amount of people. Our team is only five members so we are unable to legitimately generalize our analyses. Having a team of five also means we had a limited amount of manpower to analyze each of the competitors, so our analyses were most likely not as complete as it could have been. Since no one on our team was an expert in any of the support areas we examined, so we cannot assert that our analyses are definitive and completely accurate. We recommend having more people, possibly professionals in the field, evaluate the competitors on the criteria we have chosen. A shortcoming regarding our criteria is that they were chosen based off the team's perceptions and beliefs. Our team could potentially have certain biases that were revealed in our chosen criteria. If we were to improve on the study, we would refer to well-known resources and research in order to compose more evidence-based criteria. The final shortcoming we would like to address is that because each member of the group rated two different competitors each, there was subjectivity in the ratings on the chosen criteria. One group member's perception of a specific criteria could possibly differ from another group member's perception. We did not establish standardization of the rating system nor did we check for inter-rater reliability prior to analyzing our results.

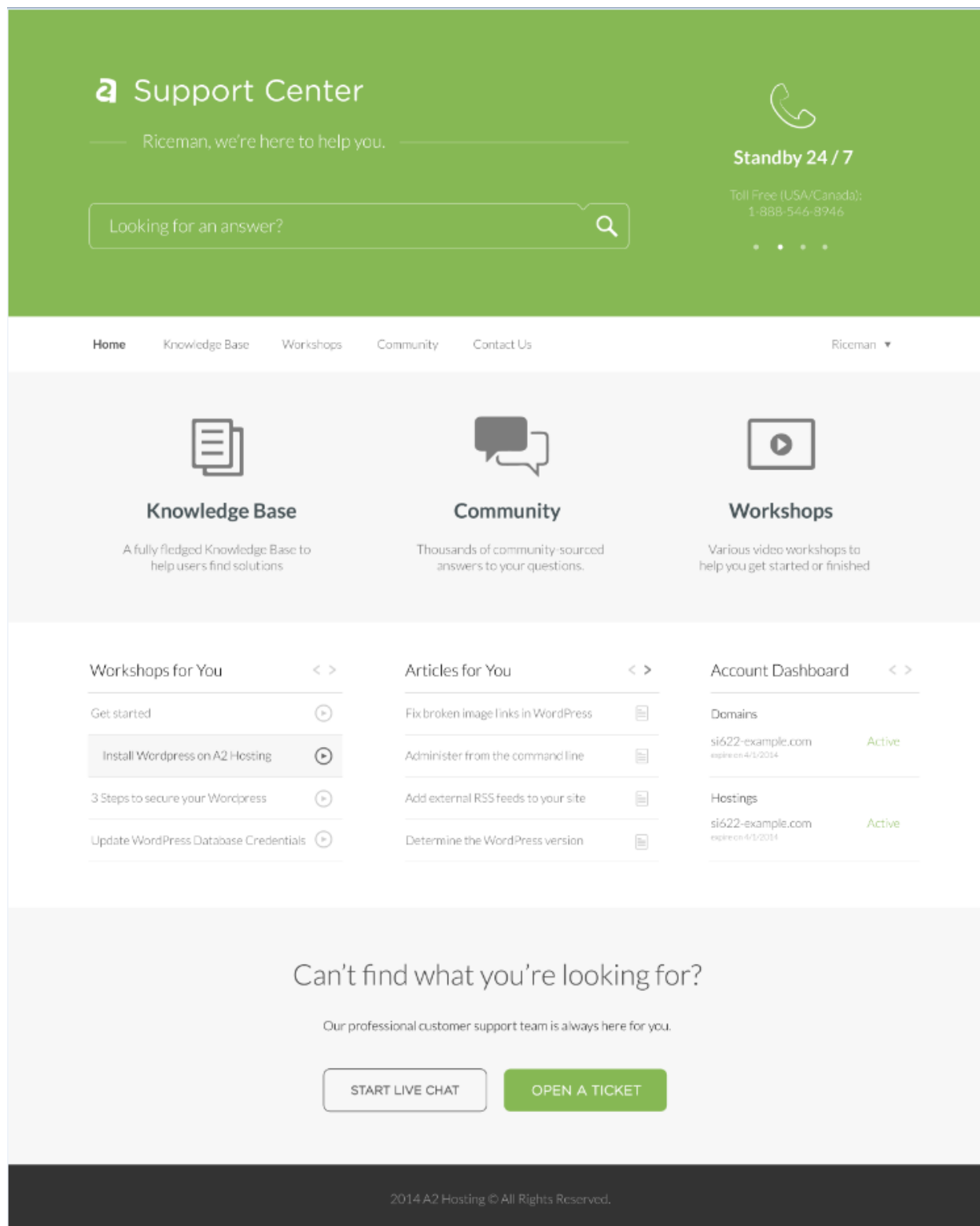
The competitive analysis allowed us to narrow down the areas that we would like to further analyze and conduct more research on. Performing a heuristic evaluation on the support areas would provide evidence for the usability of the support areas in general. The heuristic evaluation would actually contribute more accurate and robust information compared with the competitive analysis because heuristic evaluation is a more exact and precise method of distinguishing and recognizing usability flaws. We are also looking into conducting usability testing on the specific support areas of the site that we recommended improving or changing in some way. Usability testing can give real user insight into how a specified area can be improved in terms of usability, which will provide us and our client with invaluable information.

## 6. Conclusion

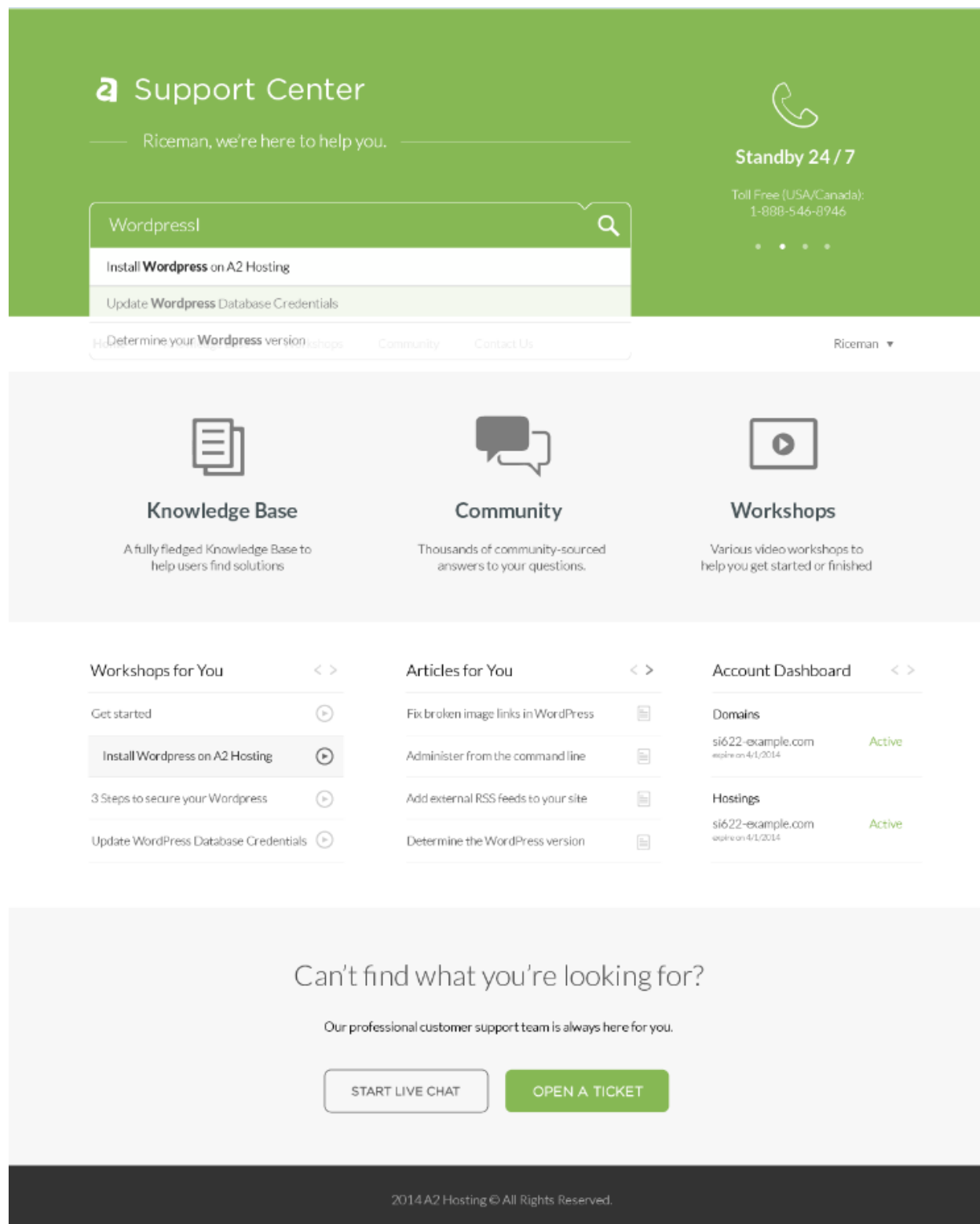
In conclusion, We have analysed competitors and service providers that are direct, indirect, partial and analogous competitors to A2 Hosting. They give us a lot of insight into various ways of presenting information to customers and people looking for help. This analysis has brought up a lot of interesting and useful recommendations for A2 Hosting. There are multiple features that different websites and services do best that A2 Hosting can adopt and modify to fit its needs. A lot of findings and recommendations depict the same thing. Based on the recommendations, we have come up with a few redesigns that are attached as appendices.

## **7. Appendix**

### **7.1 Redesigned support page**



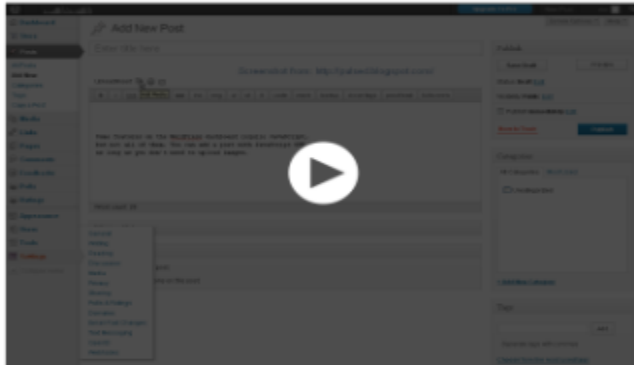
## 7.2 Redesigned search



### 7.3 Redesigned Article Page

## Install WordPress using the A2 QuickInstaller

This article describes how to use the A2 QuickInstaller to install WordPress on your server. We've also made a video for you to walk you through the process.



### Installing WordPress ▲

1. Use SSH to log in to your system as the root user.



To use the A2 QuickInstaller, you must log in as the root user using SSH. You cannot use the serial console in the VPS Control Panel to run the A2 QuickInstaller.

2. To use the A2 QuickInstaller, you must log in as the root user using SSH. You cannot use the serial console in the VPS Control Panel to run the A2 QuickInstaller.

```
sh /usr/sbin/quickinstaller.sh
```

3. To start the A2 QuickInstaller, type the following command, and then press ENTER
4. Under Application Installers, type the option number for CMS/CRM, and then press ENTER.
5. On the CMS/CRM Menu, type the option number for Wordpress, and then press ENTER. The A2 QuickInstaller updates your system, and then begins the installation process.

### Testing and Configuring the Installation ▾

#### More Information ▾

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Administer from the command line

Add external RSS feeds to your site

Determine the WordPress version

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Can't find what you're looking for?

Our professional customer support team is always here for you.

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[OPEN A TICKET](#)

[ASK A QUESTION](#)

## What's the best way to install Wordpress in A2 Hosting?

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3 answers • A2 Hosting offered the best answer



## Any tips on how to SEO your website yourself?

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1 answer



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4 answers • Riceman offered the best answer



## Phasellus nec ante sed nulla rutrum?

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3 answers • Jlye offered the best answer



## How to configure WordPress to use a temporary URL?

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2 answers

### Tag Cloud



Prev **1** 2 3 ... 6 Next