

Clarity Hosting Recommendations

created by:
[Clarity »](#)

division:
networking

updated:
2018

Clarity Hosting Recommendations

There are many hosting possibilities for every type of online property. One thing that's important to understand is that your hosting provider or solution can change. Many clients get hung up on selecting a hosting provider, when in reality, many clients will upgrade and switch their hosting provider as their hosting needs change with their online business. Providing Hosting recommendations typically depends on the level of traffic and type of security a Client needs. Many clients are looking for the optimal balance between meeting some minimum requirements during the initial launch of their project, and then scaling up as needed. However, many clients already have a site that gets a lot of traffic and therefore need a more robust environment to begin with. Either way, Clarity is happy to help provide some hosting recommendations here for your project.

As a prerequisite to hosting recommendations, we strongly suggest clients review the Clarity Hardware Requirements documentation that will outline specific hosting requirements and server recommendations. This document is oriented toward outlining different solution providers and general costs we've experienced in the past, whereas the Clarity Hardware Requirements document goes into the server, hardware and networking requirements and recommendation level of detail. That document is oriented toward the technical staff, whereas this document focuses on business decision-making.

| Hosting

Many clients get hung up on selecting a hosting provider, when in reality, many clients will upgrade and switch their hosting provider as their hosting needs change with their online business.



General Hosting Concepts

To begin, it's helpful to confirm if there are any major requirements that we'll need to keep in mind for your application – here are a few key categories we'll need to know more about to provide an optimal hosting recommendation:

Redundancy

Does the hosting need to be redundant (i.e. have failover), and if so what is the maximum time the application can be offline before it becomes a business issue?

- This will typically drive the level of redundancy required (and therefore cost too – the more redundant, the more infrastructure will be necessary).
- Most businesses can handle some downtime such as 5-10 minutes of downtime or even up to an hour, but others simply cannot and would need to have a solution that immediately “fails over” to a backup environment within seconds if not milliseconds.

HIPAA Compliance

Does the hosting need to meet HIPAA compliance requirements?

- Clarity has a specific whitepaper and articles covering HIPAA compliance in detail – however, the general question would be whether the application has extensive HIPAA compliance needs or if there are relatively simple forms that would have very small amounts of HIPAA/PHI (Protected Health Information) data needs.
- Typically the hosting environment can become significantly more expensive if HIPAA is required due to the robust security necessary – there are 3rd party and cloud-based hosting / platforms that can handle providing HIPAA compliance for just the specific aspects of the site that need HIPAA compliance if the amount of HIPAA data is reasonably small.

Traffic Variance

Does the hosting solution need to handle significant spikes in traffic?

- Does your site tend to get major spikes in traffic that are greater than 50% of the normal traffic the site would see on average throughout the day? This would typically be due to a major marketing campaign or similar scheduled events triggering users to visit the site?
- Would there possibly be a non-predictable event or events that would cause significant traffic spikes?

Unique Requirements

Are there other unique components / requirements for your site(s)?

- Some international businesses require that the data collected on the website be stored at a data center within the country.

HELPFUL QUESTION:

- Do you have any traffic history analytics to help predict future traffic?



Shared Hosting

For a typical, low traffic site (50k visitors a month or less), we recommend one of the shared hosting plans below:

Managed.com (PowerDNN)

Hosting with Managed.com costs roughly \$50/month. If your site traffic is extremely low, it could be slightly less. If it's rather high or has major spikes, it could be slightly more. This group provides robust backups, 24/7 support and overall has a solid reputation for hosting the content management systems that Clarity typically employs for Client projects (i.e. DNN/DotNetNuke, WordPress, etc.).

Provider of Your Choice

This option can work but we highly recommend reviewing with Clarity before going this route. Specifically, groups like Network Solutions, GoDaddy and other similar offerings have limitations with their shared hosting that dramatically reduce site performance and manageability. If you have an existing shared plan, we encourage you to review with Clarity before deciding if that plan will still suit the business best with the new platform you'll be investing in.

Hosting Internally

If your team has internal hosting options and prefers to go that route, we would simply need to coordinate with and discuss the technical requirements with your team. Generally speaking though, this isn't a problem for us to set up and help your team manage.

Clarity Shared Hosting

A more expensive option but less overall than getting a dedicated server. Clarity has a dozen dedicated servers that are selectively managed for a small group of Clients who each host on those servers. There are typically 4-8 sites on any given dedicated server (standard hosting has between 80 - 200 sites per server) and we manage where those sites are based on the server's capabilities, the site's traffic and overall resource usage. If your team has custom needs, this is a great option to enable robust capabilities without the full cost of a dedicated environment.



| Robust Hosting Options

For more robust hosting options that may be driven by significant traffic, the desire to directly control the servers, or possibly security or other requirements, we've provided some standard recommendations below



AWS (Amazon Web Services)

AWS provides a robust, scalable option for hosting, and although it's more expensive than a shared hosting plan (typically beginning in the \$200/month range) it offers a dedicated server environment (via virtualized / virtual machine model) that is typically going to be much more performant than a shared environment with significant loads applied. It also has "effectively" infinite scalability and robust options for failover, CDN (content delivery network), load-balancing, etc. In addition, AWS is generally very well supported and a favorite of large businesses. If your team is considering hosting in a dedicated environment and has the need for such an environment, AWS is a recommended option to at least evaluate and compare. One of the major downsides to AWS is their very minimal / spartan levels of support. Typically you would need to engage Clarity or another partner / internal resource to provide support.



Microsoft Azure

Microsoft's answer to AWS is Azure. It's a very robust hosting option that compares very closely to AWS on most key points (pricing, options available for failover, redundancy, load-balancing, etc.) but also enables some more robust options. For example, this tends to be a highly recommended option for HIPAA compliance needs. Microsoft has baked in their encrypted-at-rest database models and other key security capabilities into their Azure offering at very affordable prices. Other dedicated HIPAA hosting options cost up to four times as much as Azure. These capabilities would otherwise need to be programmed into the application directly or paid for at much higher licensing costs if purchased independently of the Azure offering. Azure also tends to work very well for organizations that are accustomed to and supporting a Microsoft based environment.





LiquidWeb

Clarity has worked with LiquidWeb for almost a decade, and during that time has had very solid results working with them. They provide a scalable architecture for dedicated servers (similar to AWS) and enable very robust capabilities for security, failover, load-balancing and generally more hands-on support for 24/7 management of your server(s). We've worked with many Clients who've opted to set up dedicated servers with LiquidWeb since they offer a more traditional / hands-on hosting support option. Their hosting costs would tend to begin at roughly \$250/month for a dedicated server, but includes hands on support.



Rackspace

Rackspace provides extremely robust service and generally compares with LiquidWeb on capabilities but has more physical presence and overall slightly faster and more robust support. Rackspace also tends to cost roughly 2-3x as much as LiquidWeb or other similar dedicated hosting options. There is a trade-off between cost vs. support. We absolutely support working with Rackspace if the budget is there, or you're already hosting with Rackspace.



Internal, Colocation, or Other Options

If your team has an alternative hosting option and prefers to go that route, we would simply need to coordinate with and discuss the technical requirements for your project. Generally speaking though, this isn't a problem for us to set up and help your team manage over time.



Recommend Add-ons

Clarity highly recommends key add-ons, and although this isn't a complete listing, it will help generate conversation for key areas of discussion:



CDN & Caching

Clarity recommends Cloudflare and Incapsula for CDN (Content Delivery Network) and server-side caching. CDN now delivers security, DNS and performance improvements for a site/application. It tends to be a service that will provide “last mile” capabilities that can have a very dramatic positive impact on performance, security and overall manageability of a site. Without going into more detail, we highly recommend considering these options if your site will be running internationally, need to be highly performant, needs redundancy / load-balancing at a relatively low cost, etc.



Analytics

Google Analytics (GA) is the primary default analytic tool that most Clients use, and although we strongly recommend having GA, we also recommend considering additional add-ons. For example, there are several analytics options that will provide detailed information about the companies visiting your site and allow your sales/marketing team to target those potential customers later on.



A/B & Multivariate Testing

There are robust 3rd party capabilities for testing and validating different presentations on key workflows (i.e. promos, colors, messaging, etc.) of your site. We recommend A/B testing if you believe there is a potential for positive improvement to your results by simplifying or adjusting your site's presentation or messaging. Generally, any site can benefit from A/B testing and it's a matter of putting the time and effort into optimizing.



Chat & Feedback Tools

There are a number of robust 3rd party tools that can plug into the site to allow users to provide feedback, chat with support, etc. and we're happy to review these with your team. These tools can help to validate the investment in the web experience you're serving up to your clients and partners. It's much better to get negative or constructive feedback from a client than to lose them altogether. Studies show that customer satisfaction goes up when users feel like their opinion matters.

HELPFUL QUESTION:

Have you considered and planned for future growth, seasonal traffic spikes and more?

