

## Website Service Platforms: A Practical Comparison

One of the first decisions you'll make when evaluating prospective website services is which operating system your site will run on. There are several front-running contenders in the industry, each with its own set of advantages. The online service you ultimately choose will likely have their own preferred operating system. In this article, we outline the top four solutions in today's web service industry.

### Primary Operating Systems

Linux: Renowned as one of the most stable, reliable operating systems, Linux is a popular choice of many online hosting companies. It's inexpensive, easy to configure, and can be implemented in a quick, efficient fashion.

Windows: Running on the widely popular Microsoft platform, the Windows operating system is utilized by many website services, largely due to its vast community network and comprehensive support program.

Unix: Despite its many similarities to Linux, Unix is rarely the operating system of choice when it comes to Internet services. A highly specialized platform, it also comes with a higher price tag and more hardware restrictions.

Macintosh: Very few web page hosting companies use Macintosh as the operating system on their web services, as it's also highly specialized and a bit costlier.

### How Will Your OS Access the Server?

When it comes to accessing the website service server, different operating systems will use different means of getting there. FTP access is generally the most common medium used by Windows and Linux systems. This method entails uploading your content files from your local drive directly to your web server. Linux also offers Telnet, or SSH, server access, which allows more tech-savvy users to access and modify files directly on the Internet server rather than replacing them with new versions.

### Will Your OS Play Nice with Popular Browsers?

This is a biggie. If one or more of today's popular web browsers don't communicate well with your operating system, you could have a major problem reaching a certain segment of online customers. Each OS has a host of specific web browsers that are compatible. You'll find that both Windows and Linux online services are well-suited to Microsoft Explorer, Firefox, Opera, and more.

## **Does Your OS Speak Your Language?**

Web page hosting servers running on Windows and Linux generally display content in HTML and JavaScript, the two most prevalent Internet languages you'll find today. You may see a slight variation in file naming based on the operating system (.htm for Windows versus .html for Linux), but both will render the same end result. In addition, both Windows and Linux support FrontPage.

Of the more advanced programming languages, both Windows and Linux web services support both CGI and Perl. This is especially important for online companies that require customers to submit data via forms—if you make heavy use of forms, be sure to verify with your prospective website service that they offer CGI or an alternate method.

Server-side scripting is yet another option. More and more online hosting companies are offering this option, which provides more versatility in processing forms and performing other functions. Some examples of server-side scripts preferred by many website services are ASP, PHP, and ColdFusion.

## **How Will Your Data be Stored?**

For dynamic web sites, a database is an essential component. Most Internet servers use MySQL or Access, the two most popular database applications in today's market. MySQL can be used on both Linux and Windows operating systems, while Access (a Microsoft product) runs only on the Windows platform.

## **Will Your OS be Secure?**

While Linux is generally viewed as the more stable of the two platforms when compared to Windows, the reality is that that a stable OS does not guarantee 100% safe data. Both operating systems are susceptible to breaches in security. The most effective way to ensure the protection of your data is to start with the source: your web page hosting company. Your web service generally has the most power to take measures to protect your web site, no matter what platform it's running on.

## **So, How Important Is It?**

While some operating systems have certain advantages over others, we maintain that the most crucial factor is nailing down an online hosting service with all the bells and whistles you're looking for, a proven track record of performance and reliability, and a value-priced package. Once you get all

that, the choice of OS should become secondary, as the web service will make its own recommendations for how to proceed.