How to Survive Hosting Downtime



This is something I posted at Webstix but I thought it was something worth posting separately here. There are ways to minimize damage if your website hosting fails. It’s best to have some (most) of these things set up ahead of time. Once the website is down, there’s not much that can be done.

Tips to Survive Hosting Downtime (Webstix.com)

If you want to survive your website and email hosting not working, there are some things you can. Here are some tips:

1. **Have a backup email account.**
   I like GMail. I forward all emails I get to GMail. This protects me in case my laptop decides to die as well.
2. **Tune your DNS records.**
   Set your MX (email) record in your DNS down to 1 hour (the “TTL” or “time to live”). This record is not like a website (“A” record) where it needs to be set high to have the website load faster. Email can take a few seconds longer. If you do this, then you can easily redirect your email to another host if necessary.
3. **Have other means of communication set up.**
   This is where a Facebook page and Twitter account can come in really handy.
4. **Have an updated list of your clients ready.**
   Have your in-house system / CRM up to date so that if your website and email are down for an extended amount of time, you are able to use another email account (that GMail.com account I mentioned) to send out a note saying how people can contact you.
5. **Set up additional DNS servers with another host.**
   One reason there could be an outage might not be the web servers themselves but it could be a DNS server failure. That’s why there are typically 2 servers listed. You can have more than that though. Set up 2 more servers that check the main server (automatically) and copy what’s there. Have these set up at another host. What will then happen is, these backup DNS servers will take over if the main ones go down.
6. **Check your domain name information.**
   One reason your website might be down might not be the hosting at all. Your domain name might have expired. If you didn’t get an email notice about it, then maybe the email address used to register your domain name is not correct. Check to make sure it is. Domain Registrars send out a message once a year asking you do to this. Worst case, your domain name is not even registered to you or your company. Make sure it is is your name – not in the name of your website developer. We never do this.

If you have these measures in place, then you should be able to better manage crisis situations like this. When you fail to plan, you plan to fail, right?

Website Monitoring

Of course, you might not know your website is down unless you have a website monitoring service. What they do is check for a word or phrase on a web page (your home page for example) on your website every 5 minutes. I use one called Site Up Time and I like it a lot. I can have messages sent to my phone (text/SMS) or an email address.

Website Mirroring

And then one more thing to do would be to set up a mirror. A website mirror is basically a copy of your website on another server. Sometimes they are used for staging purposes but are mainly used as a backup or another server that can be switched to (sometimes automatically) if another server goes down.

I could not find anything good as far as a website mirroring service out there. They must exist. Most of what I found was instructions on how to do it. It's something you could pay someone to set up easily enough. If anyone knows of one, please post it in the comments area below.

-Tony

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