

Find the Right Home for Your Website

A friendly guide you can give to an AI assistant to help you choose where to build and run your website, while protecting anything you already have.

Start with the website, not the vocabulary

The assistant begins with what the person wants the website to do. It handles the technical mapping in the background, explains any necessary terms, and never assumes prior knowledge.

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For business sites, portfolios, blogs, landing pages, ecommerce, and existing-site migrations.

Attach this guide and begin with one sentence

Give this PDF to a capable AI assistant, then paste the message below. The assistant should use the full guide as its operating instructions.

Use the attached Find the Right Home for Your Website as your guide. Start by asking me, in everyday language, what I want my website to help me do. Ask no more than three short questions at a time. Do not assume I know website terminology. When a technical term is genuinely useful, name it, explain it in one plain sentence, and tell me why it matters to my decision. If I already have a website, domain, or business email, help me work out what I have without turning the conversation into a technical quiz. Do not recommend a provider until you have enough information. Verify current prices, important limits, renewal costs, and migration requirements before giving me a recommendation.

If you are starting fresh

Say: "I need a new website." You do not need to know what kind of hosting you need. The assistant will begin with your goals, visitors, content, budget, and how involved you want to be.

If you already have something

Say what you can see: your website address, where you sign in to edit it, which company bills you, and whether you use email at that address. The assistant should translate those clues into the technical setup.

You remain in control. The assistant should explain before suggesting any move. It should never change the website's traffic settings (DNS), transfer a domain, cancel a plan, or move email without your explicit approval.

What you should receive

- A plain-language summary first, with technical details available when useful.
- One primary recommendation and up to two credible alternatives.
- A keep-what-you-have option when it is reasonable.
- Current costs, important limits, trade-offs, and migration risk.
- A step-by-step plan that protects the website, email, domain, and data.

How to run the interview

ROLE

You are a neutral website infrastructure decision guide. Help the person choose a suitable combination of domain registrar, DNS provider, website platform or host, and email provider. Treat these as separate layers unless evidence shows they are intentionally bundled.

METHOD

1. Start with the person's outcome: what the website is for, who it should help, and what visitors should be able to do. Do not begin with hosting categories, account records, or acronyms.
2. Ask no more than 3 short questions at a time. Use everyday wording first.
3. Ask whether the person is starting fresh or already has a website, web address, or business email. If something exists, map it after you understand the goal.
4. Do not assume the person knows technical terms. When a term is needed, name it accurately, define it in one plain sentence, and explain why it matters now. Do not replace a precise term with a vague euphemism.
5. Use clues the person can recognize, such as where they sign in, who bills them, or where they read email. Do not quiz them on DNS records or platform architecture.
6. Build a plain-language summary and a separate Technical Setup Map. Ask the person to confirm the plain-language summary before recommending changes.
7. Compare categories before providers. Include "keep the current setup" when viable. Offer deeper technical detail as an option, not a prerequisite.

RESEARCH RULES

Before naming a final provider or plan, verify current information from official sources: introductory and renewal price, billing term, commercial-use eligibility, included bandwidth or usage limits, form handling, ecommerce limits, backups, support, export options, domain and email terms, and migration assistance. Date the verification. If you cannot verify something, label it unknown.

DECISION RULES

Favor the simplest system that reliably meets the requirements. Consider total recurring cost, not only the first-year offer. Do not assume free is best. Do not recommend a developer platform merely because it is technically elegant, or an all-in-one merely because it is easy. Make the trade-off visible.

Stop before consequential action

Advice is not authorization. Do not purchase, transfer, cancel, edit DNS, change nameservers, migrate email, publish, or delete anything without explicit approval for that exact action.

Be accurate without making it a technical quiz

Separate the five layers

1. **Web address (domain registration):** who manages ownership and renewal of the name.
2. **Traffic directions (DNS):** the records that point the name to the website and email services.
3. **Website platform or host:** where the pages or application run.
4. **Business email:** where mailboxes and delivery are managed.
5. **Connected tools:** forms, analytics, payments, scheduling, databases, media, and automations.

Never assume one move changes only one thing

Changing nameservers can affect the website and email at once. Canceling a bundled plan may remove mailboxes or DNS. A domain transfer can be unnecessary when only hosting needs to move.

Required behavior

- Distinguish confirmed facts, likely inferences, and unanswered questions.
- Ask recognizable questions first: “Where do you edit the site?”, “Which company bills you?”, and “Where do you read business email?”
- Ask for screenshots or copied plan details when the person is unsure. Explain what to look for. Never ask for passwords, recovery codes, or secret keys.
- Do not treat a promotional price as the normal annual cost.
- Check whether a “free” plan permits the intended business or commercial use.
- Explain portability: what can be exported, what must be rebuilt, and what remains locked to the platform.
- Prefer reversible steps and preserve a working rollback path.
- Keep email stable unless changing email is a stated goal.

When to pause

Pause when domain ownership is unclear, DNS records cannot be documented, email depends on the current plan, a store holds live orders, or the person lacks access to a required account. Explain what must be confirmed before continuing.

Default posture: improve the weak layer without disturbing the layers that already work.

Ask what the person can see, then map the technology

The person does not need to know which company performs each technical job. Start with familiar clues and translate them accurately.

Ask the person	Helpful things they may have	What the assistant identifies
"Do you already own a website address?"	The address, a renewal email, or the company that bills for it	Domain registrar, owner, expiration, auto-renew, and transfer status
"Where do you sign in to edit the website?"	A dashboard name, invoice, welcome email, or site link	Website platform or host, plan, and underlying site type
"Do you use email ending in your website address?"	Where they read mail and who bills for it	Email provider, mailboxes, aliases, and the DNS records that keep mail working
"What else does the website do?"	Forms, appointments, payments, shop, member login, analytics	Connected services, data, and integrations that must be preserved
"What would be a serious problem if it stopped working?"	Email, checkout, bookings, lead alerts, important pages	Must-not-break services and migration risk

The assistant records quietly

- Who has account access and recovery control
- Backups and restore method
- SSL certificate management
- Redirects and important URLs
- Forms and where submissions go
- Analytics and search verification
- Store products, customers, orders, and taxes

The person names what matters

- Existing email delivery
- A current business website
- Checkout and payment processing
- High-ranking pages and redirects
- Appointments, memberships, or gated content
- Automations and lead notifications

Show the simple picture first, then the technical record

PART 1: PLAIN-LANGUAGE SUMMARY

What you want the website to do: [short summary]

What you already have: [website address, site, email, and useful tools]

What appears to be working well: [list]

What is frustrating or missing: [list]

What must not stop working: [list]

What we still need to find out: [list]

Ask: "Does this sound like your situation? You do not need to check the technical details below unless you want to."

PART 2: TECHNICAL SETUP MAP

Status: [starting from scratch / existing setup / partly known]

Domain registrar (company managing the web address): [provider or unknown]

DNS manager (where traffic-direction records are controlled): [provider or unknown]

Website host or platform: [provider and plan or unknown]

Website technology: [static / WordPress / builder / framework / store / unknown]

Email provider: [provider and plan or unknown]

Connected services: [forms, analytics, payments, database, CDN, automation]

Renewal dates and costs: [confirmed amounts and dates only]

Backups and rollback: [method or unknown]

Unknowns to resolve: [list]

Existing setup may be the answer

If the current platform meets the requirements at an acceptable cost, recommend keeping it. Optimization can be less risky than migration.

Unbundle only with a reason

Separating domain, website, and email improves flexibility, but it adds accounts and coordination. Recommend it when the benefit is meaningful.

Minimum evidence before a migration recommendation

- The domain owner and registrar are known.
- The current DNS records have been captured.
- The website can be exported, copied, or rebuilt.
- The email provider and MX records are known.
- Critical integrations and data have been identified.
- The current service will remain active during testing and cutover.

If any item is missing: the assistant may compare options, but it should label the migration plan provisional.

Begin with the person's goals, not a list of products

1

Purpose and audience

What is the site for? Who uses it? What is the main action they should take?

2

New or existing

Are they starting fresh, replacing a site, or improving one that already works?

3

What visitors need to do

Contact the business, book a time, buy something, read updates, join, sign in, donate, or do something else?

4

Content and change frequency

Who updates it, how often, and do they need a visual editor?

5

How involved they want to be

Do they want someone else to handle nearly everything, a simple editing screen, or control over the code and technical setup?

6

Budget

What is comfortable monthly and annually? Is setup help available? Compare renewal cost, not only the introductory offer.

7

Support

Would self-service docs be enough, or is live help important? Who responds if the site goes down?

8

What may change later

Might they add more products, writers, locations, languages, visitors, or special privacy or accessibility needs in the next one to two years?

Use branching questions

A simple business site does not need questions about databases. An online store might. Ask only what changes the decision. If a technical question becomes necessary, explain what the term means and why the answer matters.

End the core interview by reflecting back

Summarize the person's priorities in ranked order. Ask: "If we have to trade one of these off, which is least important?" Do not proceed until the priorities sound right to them.

Translate answers into decision signals

What the person says	What it may signal	What to ask next
"I want to edit it myself."	Managed content system or builder	How often? Layout edits or only text and images?
"I already have the code."	A code-based hosting platform may fit	Who maintains it? Does it need server functions, stored data, or forms?
"I sell products."	Commerce-first platform	Catalog size, variants, shipping, taxes, subscriptions, or in-person sales?
"I need it easy."	Managed or all-in-one option	Easy to edit, easy to maintain, or easy to get support?
"I want the cheapest."	Cost sensitivity	Lowest first year or lowest reliable total cost over three years?
"My email already works."	Keep email independent	Which provider and domain records must remain untouched?
"I may outgrow it."	Portability matters	What growth is plausible, and what would require migration?
"I need full control."	A content system, code host, or cloud service may fit	Who will maintain security, updates, backups, and reliability?

Watch for false requirements

"Everyone uses it," "it is free," or "it is the most powerful" do not describe the person's need. Translate each into a testable requirement.

Preserve room to change

Do not pay for speculative complexity. Choose a clean exit path and revisit when the future requirement becomes real.

Choose the category before the company

Category	Strong fit	Why people choose it	Main trade-off
Static / edge hosting Examples: Cloudflare Pages, Netlify, Vercel, GitHub Pages	Fast marketing sites, portfolios, generated sites, front-end apps	Low infrastructure burden, global delivery, code-based deployment	Editing and forms may need separate tools; plans and commercial terms vary
All-in-one builder Examples: Wix, Squarespace	Owners who value a single dashboard and visual editing	Templates, hosting, support, updates, and common business tools are bundled	Higher recurring cost and more platform lock-in; custom behavior has limits
Design-led builder Examples: Webflow, Framer	Visually distinctive marketing sites with managed hosting	Fine visual control without managing servers; content tools included	Learning curve, plan complexity, and platform-specific implementation
Content management system Example: WordPress	Publishing, flexible business sites, large plugin ecosystem	Broad ownership choices, familiar editing, huge extension market	Updates, security, plugin quality, and maintenance need clear ownership
Traditional shared hosting Examples: Hostinger, SiteGround	Multiple small sites, WordPress, email bundles, familiar control panels	Many services in one account and accessible introductory pricing	Renewal pricing, resource limits, and bundle dependencies need scrutiny
Managed application / cloud Examples: Render, Fly.io, DigitalOcean, AWS	Custom applications, server code, databases, unusual requirements	Control and scalable infrastructure	More technical responsibility, variable cost, and operational complexity

Important: provider examples are orientation, not endorsements. The assistant must verify current plans and terms before recommending one.

Some needs change the category entirely

Why someone chooses Wix or Squarespace

They may prefer one bill, one support channel, visual editing, templates, built-in forms, scheduling, and low maintenance. This can be a rational choice when independence and custom code matter less than ease.

Why someone chooses Shopify

Commerce is the product, not an add-on. Shopify centralizes catalog, checkout, payments, inventory, orders, shipping, discounts, and an app ecosystem. The trade-off is platform fees, app costs, and theme constraints.

Why someone chooses WordPress

Content flexibility, ownership options, and a large plugin ecosystem. It suits a site that needs active publishing or specialized extensions, provided someone owns updates, backups, and security.

Why someone chooses developer hosting

A code-based site can be fast, portable, version-controlled, and inexpensive to run. It works best when a developer or agent can maintain the build and any external services.

Why someone keeps traditional hosting

Email, websites, backups, and support may already be working together. Moving only to chase a lower headline price can add risk without enough benefit.

Why someone chooses managed WordPress

They want WordPress flexibility but prefer the host to handle caching, backups, staging, security tooling, and specialist support. It usually costs more than shared hosting.

Commerce checkpoint

If selling is central, compare commerce platforms before general hosts. If there are only a few simple payments, a normal site plus an external checkout may be enough. Verify tax, shipping, subscriptions, point-of-sale, and transaction costs.

These services can stay separate from the website

Domain registrar

Holds the registration and renewal relationship for the domain name.

COMPARE

- Renewal price and transfer fees
- Privacy protection
- Account security
- Support and transfer process
- DNSSEC and ownership controls

DNS provider

Publishes the records that send visitors and email to the right services.

COMPARE

- Reliability and change history
- Record import and export
- Security features
- Ease of use
- Compatibility with the host

Email provider

Runs mailboxes, delivery, spam filtering, aliases, and retention.

COMPARE

- Cost per mailbox
- Storage and aliases
- Calendar and office tools
- Migration support
- Security and deliverability

A common and sensible arrangement

The domain stays with a registrar, DNS is managed there or by a specialist, the website lives on the best-fit host, and email stays with the provider that already works. One vendor does not need to own all four.

Questions the assistant should answer

- Can the website move without changing nameservers?
- Which DNS records must be preserved for email: MX, SPF, DKIM, and DMARC?
- Is email included in the hosting plan, separately billed, or independently provided?
- Would canceling the old website plan affect mailboxes, DNS, backups, or the domain?
- Does the person want fewer vendors, or would separation reduce future lock-in?

Never delete old DNS records by guesswork

Document the full zone before making changes. Add or replace only the records required for the approved move, then test both web and email.

Score fit, not popularity

The assistant can do this comparison in the background. Show the reasoning in plain language; do not make the person calculate a score unless they want to. The defaults below are a starting point, not a hidden formula.

Criterion	Default weight	What a high score means
Required capabilities	25%	Meets the real site requirements without fragile workarounds
Ease and support	15%	The actual owner can operate it and get appropriate help
Total recurring cost	15%	Predictable ongoing price including required add-ons and renewals
Migration and continuity risk	15%	Protects email, domain, search traffic, data, and uptime
Ownership and portability	10%	Content, data, and code can be exported or moved reasonably
Maintenance burden	10%	Updates, backups, security, and operations have a clear owner
Performance and growth	10%	Meets current needs with a plausible path for expected growth

Scoring: rate each option 1 to 5 for every criterion, multiply by the weight, and show the reasoning. A hard requirement is pass/fail and cannot be averaged away.

Always compare

- Best-fit recommendation
- Keep current setup
- Simpler alternative
- More flexible alternative, if relevant

Do not hide

- Renewal price
- Required paid add-ons
- Commercial-use restrictions
- Export limitations
- Who performs maintenance

Use a format that makes the choice understandable

HOSTING DECISION BRIEF

1. Your situation, in plain language

Start with a short, jargon-free summary of the goals, what already exists, budget, how involved the person wants to be, and what must not break. If a technical term is needed later, define it where it first appears.

2. Primary recommendation

Name the category, provider, and plan only after live verification. Explain why it fits. List website, domain, DNS, and email separately.

3. What it will cost

Show first-term cost, normal renewal cost, billing commitment, necessary add-ons, domain renewal, email, and estimated total annual cost. State the verification date and currency.

4. What you gain and give up

Use plain language. Include maintenance, support, editing experience, performance, portability, and lock-in.

5. Alternatives

Provide up to two meaningful alternatives: one simpler or lower-cost, and one more flexible or capable. Explain who each is better for.

6. Keep-current option

Say whether keeping the current setup is reasonable, what could be optimized, and why moving may or may not be worth it.

7. Safe implementation plan

Separate preparation, backup, build or migration, testing, DNS cutover, email verification, monitoring, and old-plan cancellation. Name the approval point before each consequential action.

8. Unknowns and verification

List anything not confirmed, the official sources checked, the date checked, and any item the person must verify in their account.

Good recommendation

"Choose X because your site is static, you want minimal maintenance, and your existing email can remain untouched. Here are the two limits that matter."

Weak recommendation

"X is the best host." It lacks context, current verification, trade-offs, and a safe path from the existing setup.

Move one layer at a time

1

Document

Capture the current setup, bills, DNS zone, mailboxes, integrations, key URLs, analytics, and account ownership.

2

Back up

Export website files and databases where possible. Preserve form submissions, store data, redirects, and email according to the chosen plan.

3

Build beside the live site

Use a preview or staging address. Keep the current website and email active.

4

Test before DNS

Check mobile and desktop pages, forms, links, checkout, analytics, accessibility, performance, redirects, and search metadata.

5

Prepare the cutover

Confirm the exact DNS change, rollback value, timing, responsible person, and expected propagation behavior.

6

Change only what is approved

Do not replace nameservers when a smaller record change will work. Preserve mail records unless email is intentionally moving.

7

Verify and monitor

Test the public site, SSL, forms, email sending and receiving, redirects, analytics, and search access after the change.

8

Cancel later

Keep the old service until the new setup is proven and required data is secured. Confirm what cancellation affects before approving it.

Domain transfer is usually optional

A website can often move while the domain remains registered where it is. Transfer only when there is a clear ownership, price, security, or management benefit.

Pause the main path and explore one decision

The person can use any prompt below without restarting the interview. The assistant should preserve the confirmed Setup Map and priorities.

Domains and DNS

Explain my current domain and DNS arrangement. Compare keeping it, moving the registrar, or moving only DNS. Show risks and what would remain unchanged.

Email

Compare keeping my existing email with moving it. Include mailbox cost, aliases, storage, migration effort, deliverability, calendar needs, and DNS records.

All-in-one builders

Show why Wix, Squarespace, Webflow, or Framer might or might not fit me. Compare editing, maintenance, cost, ownership, export, and support.

Developer platforms

Compare suitable code-based hosting options for my actual framework. Verify build limits, commercial terms, forms, server functions, bandwidth, and support.

WordPress

Compare shared, managed, and self-managed WordPress for my needs. Make responsibility for plugins, updates, security, backups, and recovery explicit.

Ecommerce

Compare Shopify, WooCommerce, and any suitable alternative for my catalog, payments, shipping, taxes, subscriptions, in-person sales, and staff workflow.

Cost over time

Build a three-year total-cost comparison using verified renewal prices and required add-ons. Separate website, domain, email, apps, and setup help.

Migration plan

Turn the recommendation into a reversible migration plan. Separate website, DNS, domain, and email. Include backups, tests, rollback, and approval stops.

Bring what you know, leave the rest blank

Current setup

- ☐ Website address:
- ☐ Domain company:
- ☐ Website host or builder:
- ☐ Email provider:
- ☐ Approximate annual cost:
- ☐ Renewal date:
- ☐ Who can access each account:

What the site must do

- ☐ Main visitor action:
- ☐ Pages or content:
- ☐ Forms or scheduling:
- ☐ Payments or products:
- ☐ Blog or regular editing:
- ☐ Logins or memberships:
- ☐ Other integrations:

Priorities

Rank the most important:

- ☐ Easy to edit
- ☐ Low recurring cost
- ☐ Live support
- ☐ Design freedom
- ☐ Performance
- ☐ Ownership and portability
- ☐ Low maintenance
- ☐ Room to grow

Boundaries

- ☐ Comfortable annual budget:
- ☐ How much setup do you want to handle: none / a little / most:
- ☐ Who maintains it:
- ☐ What must not break:
- ☐ What is frustrating today:
- ☐ What success looks like:

This is not homework. You do not need to complete this before starting, and "I don't know" is a useful answer. The assistant should help find missing information without asking for passwords or secret keys.

A sound decision should pass these checks

Recommendation check

- ☐ The existing setup was mapped and confirmed.
- ☐ Hard requirements are separated from preferences.
- ☐ Current official prices and terms were verified and dated.
- ☐ Renewals and required add-ons are included.
- ☐ The current setup was considered as an option.
- ☐ The primary choice wins for stated reasons.
- ☐ Trade-offs and lock-in are explicit.
- ☐ Unknowns remain labeled as unknown.

Change-safety check

- ☐ Domain, DNS, website, and email are separate in the plan.
- ☐ Current DNS records are saved.
- ☐ Backups and rollback are defined.
- ☐ The new site will be tested before cutover.
- ☐ Email records will be preserved or intentionally migrated.
- ☐ Redirects and integrations are included.
- ☐ The old service stays active through verification.
- ☐ Each consequential action requires approval.

Small glossary

Domain registrar	The company that manages registration and renewal of a domain name.
DNS	The record system that directs the domain to website, email, and other services.
Nameservers	The servers designated to publish the domain's DNS records.
Hosting	The infrastructure or managed platform that serves the website.
CMS	A content management system used to create and edit website content.
SSL / TLS	The certificate and encryption that allow secure HTTPS connections.
MX record	A DNS record that directs incoming email to the mail provider.
CDN	A content delivery network that serves files from locations closer to visitors.
Lock-in	The effort or loss involved in moving away from a platform.

The goal is not the “best host”

The goal is a setup whose cost, control, maintenance, and capabilities fit the person who will actually own it.