

What is web hosting?

 By [Tim Wyatt-Gunning](#)

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Being a "good host" was definitely high up the list of what parents of middle-class spoilt brats, like me, expected from their children. Apart from learning to place many more pieces of cutlery on a table than were required, I think the answer to being a good host was, and still is, to provide a decent and handy location for a group of people to share vaguely similar interests and to start a few conversations and make sure there are no uncomfortable silences. And, for me, that location was usually around a dinner table. Now it's around a computer.

A likely dinner conversation at that time might have been a quick riposte of this obscure new thing called the internet and how it would never work. But just like we did with the internet's parents and grandparents, the radio, the telephone and the TV, we ranted in public at the impending collapse of society, and then we rushed home, gathered the family, drew our curtains as far as our wallets allowed, and we couldn't get enough of it.

We all love it, we all rely on it, yet none of us have a bloody clue how it works and we don't care just as long as it does. If it doesn't, we freak out because the internet runs our lives and sometimes we get nasty ([Listen to the audio clip](#)). If we could just understand the basics, life would be so much easier.

Moving our preferred meeting location

Consider this: much of what the internet has done is simply to move our preferred meeting location, our point of contact with other human beings, from a dining room, a boardroom, a shop or any physical meeting place, to a non-physical one, a so-called virtual one which resides on a computer, often in the form of a website, which now might physically sit on your un-laid dining room table. Cutlery free, you can sit alone and start any conversation you want, which will reach either invited guests (via email, instant messaging or private forums) or potential new unknown friends (via a blog or website).

And now your six-seater dinner table has hundreds of people keen to come to the party, but neither your venue (your computer) nor your local transport network (your Internet connection) is going to cope and you will need to move to a bigger venue that people can reach more easily without having to go the extra Telkom mile, and is on a major public transport route. That's where I hope we, your ISPs, come in.

"Hosting", in the old-fashioned sense of the word, still holds true for what we do. We provide online places where you and your extended group of friends can meet, and we carry you to and from the venues. Whether that's by email, Facebook, forums or your spanking brand new website, we've probably played a part in matching you up. As hosts, we own a mega party venue, situated as close as can be to a major highway. The fact that your real office is in the arse-end of nowhere doesn't matter, because our venue isn't and we'll make your visitors think you're keeping up with the Joneses. We do some lovely e-commerce glassware, SQL-studded napkins, an uncapped guest list, 24/7 concierge services and some spam-filtering bouncers.

We host anything from lectures, parties, conferences, to sob stories, homeless kittens and plumbers from as little as R19 per month. That wouldn't have bought me the ingredients for my consistently inedible baked onion starter back in the dinner era. As for that ad in the Yellow Pages, forget it!

Our beautiful Internet. Early days.

ABOUT TIM WYATT-GUNNING

Tim graduated from Cambridge in 1992, was a banker in London for 4 years, before getting involved in the European telecommunications industry in 1996 with LDI. In 1999, he moved

to South Africa to set up Storm Telecom. For 9 years Tim co-ran Storm, driving it to revenues of over R250m, with over 6000 business customers across the country, until it was bought by Vox Telecom in January 2008 for R360m. Tim joined Webafrica as CEO in October 2011.

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