

## Want a Good House for Joomla! In Malaysia?

Image by kenye

We, the admins of Joomla-My have been monitoring the Malaysian Joomla! Community since the day of its birth on the internet. I found out that relatively significant number of users there are still in the dark with regard to choosing a good webhost for their website. It should be noted that these users are making their first ever live website and relatively inexperienced with web development. Soon after, I created a forum category meant solely for users to write a review of their past & present webhost so that we as a community can help each other. What I wrote hereafter is a recollection of experience and thoughts that might help some of you in deciding your new webhost.

\*be prepared to read. This post is rather lengthy.

\*Keep in mind that I wrote this in conjunction with a contest that is organized by my current webhost, yet I tried as much as possible not to be biased and will give you a 100% (okay, 99% perhaps) frank review of what I think about them.

### Let the story begin. First webhost

I bought my first webhosting package back in 2004, when I started to run a Mambo-based (the origin of Joomla!) website. The site is now powered by Joomla! – as I mentioned in my previous post. Back then, a basic 1Gb space with 5Gb bandwidth costs RM199, but the domain was cheap, RM 35. The package was sufficient to my needs and I almost thought that I would stay with the webhost for a long time. Boy I was wrong.

A year later, I noticed something amiss with the server that hosted that particular website when several installations of the usual stuff (components/modules/mambots/template) failed. The errors led to inaccessible PHP /tmp/ directory and failure to move necessary files. A php.ini check revealed a nasty surprise. The server ran on Safe Mode which hindered Mambo to run at its full capability. I tried emailing the technical support to ask them to turn off the Safe Mode. But they insisted that it was needed for security purposes. I was flabbergasted.

Apart from this main problem, another frustration was caused by the lack of DOXML in their PHP configuration. This plugin is needed when you install a (cool) flash photo gallery called Expose4. Another email to the tech support bared no fruit as they suggested me to move to a dedicated server.

### Fixing the problem. Second webhost

Wasting no time, I started a survey of good and affordable webhost for Joomla!. I read reviews a lot and ended up with a rather good one (no, its not yet Exabytes as their price was still pricey for a student like me). The price was good (RM149) and the space was big (at that time) – 2Gb. However, it still lacked DOXML. As I was not using Expose4 for any project, I can still live without it. Thus the coming year (2007), I bought a couple more packages (one of them was this blog).

There was this one interesting occasion I would like to share during my time in using their service. One of my sites got Dugg and the bandwidth for that month jumped to almost 70Gb, yet our maximum allowed bandwidth consumption was only 50Gb. The webhost contacted me via Yahoo! Messenger and warned me. Guess what, I offered barter. Should he give me some extra bandwidth, I will put a banner to their website. He agreed. It was a relief and to be frank, these kind of small gestures left us (the customers) to be thankful and appreciative of their service.

A year later, I released a Fireboard Forum module called mod\_fblatest. Again, a sudden (and continuous) flock of visitors came to this blog. I started to receive some comments from loyal oversea visitors (USA and European countries) on the load time of the website. As a quick response to this, I unpublished all local advertisement services as I realized that they were consuming almost 300Kb alone for their promotions! Plus with the un-optimized javascripts (back then, mind you), it was actually a necessity to remove them. Yet, the emails keep coming in. A friend of mine, Derred showed some proof of the loading time taken from USA (using Firebug).

Time to move on. Current webhost

I decided to keep my visitors happy. Thus earlier this year, I moved this blog and my first website to Exabytes. However all sites that were made prior to 2008 were not moved because I appreciate my past webhosts' good treatment. Why do I choose Exabytes? I was impressed, to say the least. Impressed with the speedy Joomla-My website & forum back then (note: current Joomla-My forum is hosted on a VPS (Virtual Private Server) sponsored by a good friend, yet the current website is still with Exabytes).

In January, I grabbed its e-Biz Plus package. For those with deep pockets and in the need for future expandability, I highly recommend you guys to get e-Biz Gold instead (300Gb storage, 300Gb bandwidth, 30 domains). The first thing that I noticed was that the response time and subsequent loading time were much faster. A brief chat with my oversea connections confirms this and a happy man I was. The spec is very up-to-date with cPanel 11, DOXML, ModSecurity and ionCube installed. DOXML would be for Expose4, ModSecurity is for added protection and ionCube is important in order to use commercial encrypted components such as Clexus PMS.

Is there one thing that I learnt from being a part-time support crew for a famous Joomla! Component developer last year, it will be the importance of keeping the support ticket checked. I was (and still) amazed of the responsiveness of the tech staff in Exabytes. Early in my server migration, I had to sort out some permission issues. Should you are a Joomla! user, I am sure you are aware of FTP & PHP user ownership problem, right? A support ticket was sent at 11.00 pm, after over 7,8 replies later (with some new problems), all issues were solved around 1.30 am. Aint it fast?

Not so long ago, there were two or three noticeable server downtime that affects my site. The interruptions were short, yet I was not satisfied. The first one was due to malfunctioned DC switch and the other due to problematic datacenter. Funny enough though, Joomla-My was not affected. So my conclusion was my sites are not on the same server as Joomla-My. I noticed the difference of both server, thus I have

requested the support staff to move my sites to the same server that hosts Joomla-My. Not only they agreed, and moved the site, they even keep my old site just in case problem arises. Just a week later when I am satisfied that everything is in working order, then they deleted the backup. Trust me, they are very professional and know what they are doing (which never ceases to impress me).

The good things aside, there is only minor disappointment that I really wish it could have been better. In fact, like most big companies, the policies and regulations are rigid. You will definitely get what you asked for in your order, No More, No Less. Compared to my previous webhost (which I still use for projects with small budget), you could ask for a bit of this and that. An example is like the one that I mentioned before. It much like comparing a kedai mamak/cheap eatery (my previous webhost) with a fancy restaurant (Exabytes).

Kedai Mamak (one in Section 14, PJ):

- 'Nasi goreng ayam satu! Nasi extra!' / 'One chicken fried rice! Extra rice!'
- 'Mana mamak ni, lambatnya datang ambil order..' / 'Where the hell is the waiter?'
- 'Mamak, apa khabar? Amacam awek?' / 'Whats up? Hows your girlfriend? (to the waiter)'
- Price for food + drinks = RM 6

Fancy Restaurant (one in One Bangsar) :

- 'err... Branzino.. Salmon elForno..'
- Personal waiter that shows you the seat
- which is not allowed to talk nonsense other than pampering you
- Price for food + drinks + perks + services = Guess...

Yes, the starting price is not cheap (cheapest is e-Biz Plus at RM269 per year). I reckon that paying for 2 or 3 consecutive years is a very, very wise move as you will get hundreds of ringgits worth of discounts. But consider your investment is worth the money as the support and the system is again, top-notch. For bloggers / newbies in web development, you might as well try this package, XStudent for RM99 per year (with a FREE domain!).

As what been discussed in the forum that I moderate, there are still a number of good webhost that you might consider. The list is not exhaustive, and by all means this article does not necessarily mean that Exabytes is the best Malaysian webhost for Joomla!. It is just works well for me and I'd recommend Joomla! users in Malaysia to use Exabytes for a peace of mind.

Those who are interested to know my previous two webhost can contact me using this link.

Joomla! is a trademark and its rightful name is Joomla!, not Joomla (without the '!')