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Content Delivery Services

Things to Look For in a CDS

Transparency:

All of the content delivery services are transparent to your users. Your users can enter your URL in their browser, link to your site, and bookmark your pages as usual. However, a content delivery service should be transparent to you as well.

Ideally, you shouldn't need to make any changes to your Web site's pages. Some services require changes to all of the image links in all your pages. Such a technique also means that the name of your CDS provider is displayed at the bottom of the browser screen as images are loaded, possibly diluting your marketing message. It is not necessary to settle for this inconvenience, and it impedes your ability to switch to a new CDS provider quickly if needed.

Also investigate the procedures needed when you update your content. Typically, the CDS needs some type of notification that you have changed the content on your site so that it can re-update its copies of your pages and avoid distributing an outdated version.

Log Files:

Another issue is getting accurate log files. Since hits that previously came directly to your Web site now go to the CDS network, the CDS should provide some simple mechanism to retrieve your log files so that hits can be analyzed. Be forewarned that services that only handle images and not HTML files can lead to unnecessary headaches. Such a service provides a log file that contains only image hits, while your ISP provides another log file that contains HTML. Integrating the two can be difficult, particularly if they are in different log file formats. Services that handle only images leave you with two log files that need to be combined.

Providers

Three leading providers of domestic content delivery services are SolidSpeed Networks, Digital Island, and Akamai. Here's a brief look at each:

SolidSpeed Networks:

SolidSpeed targets small to medium-sized businesses with a reasonably priced service that includes performance measurement. The service accelerates HTML and images and generally doesn't require changes to Web site content. The SolidSpeed Web site provides a simple mechanism to notify the CDS of content changes. Complete log files are also available from the Web site. They offer a variety of pricing options, based on the number of hits your site receives each month. Cost is based on hits used for the month. Minimum is \$50/month and scales upward. See <http://www.solidspeed.com/> for details.

Digital Island:

Digital Island merged with Sandpiper, the first standalone CDS. The company targets medium to large companies, providing content deliver service for larger sites. HTML and images are accelerated. Cost is peak bandwidth based at approximately \$18 per gigabyte served with a \$1500/month minimum. See <http://www.digitalisland.com/> for details.

Akamai:

Akamai concentrates on accelerating graphic and multimedia content for large-company sites. Their technology does not speed up HTML content. Modifications to Web site content are needed, and Akamai provides tools to assist with this process. Akamai's pricing is peak bandwidth based and starts at \$2000 per megabit per second served per month with a 12 month minimum contract. See <http://www.akamai.com/> for details.

Summary

A CDS is the way to go if you are interested in accelerating your site, making it more reliable, and providing a better user experience. Most of the CDS providers offer a free trial, allowing you to fully evaluate their service before purchasing.

For more information and links about Content Delivery Services, head to:
http://webreference.com/internet/software/site_management/cdns.html

About the author:

Jon Zeeff is Chief Technical Officer at SolidSpeed Networks, a leading provider of content delivery services to the small and medium-sized business market. After much experience with the challenges of single-site hosting for sites such as www.ameritech.com and www.gateway.com, he feels that the need for optimal performance will drive the majority of Web content to be served from multiple locations. You can find out more about SolidSpeed at www.solidspeed.com.



[Content Delivery Services Introduction](#)

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