

## "Windows Helps Extend Hosting Business Smoothly"

A conversation with Travis Staliker and Clinton Hansen of Liquid Web, Inc.

Founded in 1997, Liquid Web provides dedicated Web hosting, shared hosting, and virtual private servers, as well as security and management add-on services that enable their clients to create complete solutions to meet their individual needs. Case Studies provide technical decision makers with concrete examples of business problems being solved through the application of technology. Life as a Web Host is customer-driven and ever-changing. We started with Travis Staliker and Clinton Hansen of Liquid Web to get their perspectives on Web hosting.

### Key Findings:

Liquid Web is dedicated to delivering consistently high connection speed and stability backed by world-class technical support. The company maintains thousands of square feet of climate controlled datacenter space with innovative redundancy characteristics built-in at each level of the infrastructure.

- Offering Windows hosting is important to avoid having customers find services elsewhere.
- Integration of features like the Web server and caching into the Windows operating system simplifies operations.
- Windows scripting supports the same scripting functionality Liquid Web uses on the Linux side of the house.
- Liquid Web finds that patch management for Windows is more hands-off and reliable than with Linux.

### Questions:

#### Let's start by having you introduce yourself and LiquidWeb.

**Travis Staliker:** Sure. My name is Travis Staliker. I've been here at Liquid Web for two to three years, and I'm currently the Director of Sales and Marketing. Liquid Web was founded in 1997 by Matthew Hill as a shared hosting company with servers in New Jersey. Five or six years ago, we opened a 1,000 square-foot datacenter in Lansing, and we filled it in about one year. The company added full dedicated hosting and opened a new 25,000 square foot datacenter with capacity for 8,000 servers and 200 employees. We're at about 80 percent capacity at that facility.

We're building out our third facility, which will have 50,000 square feet of office space and 40,000 square feet for the datacenter, with capacity for 25,000 servers and 600 employees.

Two years ago, Liquid Web was primarily a Linux shop, and our main brand was what we called "Heroic Support." If a customer had a specific demand for Windows, we would set that up, but it was really a one-off situation. There was no advertisement for it on our Web sites. But demand for Windows really took off, and since we weren't officially offering it, our customers started forming relationships with other hosts that offered Windows.

**Clinton:** I entered the IT field right out of high school, and I've been doing IT ever since. I've been working here at Liquid Web for almost a year and a half now. I started in the Windows team about a year ago, when Liquid Web really started pushing the Windows hosting, and I built a fairly strong team.

#### You were driven to offer Windows because of strong demand?

**Travis:** Exactly. Without advertising it, one to five percent of new servers were Windows. Now that we're officially offering it, it's 25 to 30 percent of all new servers.

#### What were some of the things that surprised you about the Windows platform?

**Travis:** Some people really get attached to one operating system, and they don't want to learn anything about another one. They just have a strong bias towards one platform.

A lot of our people like a challenge, though, and that's the reason they're in IT. Any time they see something new, they want to try it out. If they're really good at Linux, they want to try Windows, just to learn something new.

That being said, when we decided to pursue Windows, we did have some internal resistance to the decision. As you can imagine, we ran into the age-old Linux vs. Windows debate, especially from some of our hard-core Linux administrators. But as a complement to our Microsoft training team, as well as the stability of the product and its capabilities for hosting, Microsoft was able to address those criticisms and solve any challenges.

#### So what converted your people to really liking the platform?

**Clinton:** Once you actually work with Windows, you see that it's a stable operating system, and I've seen plenty of issues with LAMP. The strength of the Windows platform and management tools make it really unique compared to Linux.

**Travis:** And what's that proverb? "The devil you know versus the devil you don't?"

I think a lot of that internal bias was because, I'm very proud to say, I think we have some of the best Linux techs in the world right here at Liquid Web, keeping the internet running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And we didn't start with that same level of expertise on the Windows side.

When we made the conscious decision to bring on people like Clinton and to build out our Windows team, we found that Windows is at least as stable as Linux and has strong merits for certain applications. If there are issues, it's really with Windows itself. And, there are a lot of customers that never call us with any issues at all. They really speak to the quality and usability of the platform.

Windows also offers our customers a very wide choice for supported applications, and for programming languages for them to use when building their own applications.

#### Is there any other value in partnering with Microsoft?

**Travis:** Certainly! Microsoft has been the best partner we've had. There's no question about that.

Everybody knows that Microsoft is a partner-focused company, and they're incredible at listening to the concerns of hosts. Even if you just look at the last two years, they listened to us, and we see that feedback has shown up in the features of IIS7.

There are also the changes to pricing and licensing that make the cost structure more like Apache. These are things that hosts really appreciate.

Patrick [from Microsoft] has been out here three or four times. We've had people come out several times to provide training, and to actually look at our systems and help us roll out things like Active Directory and Windows Update Services. They've worked with our technicians and developers. It's been an incredibly valuable relationship.

On the marketing side, we've done co-branded marketing, which allowed us to launch our product offering to a broader market, with Microsoft supporting the marketing effort.

They've just been a great partner to work with. If I have questions, I just call Patrick.

#### Coming from Linux, you're used to having to integrate many components. What did you think of the integration of operating system, Web server, caching, and other features in the Windows platform?

**Travis:** The integration of Windows components definitely makes it easier for us on the setup and support side of things. Being able to just add directory services and DNS to the Windows set up, just selecting that ASP.NET should install, and configuring the system to match the customer's requests, in my opinion, is quite a bit easier on Windows because of that integration. Because we're a full managed host, our customers expect us to do all that setup and maintenance.

#### Do you use scripting on Windows? Is Windows scripting as capable as Linux scripting?

**Travis:** We have a guy on the Windows team that is really good with scripting. He basically ported over the scripts that we developed for Linux, so we have a familiar way to do similar things on Windows. If I would say Windows is just as capable.

#### What about keeping systems patched and updated? Do you see any differences between Linux and Windows?

**Clinton:** On the Windows side, we use Windows Update Server to push patches out to our customers' machines. The patching is pretty easy, and isn't something that honestly we have to worry a lot about.

**Travis:** On the Linux side, we've had instances where if a shell has changed things in an update that's taken down multiple sites simultaneously. I would say the patch management and updating is much more hands-off and reliable on the Windows side. It seems much more tested.

#### Are there features in Windows Server 2008 that seem particularly useful for hosts?

**Clinton:** Definitely. The new features in IIS7 are great for us, especially the modularity of IIS. I know the IIS7 new feature is important to our customers. We also have a lot of customers asking about Hyper-V, which is the virtualization support built into Windows.

Testimonials: Liquid Web, Inc. [Go]



### Meet The Team:

**Travis Staliker, Director of Sales and Marketing, Since 2006.**

**Clinton Hansen, Manager of Windows Products, Since 2007.**