What hosting Exponential involves

The parts a hosting company provides for an Exponential site (PHP for the web and the command line, a database, a web server or Velocity, cron, mail, writable storage, backups and TLS), what runs all the time, and the...

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This page is for product managers and system administrators at a hosting company who are about to offer Exponential hosting and want the whole picture first. It answers: what Exponential is from a server's point of view, which parts the host provides, what keeps running after the install, and how the work can be divided between host and customer. The details of each part are on the other pages of Hosting basics.

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Exponential from the server's point of view

Exponential is an open source content management system written in PHP and published under the GNU GPL (`composer.json`: `"license": "GPL-2.0-or-later"`). It is maintained by 7x (Who is 7x?) and continues a code base whose original product its creator discontinued after almost 18 years.

For a server, an installation is:

- **Plain PHP files** in one directory (the kernel, `lib/`, `extension/`, `design/`, `vendor/`), with one front controller, `index.php`, that every page request goes through (chapter 3).
- **A database**: one of six supported engines, SQLite 3 by default, which needs no database server at all (Databases in the official order).
- **A writable run-time tree**, `var/`, holding caches, logs, uploaded files and image variations, and (with SQLite) the database file, plus `settings/override/` and `settings/siteaccess/` with the installation's own settings.
- **Command line tools**: the console `bin/php/console`, the scripts in `bin/php/`, and `runcronjobs.php`, which runs the periodic jobs.

It has no compiled code of its own, so it runs wherever a supported PHP runs (Operating

systems for hosts).

The parts a host provides

Part	What Exponential needs	Page
PHP for the web	8.0 or later (Velocity included), with the required extensions	PHP versions and extensions
PHP on the command line	the same version and extensions as the web PHP	PHP versions and extensions
`php.ini`	the values the installer checks, sized for uploads and imports	PHP settings for Exponential
A web server	Exponential Velocity (recommended), or Apache, nginx or another server with PHP-FPM	Choosing a web server
A database	SQLite 3 needs only the `sqlite3` extension; the others need a server and an account	Databases in the official order
Composer	to install and update the code and its extensions	Composer and Git on servers
Writable storage	`var/` and `settings/` writable by the site's user	Writable directories and permissions
Cron	`runcronjobs.php` at regular intervals	Cron jobs
Mail	a way to send: sendmail or SMTP	Mail delivery
TLS	a certificate for each site address	TLS and HTTPS
Backups	the database and the files, kept off the machine	What to back up

> **Note**
>
> A web server is not needed during a command-line install (the kickstarter or `exp:install`); the setup wizard needs one, because it runs in the browser (chapter 2).

What keeps running after the install

An Exponential site is not finished when the installer ends. These keep running for the life of the site:

What	Why	Where it is described
Cronjobs	notifications, search indexing with delayed indexing, link checks, cache and session cleanup	chapter 10, cronjobs
Velocity, if it serves the site	a long-running PHP server process with a pool of workers	Velocity for hosts
PHP-FPM, if Apache or nginx serves the site	one pool per site is usual	PHP-FPM tuning
A database server, unless SQLite is used	PostgreSQL, MongoDB, MariaDB, Oracle or MySQL	the page of each database
Logs	`var/log/` and the web server's own logs grow and need rotation	Log viewer and rotation

What	Why	Where it is described
Caches	`var/cache/` grows and is cleared after changes	Cache clearing and warming

The example crontab in chapter 10 runs the `frequent` part every 5 minutes, the default part every 15 minutes, `infrequent` hourly, and the cleanup parts once a night, all from the crontab of the site user.

> **Warning**
>
> Hosting that forbids long-running processes cannot run Velocity; Apache or nginx with PHP-FPM serves the site there instead. Hosting without cron cannot run the periodic jobs, and notifications and delayed search indexing then never happen. Decide both before you design an offer.

How a site gets installed

Every install method runs the same installer steps; they differ only in where the answers come from (chapter 4):

Method	Answers from	Fits
Setup wizard	forms in the browser	shared hosting without shell access
Kickstarter	a `kickstart.ini` file	repeatable installs, provisioning scripts
Console install (`exp:install`)	command-line options	automation, containers, one-command installs

All three run the same critical system tests first and stop with the cause and the fix when the machine is not ready. For a hosting company the kickstarter and `exp:install` are the natural tools for automated provisioning; see One-click installers and exp:install.

Dividing the work: options

The repository does not prescribe how a host and its customers share the work. These are the usual options; choose per plan, and write the choice into the plan's description.

Task	Host does it	Customer does it
Operating system, PHP, web server, TLS	typical in every model	only on unmanaged servers
Database server and accounts	typical	on a server of the customer's own
Installing Exponential	as a provisioning option	with the setup wizard or the console
Updating Exponential and extensions	as a managed option (automated updates)	with Composer or the `ezupdate` extension
Cron	the host installs the crontab	the customer, where the panel allows it
Backups	typical, with restore tests	in addition, for their own copy

Task	Host does it	Customer does it
Content, templates, extensions of their own	rarely	typical

> **Tip**
> Write down for each plan which of these rows belongs to whom. Most support questions about Exponential sites come from a row nobody thought was theirs: cron that was never installed, or a PHP upgrade that left the command line PHP behind the web PHP.

Checklist

- ☐ PHP 8.0 or later (PHP 7.4 usable without support) for the web and the command line, the same version and extensions in both.
- ☐ `sockets`, `pcntl` and `openssl` in that PHP where Velocity is offered.
- ☐ A database offer chosen from the official order.
- ☐ `var/` and `settings/` writable by the site's user; one user or one group for every process.
- ☐ Cron available to run `runcronjobs.php`.
- ☐ Mail sending configured (sendmail or SMTP).
- ☐ TLS for every site address.
- ☐ Backups of the database and the files, with a tested restore.
- ☐ The division of work written into each plan.

Related pages

- Hosting basics and Hosting companies: start here
- Requirements at a glance
- Choosing a hosting model
- Chapter 2: Requirements and chapter 10: After installing
- Choosing hosting, database and operating system
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