The Little ISP that Couldn't

> **Claim:** The ISP operating under the name Blueberry Hill provides "unlimited traffic" and "unlimited data transfer" with "no hidden charges."
>
> **Status:** False.

Origins:

Most of you have probably received at least a few multiply-forwarded pleas from strangers exhorting you to aid them in rectifying some injustice (locating a kidnapped child for example, or turning the tables on a restaurant that charged $250 for a simple cookie recipe). We have such a request for you today, and it's neither apocryphal nor anonymous. We received some shabby treatment at the hands of an unscrupulous ISP that severely impacted our ability to maintain this site, and if you find our work valuable and would like to help us out, we ask you to make your voice heard.

Barbara and I have been maintaining the Urban Legends Reference Pages on our own for over four years now, ever since its start as a little corner of the net where I kept my short write-ups of some of the more common Disney legends. It has grown tremendously (both in size and popularity) since then, but we continue to operate it out-of-pocket: nobody pays us for what we do, and we bear on our own all the expenses of the computer equipment, Internet connections, and web hosting services (and of course all the time and labor) required to keep this site operational.

For quite a while now we've been trying to find a way of accommodating the tremendous amount of traffic our site receives without spending several hundred dollars a month for web hosting services. The ISP that hosts our snopes.com domain (Best Internet Communications, whom we highly recommend) has limits on the amount of traffic an account can receive during a 24-hour period, and we've long since outgrown those limits. For a few years now, most of the traffic for www.snopes.com has been redirected to a mirror site we maintain on Simplenet (another ISP we highly recommend), who offer a good deal that includes unlimited disk storage and no traffic limits for only $14.95/month. Although they've done an admirable job in hosting our site, access to our site can be rather slow during periods of heavy traffic, so we've been looking around with an eye towards moving our site (and our domain) to an ISP which could better handle the demand. The first provider we opted to try was Blueberry Hill Communications, who offer web hosting services that are advertised as including "unlimited hits" and "unlimited data transfer" with "no hidden charges."

We established an account with Blueberry Hill, copied our web pages over to it, and began directing some of our web site traffic there. (The disk quota on our account was far too small to accommodate anything but our HTML pages, so all our image files continued to reside elsewhere.) This new account seemed reasonably speedy, so we eventually tried directing more of our HTML traffic to it. One day a few weeks later (8 June 1999, to be precise) we found that our account had been disabled and our web site was non-functional. We had received no advance warning or notice about this action, nor did anyone at Blueberry Hill communicate anything to us until we took the initiative of phoning them to inquire. Only then did we find out that they had deliberately disabled our account. When we asked why they hadn't even extended us the simple courtesy of notifying us (either before or after the fact) that they were disabling our account, we were told, "We've found that shutting off a customer's account is the best way of getting their attention." Pretty novel approach to customer support, eh? Can you imagine if other types of service providers used this model ? "One day I noticed that $10,000 had disappeared from my bank account. When I called my CPA to find out what was going on, he told me, 'I've found that embezzling from my clients is the best way to get their attention.'"

Blueberry Hill had disabled our account, they claimed, because so many of the process slots on their server were being used to handle traffic to our web site that visitors were unable to reach the web sites of other customers whose sites resided on the same server. There may have been a problem, but it wasn't our problem. We weren't breaking any rules or doing anything we weren't supposed to be doing; we simply have a very popular web site. If Blueberry Hill's servers couldn't handle the load, then it was their problem. They took our money by promising

"unlimited traffic," and then summarily cancelled our account because we generated too much traffic. This is no different than advertising an "all-you-eat-buffet," then going through the restaurant and kicking out patrons who are "eating too much."

The end result was that Blueberry Hill told us if we wanted our account reactivated, we would have to pay for additional services (which we didn't need) in exchange for their moving our site to a server better able to handle the traffic. It had taken them less than four weeks to violate their promises of "unlimited traffic," "unlimited data transfer," and "no hidden charges." (This is a tactic more commonly referred to as "bait and switch.") We agreed to pay the higher fee, and Blueberry Hill moved our account to a different server. This was the one and only time Blueberry Hill spoke with us.

On 20 July 1999, Blueberry Hill once again disabled our account with no prior notice or warning and re-directed all requests for our web site to Yahoo! Also once again, they didn't extend us the simple courtesy of telling us anything about their actions until we phoned them to find out what was going on. This time they claimed that we were using up too much CPU time on their server and told us they were disabling our account permanently. Once again, this wasn't our problem – if Blueberry Hill wasn't capable of handling high-traffic web sites, they shouldn't have been advertising "unlimited traffic" and "unlimited data transfer." Besides, the "too much CPU" claim was specious: our site consists of nothing but HTML pages – no CGI scripts, no Java applets, no FrontPage extensions. It's hard to imagine a less CPU-taxing web site. If Blueberry Hill was having problems with their server being CPU-bound, it was because they don't know how to administer web servers, not because of anything we did.

Even though we were left in the lurch by a company that couldn't deliver what they promised; who quoted one price and then demanded more money; who arbitrarily twice cancelled the account of a paid-up customer who had violated none of their rules, and who displayed nothing short of open contempt for our business, we normally would have just moved on and looked for a better ISP (which, at this point, would have been any ISP that had a reliable source of electricity). However, Blueberry Hill didn't leave things at that: when several readers of our site wrote to Blueberry Hill to protest the shabby treatment we had received from that company, Blueberry Hill chose to respond with a series of completely false and increasingly contemptible reasons why they had terminated our account, rather than simply admitting that they were incapable of providing the services they advertised. (Services which Simplenet is able to provide to us for less than half what Blueberry Hill charges.)

So, what are we asking you to do about this? Not much, we think. We invite you to visit Blueberry Hill's comments form at http://www.bhcom.com/servers/comments.htm and let them know you're unhappy with the unfair way they treated us, that because of this you wouldn't ever consider using their hosting services, and that you'll recommend to everyone you know that they avoid using Blueberry Hill's services as well. (If you're uncomfortable taking sides in a dispute between two strangers, then please don't do anything at all.) Of course, since Blueberry Hill doesn't want to be in the uncomfortable position of having to explain the shoddy way they treated one of the previous customers to potential new customers, they trap messages with the word "snopes" in them. So, if you write, be sure to get your point across without actually using the word "snopes" in the text of your message.

Since Blueberry Hill has typically responded to previous complaints with a mind-boggling array of ludicrous and fabricated excuses about why they terminated our services, we're providing the refutations to their more common excuses in advance:

Our TOS (Terms of Service) specifically states service for web hosted domains. They do not have a domain hosted with us.

We told Blueberry Hill up front that we wanted to try out their service for a while before moving our domain there, and they readily agreed. How else could we have established an account with them if they hadn't agreed to this condition? They set up the account – we didn't break into their servers and furtively set up it up ourselves. And

once they had demonstrated that their idea of "customer service" included the arbitrary deactivation of customer accounts, we'd have to have been foolish to consider allowing them to host our domain until they demonstrated themselves to be reliable and stable – which they never did.

This customer does not use the web space for their website, but only uses it to be a place to house images that are downloaded thru many websites on the Internet.

and

They are using the web space as a depository for image files that are linked from our servers on the net – purely a download site.

This excuse is patently false and easily disproved.

With the exclusion of our message board, a copy of every single one of our 600+ HTML pages resided on Blueberry Hill's server. If that doesn't constitute a "web site," we don't know what does. More importantly, the initial 10MB disk quota they gave us precluded us from storing any image files (or any other non-HTML files) on their server at all -- we could barely squeeze our HTML files alone into that small an amount of disk space. For the entire first month our web site was hosted by Blueberry Hill, we did not have one single image file stored on their server.

Later, after they demanded that we pay for services which we didn't need, they upgraded our account to include 50MB of storage space. We then placed about 20-30 of the smallest, most common images used by our site (the ones that load from our main page, and the buttons that appear at the bottom of most of our pages) on Blueberry Hill's server. No other images were stored on or loaded from Blueberry Hill's server, and none of the few images stored there were accessed from any other site on the Internet (unless other sites had linked to them without our knowledge or permission, which was highly unlikely).

They have hopped from provider to provider abusing their systems.

Until we tried Blueberry Hill, we had not ever hosted our site with any ISP other than Best or Simplenet. We continue to do business with both Best and Simplenet, and neither one of them has ever expressed any complaint about the way we use their systems. (In fact, Simplenet provides superior service to Blueberry Hill for less than half the price.)

In all fairness they could have at least put a link of acreditation on our site but in exchange they wanted free hosting for this.

We never asked for (or expected) any hosting services for free, nor did we ever offer to put advertising banners for Blueberry Hill on our site in exchange for free or discounted services. Blueberry Hill asked us to place their advertising banners on our site as a condition of their continuing to provide the services they had already contractually agreed to provide. We agreed to do so once they communicated to us how many banners they wanted and where they wanted them placed. We never heard from them again.

It was not the bandwidth or hits they were recieving but the fact that they were utilizing 60% of a dedicated servers cpu power

and

They are using 80% of a full dedicated servers cpu.

In true urban legend fashion, the percentage figure quoted above varies from telling to telling, generally falling into the 60% to 80% range. As we mentioned above, this claim is nonsense. Our site uses nothing but standard HTML;

a less CPU-dependent web site is hard to imagine. If Blueberry Hill had trouble with their server's CPU usage, it was because of their ineptness in managing it, not because we did something wrong.

Blueberry Hill advertises that they offer "legendary BHCom customer service." They certainly do – in the very same sense that Jesse James is "legendary."

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The URL for this page ~~is~~ was www.snopes.com/inboxer/scams/bhcom.htm .

Archived by **HostMySite.ca** (www.hostmysite.ca) via www.network54.com/Forum/103194/thread/1002215837 .

N.B.: With a couple of extremely minor exceptions (a missing full stop comes to mind), this cached copy of the original article is copied and pasted verbatim from the above source on the network54.com domain (with formatting for print added), and going by memory seems to be the same as the original. (The original is no longer available, as it was deleted by *Snopes* from their website. This is unfortunate, as it was instructive, and of all people I'd have expected *Snopes* to maintain that sort of information for posterity.) Of particular note is that the original text of the responses from *Blueberry Hill* are left intact – including spelling, grammatical, punctuational and vocabulary errors – without the benefit of adding "*[sic]*" in every instance.

Footnote: *Blueberry Hill Communications, Inc.*, later apparently doing business as *4Domains*, went out of business in October 2010 due to insolvency, apparently taking some of their customers' money with them. *ICANN* (the *Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers*) terminated their accreditation status (to be a domain registrar), forcing them to transfer management of their customers' domains to a different registrar … ironically named *Internet BS*! For a screenshot of what their customers awoke to see one day, go to www.hostmysite.ca/gotchas/template_hosts.php#kelly .