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How to publish a website on Windows Server with IIS

Websites & Applications

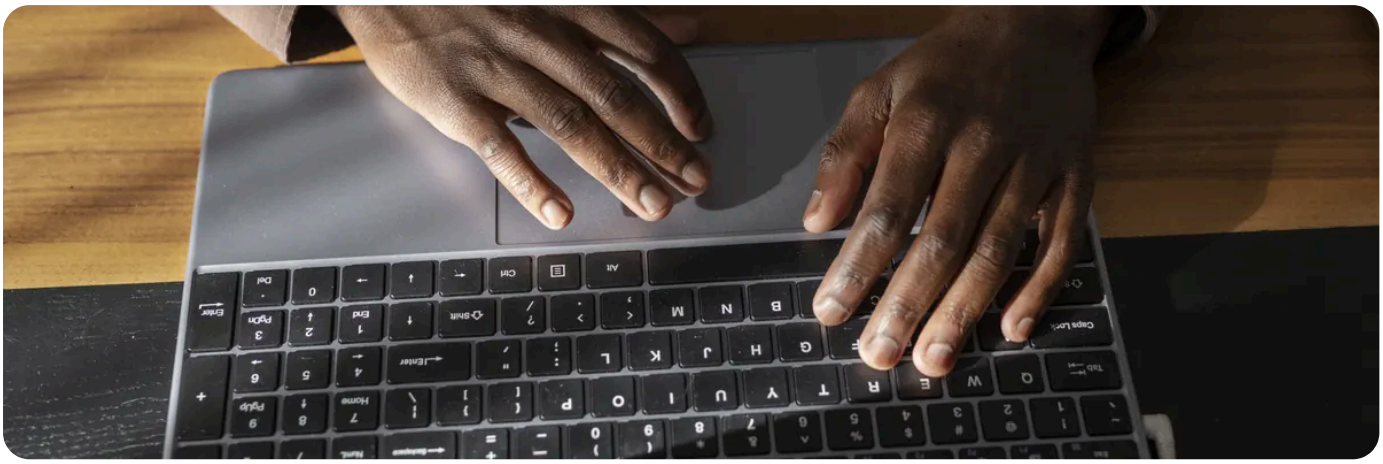
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How to publish a website on Windows Server with IIS

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On Windows Server the web server is **IIS** (Internet Information Services). You install it as a server role, create a *site* pointing at a folder with your files, bind a name (the domain) and a port to it, and open port 80 in the Windows firewall. This article is for a Windows Server VPS where you have the administrator access (**connecting to a Windows VPS with Remote Desktop**); what runs inside is yours, and our support does not install or repair IIS (**how far our support goes**).

Step by step

1. **Install the role.** In Server Manager, *Manage*, *Add Roles and Features*, and tick *Web Server (IIS)*. Or, in a PowerShell window as administrator: `Install-WindowsFeature -Name Web-Server -IncludeManagementTools`. Afterwards the server's address in a browser, from inside the server, should show IIS's welcome page.

2. **Put the site in a folder.** For example `C:\sites\yourdomain.tld` with a test `index.html`. Avoid `C:\inetpub\wwwroot` for real sites.

3. **Open IIS Manager** (*Internet Information Services (IIS) Manager*, or `inetmgr` in the Run box). Under *Sites*, right-click, *Add Website*.

4. **Fill in the site:** the *Site name*, the *Physical path* (the folder), and the *Binding*: type *http*, the IP (or "All Unassigned"), port *80* and the *Host name* with your domain. The name is what allows several sites on one IP.

5. **Settle the clash with the default site.** *Default Web Site* also listens on 80 with no name. Stop it (right-click, *Manage Website*, *Stop*) or give it another name or port, so it does not answer in place of yours.

6 **Give read access to the site's identity.** Each site runs in an *application pool* whose identity is `IIS AppPool\PoolName`. The folder must let it read; for example, from an administrator command line: `icacls "C:\sites\yourdomain.tld" /grant "IIS AppPool\yourdomain.tld:(OI)(CI)RX"`.

7 **Open the port in the Windows firewall.** In *Windows Defender Firewall with Advanced Security*, check that the inbound rules for web traffic (HTTP, port 80, and HTTPS, port 443) are enabled. Then point the domain at the VPS IP (**pointing a domain at your own VPS**).

HTTPS on IIS

Import the certificate into Windows, and on the site go to *Bindings*, *Add*, type *https*, port 443, pick the certificate and tick *Require Server Name Indication* if you have more than one site on the IP. For free certificates there are ACME clients for Windows, third-party and open source; they are yours, and so is the renewal. Typical failures: **no padlock on your site**.

The errors you will meet

What shows	Usual cause
403.14 Forbidden	The folder has no default page (for example index.html) and directory browsing is off. Create the file, or add it under *Default Document*.
401 / 403.3 (permissions)	The pool's identity cannot read the folder. Go back to the permissions step.
500.19	A configuration error: a `web.config` with bad syntax, or a rule that needs a module that is not installed (for example URL Rewrite).
503 Service Unavailable	The *application pool* is stopped or fails to start. Look under *Application Pools* and start it; Event Viewer says why.
The site opens inside the server but not from outside	The Windows firewall, the domain's address or the *Binding*. See **ports and firewall**.

A Windows Server exposed to the internet is attacked every day.
Keep Windows Update on, use a strong administrator password and restrict remote access: **making Remote Desktop safer**. If your site needs PHP, databases or other technologies, check that Windows is really what you want: **Linux or Windows**.

IIS logs
go, by default, to `C:\inetpub\logs\LogFiles`, and system errors to Event Viewer. When something fails, the reason is there. A VPS's backups are not included by default: **backing up a VPS**.

NEED A HAND?

Lost access to the Windows server? The panel console gets in without the network: tell us the service name.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Connecting to a Windows VPS with Remote Desktop →
- Making Remote Desktop on a Windows VPS safer →
- Linux or Windows hosting: which does your site need →
- VPS server plans →

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