

## How To Choose The Right Domain Name

### A Good Domain Name

Your domain name is the center of your Internet identity. So what type of things should you take into consideration when choosing the name that will represent you on the Web?

Choosing the right domain name can be critical to the success of a website. Most Internet users remember websites by their domain names; your domain name will affect the way people link to you, and the way you rank in search engines. Take a little bit of time to consider what is important in your domain name.

#### **Anatomy of a domain name:**

Each domain name consists of two parts - the Mid Level Domain (MLD), and the Top Level Domain (TLD). The Mid Level domain is what most people remember: Google, CNN, or eBay. The Top Level Domain is the portion after the dot: COM, NET, ORG, etc. There are also specific TLDs for each country (cc, fr, uk), educational sites (edu), and government sites (gov). Many of the TLDs are only available to residents of the particular country, or to organization that meet specific requirements, like educational accreditation.

#### ***How to make the best domain name:***

**Keep it short, and simple. The shorter it is the easier it is to remember.**

Even though you can register a name that is over 60 characters, you should register the shortest name that your customers and visitors will associate with your website. Consider the difference between avab.com and AcmeVideosAndBooks.com.

Some argue that shorter domain names are easier to remember, easier to type and far less susceptible to mistakes: for example, "remotepc.com" is easier to remember and less prone to typos than "logintomycomputerfromsomewhereelse.com". Others argue that a longer domain

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name is usually easier on the human memory - for example, "fcu.com" is a sequence of seemingly unrelated letters, whereas FirstCreditUnion.com clearly indicates what it is.

I would recommend a name that is more than 20 letters if you can find one that communicates your message. Unfortunately, many short domains are already taken.

### **Make it Easy to Type**

There are many letters that sound similar (C, V, B, and T) and there are common spelling rules (like I before E) that make certain phrases difficult to communicate. Sites like ICanHasCheezburger or Flickr are popular in spite of their strange names, not because of them. Another issue to keep in mind is unintended letter combinations. Imagine you are starting a site about Apple Computers and name it **MacHome.com**; it also spells **MachoMe.com**. There are some far funnier, and more unfortunate, domain names out there; don't let your business fall prey to this.

### **Keyword Names Or Brand Name Domains?**

A brand domain is the name of your business (e.g., Dillards.com); a keyword domain is what your business does (e.g., DepartmentStore.com). You have to choose which way you are going to go based on what your business is. On one side, your clients know you by the name of your business; on the other side, including the name of your service or product helps people find you in the search engine results. Both have advantages, just don't go overboard or your name will be difficult to share and talk about.

A domain name that matches your brand name can be very important. The name you use to advertise your product is the name that you will want for your domain, because that is the first thing people will try in their browser. Your brand is also the easiest thing for them to remember and will be searched in conjunction with your service when people use search engines.

**Keyword Based Domains** – domains that incorporate keywords communicate quickly what visitors should expect. Additionally, search engines use the words in your URL to determine your placement in their results. By choosing a domain that matches a keyword search, you may be able to rank higher for targeted keywords and thereby benefit from added traffic. Las-Vegas-

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Realty.com could be a very useful for a realtor in Las Vegas, but it also means that you are competing with a huge number of other websites also targeting those keywords.

**Brandable Domains** – using a domain that is your name or your company name means that you have less work to do in your advertising to get people to the right place. But it also means that fewer people will stumble across your site while looking for your product/service in general.

Many of the most successful sites do not use keyword domains. These online businesses have chosen to go with a completely original domain, and brand it. A few examples are Yahoo!, Google, Amazon, Monster, and eBay. These large corporations are not naive about search engine optimization; they are putting emphasis on creating a brand name around their business.

Consider the example of real estate again. If you give out many cards and have a memorable name, having a domain name that matches the way people think of **you** means you will keep more of the traffic produced.

You don't have to choose one or the other, especially in local markets. Domains like Engadget.com, ProBlogger.com, or LarsenAuto.com are quite brandable yet also incorporate a keyword. If possible I suggest that you err on the side of branding.

### **Tips for Branding.**

Setting your brand apart with a unique moniker for your business helps you create a space on the web. Your brand should be more than a grouping of words; think along the lines of MoneyTree.com rather than GetYourPaydayLoans.com.

Make the domain unique to avoid losing traffic to another popular site. Avoid words that sound like existing brands and watch out for commonly misspelled words.

When you have settled on several available name choices, ask around to see what your friends and clients have to say. A name that may make perfect sense to you may be too hard for other people to remember. Is your domain easy to say? Is it hard to spell? Do you need to explain why you chose the name?

Collect a few words that are related to your service/product and related to your company name. Try several combinations to find the configuration that brings it all together to fit your vision.

## **Dot What?**

If you're looking to grow your web business for the long-term, you should have a preference for a .COM. Most users, except the very tech-savvy, assume .com when they are told a domain name. Claiming a .com makes it easy for your customers to navigate directly to your site. There is one major exception to this. If you are regionalized or specific to a particular country you will get significant value by owning a domain that is specific to that country; metrotransit.com vs. metrotransit.co.uk will perform very differently in London than in New York City. If the web is not your primary channel, your Top Level Domain is of less concern.

When you try to register your business's domain name, you may find the name you want is already taken. If your perfect domain name is not available in .com don't give up. If you get creative you may be able to put together an alternate that is available. Or, you can just take a .net or .org. The only real difference is that you should be sure to always stress the extension in your marketing materials. So, if your site is DogBook.net you should always list your site as DogBook.net, and not The Dog Book. Over time, your consistency will pay off.

## **Be Careful with Hyphens and Numbers in Domain Names.**

Should you get a hyphenated name? You will probably find that hyphenated versions of phrases are easier to find and result in fewer unexpected letter combinations. But there is a good reason that hyphenated names are less popular: it's easy to forget the hyphens when typing a name. Many users are used to typing things like eastcostrecords.com but not east-coast-records.com. They'll probably leave out the hyphens and wind up at your competitor's site.

There is a second reason that hyphenated names can be problematic. Try verbally communicating a URL like dash-dot.com or the-best-thing-since-toast.org. It is a hassle and people are very likely to miscommunicate or mistype it. I know a guy named Alex who runs a picture blog called celebrities-eating.com; if you forget the dash you might visit a porn site, instead of pictures of presidents eating pancakes. When considering a hyphenated name, know the websites that your customers may end up at accidentally, and whether that is a risk you are willing to take.

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Your decision will depend on how important a specific name is to your business. I recommend that you be sparing in your use of hyphens; if you need more than one hyphen you may want to do a little more brainstorming.

Numbers are another category of names that can be difficult to communicate. Even though 9west and NineWest are pretty simple to share verbally, you are still going to run the risk of people getting it wrong when they actually search for it.

### **Adding Articles, Verbs, or Adjectives to Domain Names.**

Adding a descriptor to your name can help get around a name that is already taken. If you do choose to add descriptors or articles to your domain name, make sure that you are creating a strong distinction, and play up your additions in all marketing materials. Otherwise, you could be driving traffic to a competitor. For example, eToys.com is virtually indistinguishable from eToy.com in almost any medium. Any mention of one can easily drive traffic to the other.

### **Avoid Legal Issues.**

Unfortunately, sometimes you come up with a great name only to find that it steps on a trademark or service mark held by another company. There are some companies that are happy to just buy the domain from you. The biggest issue here is probably the hassle that will arise if you have to change your name. Other companies may be more inclined to sue you. Spending an extra 15 minutes searching copyright.gov is much easier than re-branding your content or calling in your legal team.

### **Register Your Domain NOW.**

If you have a good idea for a name or a future site, buy the name when you get the idea so you can have the most brandable version of the name.

### **One May Not Be Enough.**

If you like a name but think it may be misspelled buy both versions. Don't want anyone trying to piggyback on your brand? Buy all three major Top Level Domains (com, net, & org).

### **Don't Overspend on Your Name.**

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If no one owns the domain you want, it should cost about \$10, and less if you are buying in bulk or buying hosting at the same time. If someone currently owns the name or has a defunct business on it, you will need to negotiate an appropriate sale price. Appropriate really means what the name is worth to you. Never accept terms where you are leasing the name; make sure the domain registration is changed to your name, address and contact information.

There are many reputable domain sellers including GoDaddy, Yahoo!, 1&1, and DreamHost. If you choose to use commercial hosting you will likely be able to buy your domain directly from them.

My top rules for choosing a domain name are:

- Keep it relevant, unique and easy to communicate
- Get a top-three TLD (com, net, org)
- If you need more than one hyphen, you should pick a different domain name
- Buy early, and buy every iteration that you can.

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*Thanks,*

*Carlos and Jeff*