

Selecting Your Domain Name

Article Rating: NA

Submitted by: articlediner on 2006-10-19 and viewed 26 times.

Total Word Count: 1349

Author Rating:

Sample of Content:

A guide for navigating domain names, and how to choose the best one for your business.

Content:

I have been asked many times by new clients how to select a business domain name. Iâ€™ve answered some commonly asked questions to assist you with one of the most important purchases you will make for your online business.

1. Should Your Business Name Be Your Domain Name?

99.9% of the time, the answer to this question is Yes. We are living in the Internet age, and consumers are becoming savvier at purchasing goods and services online. When people think of your product (or service) theyâ€™ll connect it with your website, which makes repeated visits to your site easier for your customers.

What if the domain name is already taken? All is not lost. You have some options:

â€¢ Offer To Purchase - If you are connected with a brand name then you may want to pursue purchasing this name from its current owner. The domain contact information can be obtained in the form of a â€œWhoisâ€• lookup. Inquire as to whether they are open to selling the domain name, but be aware theyâ€™ll likely charge a higher fee for it than you would normally pay.

â€¢ Back Order â€“ This is becoming a very popular trend. Domains can now be â€œback orderedâ€• meaning simply that when the current ownerâ€™s domain registration expires, should they not renew, the domain will become available for you to purchase. This may also carry a higher fee than a normal registration.

â€¢ Alternate Ideas â€“ If your business is relatively new, it may be wise to consider alternative extensions. For example, mybusiness.com may not be available, but â€œmybusiness.netâ€• or â€œmybusiness.bizâ€• might be. The Internet has exploded in the last year with alternate extensions and there are plenty to choose from.

2. Should My Domain Name Include Keywords?

This is an excellent idea! Consider for a moment that you are a candle maker whose business name is â€œAmyâ€™s Jar Candlesâ€•. Your business name already uses â€œjar candlesâ€• as key product branding. Registering â€œamysjarcandles.comâ€• is a terrific way to target your incoming audience which results in a better chance for sales. For example, chances are that anyone shopping for candles would have a general idea of what type of candle they need, such as a jar candle, or pillar candle. Buyers are far more likely to try out phrases like â€œjar candlesâ€• or â€œpillar candlesâ€• in the search engine rather than just â€œcandlesâ€• because it will produce relevant results quicker. Having a domain name that matches your product or service branding is crucial because the easier it is to remember, the more likely it will be tried in a browser and/or search engines.

3. What Extensionâ€™.com, .net, .org?

Domain names have been disappearing at a rapid rate and new extensions have been introduced to keep the pool of available names flowing. What if the â€œ.comâ€• extension for your domain name is not available? In this instance itâ€™s likely that you can register the â€œ.netâ€• or â€œ.orgâ€• (or other) variation of your business name. Which do you choose? Should you select a â€œ.netâ€• or â€œ.orgâ€• extension, or consider a country specific alternative such as â€œ.ruâ€• or â€œ.co.ukâ€•?

Does your business cater to the local community? If so, then it might be wise to consider searching for a country specific domain extension for your area first. For example, .com is universally regarded as a US or international extension, while .co.uk refers to the United Kingdom. Should a UK buyer be looking for car parts in his neighborhood â€œmikescarparts.co.ukâ€• is more likely to be a local websites than â€œmikescarparts.comâ€•.

Businesses with an International audience can benefit from registering their name with the â€œ.netâ€• extension while â€œ.orgâ€• can be useful for identifying a non-profit organization. Since the registration restrictions for â€œ.orgâ€• have been removed however, this extension is open to anyone.

There are no rules on which extension to register, but should you decide to register a .com alternative, be very sure you *market your company using the entire domain name*.

Most buyers assume a .com extension and without specific information may be unable to locate your site.

4. Long Domain Names – Good or Bad?

This is a topic on which you will find wide variation on opinions. Your domain name can be up to 67 characters in length, that's a lot of space!

The argument for a longer domain name is mainly that it's easier for the human mind to recall later. If your business name is "I Design and Host Websites" you probably wouldn't want to register "idahw.com" with the hope that someone would associate this with your company, product or service by remembering what that stands for.

For example, "gacwh.com" is a sequence of unrelated letters that could be difficult to type correctly whereas if it that is registered as "getacheapwebhost.com" it is more likely to be remembered. Long domain names also have the added advantage of having room for your keywords. For example, if you have a site listed on Google with a domain name like "jansartsupplies" it may do better in a search for "art supplies" than a name such as "mikesartstuff.com".

The other side of this argument is that shorter names are easier to remember and type, and thus less prone to errors. For example, "websitedesign.com" is less susceptible to typos than "Icanbuildyourwebsiteaffordably.com".

The issue with shorter or more general names is that ones like "candles.com" and "tires.com" are generally not going to be available. If you decide to register a short name, possibly your company's acronym, be sure it's a meaningful combination of characters that is easy to remember. I would recommend finding a domain name which represents your products in the shortest and most meaningful way possible. Businesses with long names may need to shorten their domain name down to assist users with remembering and typing long names shorter names are also easier to fit in the title bar.

5. Should I use Plurals and Hyphenations?

Domain registration engines will usually suggest an alternative if the name you are searching for is taken. Sometimes this will include adding a hyphen or even "my" or "the" to the name.

If you wanted the term "design.com" and it was taken, you may find yourself staring at alternatives such as "mydesign.com", "thedesign.com" or even "designs.com". Which should you choose?

My rule of thumb for my clients is not to register "designs.com" if they cannot also register "design.com". The reason is that many times buyers may forget to type the "s" at the end of the name and your sale may go to someone else. There are those who will argue that this theory works in reverse, but why take chances? If you decide to register a name as "my" or "the" remember to market using your entire domain name.

Hyphens are another popular way to successfully register your name when the non-hyphenated version is no longer available. An advantage is being able to get the name that

you want however, itâ€™s my opinion that the disadvantages far outweigh this.

Hyphens are easy to forget. Users are comfortable with typing phrases like â€œjarcandles.comâ€• but may have trouble remembering to include a hyphen if you registered â€œjar-candles.comâ€•. This may result in a sale for your competitor and translates to lost sales for you.

Hyphens are also an issue with verbal recommendations. Consider a verbal recommendation for a store named â€œanas-jar-candles.comâ€•. This may translate at some point to: â€œWow, I visited Anaâ€™s Jar Candles dot com today and saw some really neat stuff.â€• Later, you would probably type â€œanasjarcandles.comâ€• into your browser hoping to visit. Ouch.

Prior to purchasing your domain name itâ€™s important to carefully consider your business community, target market, and keywords. Just ten minutes spent jotting down ideas can mean the world of difference when it comes to success with your online business.

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