

Domain Name Selection Guidelines

The importance of selecting a good domain name for your website should not be overlooked. Ultimately, it's how visitors will access your website and it can become part of your branding.

Unfortunately, with the popularity of the internet, the domain name that may seem like the obvious choice for your website may be already claimed by another party. Short names, words found in the dictionary, common phrases, acronyms, family names, and brand names are seldom available. And many potentially desirable names have been taken by speculators who will sell them to the highest bidder at a substantial markup.



Don't make domain name selection an afterthought. Look into this early in the process of starting a website.

Follow these general guidelines for selecting a domain name:

- **Keep it short.**
 - These are easier to type without errors and easier to remember.
 - For marketing and practical purposes, shorter domain names will be easier to fit on signs and other printed materials
- **Make it easily typed.**
 - Avoid unexpected letter combinations like "q" not followed by "u".
 - Acronyms may be suitable if familiar to your target audience.
- **Avoid hyphenation.**
 - An exception is if it's actually part of your offline identity. Example: Coca-Cola is the actual name of the soft drink.
- **Make it memorable**
- **Use the most common "third-level-domains"** (also known as TLDs) if possible
 - i.e., .com, .org, or .net. Otherwise visitors may remember the main part of your domain name but may mistakenly assume.
 - Before registering a domain name, check out what sites your visitors will see if they type in the wrong TLD. Make sure it isn't a competitor.
- **Check variations** on the name such as misspellings and different "third-level-domains" (e.g., .com, .org, .biz, etc.)
 - Make sure that the variant doesn't take your would-be visitor to your competitor website or an offensive one if your visitor mistypes your address.
- **Avoid copyright infringement.** These could lead to a lawsuit.
 - For example, even if available, registering the name PepsiKola may get you a letter from the soft drink company.
 - Big corporations monitor the registration of names similar to theirs and ones with derogatory implications such as *nameofcompanysucks.com*. In fact, some companies register these names privately to keep them from being used.

- **Tie it in.** If your brand is tied to a slogan, uniform, or other attribute, consider that as a domain name.
 - Example: Pat Blackwell of Party Assurance is known for always wearing a red coat at the parties she works at. People may associate her more with redcoatlady.com or redcoatladies.com than partyassurance.com. So she registered all three names and all of them point to the same website.
 - You could also use the name of a mascot, your founder, or the results of using your product (such as “a cleaner shine”).
 - Consider whether using your product name will be more effective than your company name.
- Make sure the domain name is **not offensive in other languages**.
- Buy **multiple domain names** – You can have multiple domain names for the same website. If your business uses an easily misspelled family name, consider purchasing the incorrect spellings also. For example, if the business name is G.H. Andersen, you might obtain GHAndersen AND GHAnderson.

Has someone else already registered the domain name you want?

- Look at more variations. If your company name is “Smash”, consider variations like smashco, smashcompany, thesmashcompany, or smashcorp.
- Add professional or business type identifiers such as LLC, CPA, JD, DDS, MD, Assoc, Inc, Corp, Co.
- You can use articles such as the, this, or that. e.g., The Smash Company. Your and My are also commonly used.
- Use a geographic identifier such as “Michigan” or “of Detroit”.
- Sometimes a domain name is taken but it doesn't point to a website. You can check with the domain registrar to backorder the domain name. You will be notified if and when the owner releases the name. (There is a fee for this service.) Some domain names are grabbed up by speculators and resold or made available through an auction. Expect to pay a premium price for these. Again, check with your domain name registrar.

Promote your domain name – and your website. The domain names for Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, and Google would have little meaning or effectiveness if they were not marketed heavily. Each has logos, multiple icons, and colors that lend instant recognition. Look at a variety of websites and see how the name fits the expectations you have of the website.

Allowable characters in domain names:

- The letters (a through z) and numbers (0 through 9) are allowed.
- Hyphens (dashes) are allowed.
- Punctuation marks and symbols are NOT allowed.
- Spaces are NOT allowed.
- Upper and lower case letters are treated absolutely the same. So whether someone types in www.AddedValueWeb.com or www.addedvalueweb.com, they are both equivalent and are registered as the same domain name.
- Note: Generally, websites prefixed by “www.” can be accessed without typing the “www.”. Likewise, typing the “http://” prefix is optional and it is usually best if omitted when giving out a web address to avoid confusion or typos.

Online tools for choosing a domain name – These tools will help you find and select a domain name. Check domain availability before going too far in your website planning.

- domai.nr
- dotomator.com
- bustaname.com
- domaintools.com
- domize.com
- domainsbot.com
- dnscoop.com
- stuckdomains.com
- nameboy.com
- dyyo.com/search_form.php
- ajaxwhois.com

Where should I register a domain name?

There are hundreds of sites for registering domain names and they all serve essentially the same function. Whether you register a given domain name with one service for \$12 per year or another service for \$35 a year, you're getting the same product.

Some of these domain registration sites offer additional products and services. Some may bundle the domain name with other products such as email service or web hosting. Be aware that you do not need to buy domain names and hosting services from the same company. Sometimes, extremely low domain name are like "loss leaders" that draw you in to get you to ultimately buy more products that are more profitable for the domain seller.

Private Registration of Domain Names

Private Registration is one service that we highly recommend. When you register a domain name you must provide your name and full contact information including address, phone number, and email address. This information becomes public record and is monitored by spammers and scam artists. You can protect your personal information by selecting private registration when you buy your domain name. This service will cost about \$12 per year per domain name but is worthwhile. When using such as service the public record will show the contact information for the third-party company that provides this service.