

## Website Design - Choosing a Domain Name for Your Website

Choosing the perfect domain name is crucial to the survival of your website no matter what type of site you want to build. A lot of times people get so caught up in the design process that they forget that their domain name will usually be the first thing people see (and remember). Whether you want to build a blog / forum or e-commerce website, there are several things you should remember when going through the process of picking the right domain name.

**1 - Understand what a domain name is.** A domain name is the unique URL or address of a particular website that defines itself from every other website on the World Wide Web. E.g. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)

**2 - Learn about domain name and site association.** When choosing the right domain name you should always keep it and your business/website's name as close to each other as possible. You do not want to confuse visitors because your domain name seems to be totally different from your website name, especially if you are running an e-commerce website.

**3 - Don't get fancy with it.** Choose a name that is not too long and is not too confusing so that visitors have a hard time remembering it. In most situations, the shorter your domain name is, the better off you will be. This is because people will remember the URL and they will continue to visit your site in the future. Also always try to avoid using acronyms, dashes or other symbols as they may also confuse potential visitors for the first time.

**4 - Think about your visitors/customers.** When dealing with most websites and finding the perfect domain name you should always keep in mind that it's not what you like, but what you have researched and know that your visitors/customers will like. Just because you like the name or think it sounds good does not mean everyone else is going to like it.

**5 - Always have a couple of back ups.** When you start to register your domain name it would be wise to have a few different names written down just in case your first choice is already taken. A lot of times they usually are, so the more unique your domain name is, the better chance you will have. Also keep in mind there are other domain designations than just .com or .co.uk. Depending on what type of website you have or are looking to build there are other domain designations that you might want to consider such as .org, .net, .co, .biz etc.

**6 - Short and Sweet - Domain names can be really long or really short (1 - 67 characters).** In general, it is far better to choose a domain name that is short in length. The shorter your domain name, the easier it will be for people remember. Remembering a domain name is very important from a marketability perspective. As visitors reach your site and enjoy using it, they will likely tell people about it. And those people may tell others, etc. As with any business, word of mouth is the most powerful marketing tool to drive traffic to your site (and it's free too!). If your site is long and difficult to pronounce, people will not remember the name of the site and unless they bookmark the link, they may never return.



**7 - Consider Alternatives - Unless a visitor reaches your site through a bookmark or a link from another site, they have typed in your domain name.** Most people on the internet are terrible typists and misspell words constantly. If your domain name is easy to misspell, you should think about alternate domain names to purchase. For example, if your site will be called "MikesTools.com", you should also consider buying "MikeTools.com" and "MikeTool.com". You should also think about securing the different top level domain names besides the one you will use for marketing purposes ("MikesTools.net", "MikesTools.org", etc.) You should also check to see if there are existing sites based on the misspelled version of the domain name you are considering. "MikesTools.com" may be available, but "MikesTool.com" may be home to an undesirable site. You would hate for a visitor to walk away thinking you were hosting something they did not expect.

**8 - Also consider domain names that may not include the name of your company, but rather what your company provides.** For example, if the name of your company is Mike's Tools, you may want to consider domain names that target what you sell. For example: "buyhammers.com" or "hammer-and-nail.com". Even though these example alternative domain names do not include the name of your company, it provides an avenue for visitors from your target markets. Remember that you can own multiple domain names, all of which can point to a single domain. For example, you could register "buyhammers.com", "hammer-and-nail.com", and "mikestools.com" and have "buyhammers.com" and "hammer-and-nail.com" point to "mikestools.com".

**9 - Hyphens: Your Friend and Enemy -** Domain name availability has become more and more scant over the years. Many single word domain names have been scooped up which it makes it more and more difficult to find a domain name that you like and is available. When selecting a domain name, you have the option of including hyphens as part of the name. Hyphens help because it allows you to clearly separate multiple words in a domain name, making it less likely that a person will accidentally misspell the name. For example, people are more likely to misspell "domainnamecenter.com" than they are "domain-name-center.com". Having words crunched together makes it hard on the eyes, increasing the likelihood of a misspelling. On the other hand, hyphens make your domain name longer. The longer the domain name, the easier it is for people to forget it altogether. Also, if someone recommends a site to someone else, they may forget to mention that each word in the domain name is separated by a hyphen. Another advantage to using hyphens is that search engines are able to pick up each unique word in the domain name as key words, thus helping to make your site more visible in search engine results.

**10 - Dot What?** – There are many top level domain names available today including .com, .net, .org, and .biz. In most cases, the more unusual the top level domain, the more available domain names are available. However, the .com top level domain is far and away the most commonly used domain on the internet, driven by the fact that it was the first domain extension put to use commercially and has received incredible media attention. If you cannot lay your hands on a .com domain name, look for a .net domain name, which is the second most commercially popular domain name extension.

**11 - Long Arm of the Law - Be very careful not to register domain names that include trademarked names.** Although internet domain name law disputes are tricky and have few cases in existence, the risk of a legal battle is not a risk worth taking. Even if you believe your

domain name is untouchable by a business that has trademarked a name, do not take the chance: the cost of litigation is extremely high and unless you have deep pockets you will not likely have the resources to defend yourself in a court of law. Even stay away from domain names in which part of the name is trademarked: the risks are the same.

## **12 - Search Engines and Directories - All search engines and directories are different.**

Each has a unique process for being part of the results or directory listing and each has a different way of sorting and listing domain names. Search engines and directories are the most important on-line marketing channel, so consider how your domain name choice affects site placement before you register the domain.

Most directories simply list links to home pages in alphabetical order. If possible, choose a domain name with a letter of the alphabet near the beginning ("a" or "b"). For example, "aardvark-pest-control.com" will come way above "joes-pest-control.com". However, check the directories before you choose a domain name. You may find that the directories you would like to be included in are already cluttered with domain names beginning with the letter "a".

Search engines scan websites and sort results based on key words. Key words are words that a person visiting a search engine actually search on. Having key words as part of your domain name can help you get better results.