

WEB DESIGN - Choosing a domain/site name

For many people, their first impression of your business will be through your domain name. Getting your domain right is the first step to building a long-standing online business.

Here are just a few things to consider. This is not an exhaustive list of things to consider by any means and you will find lots of other suggestions and recommendations on the web by simply googling 'choosing a domain name' or similar.

1. Make it memorable and short

Many shoppers look around before buying. It may take several visits to your site before a potential customer is ready to buy from you. If they're to come back, it's crucial that visitors can easily remember your site's name.

A short, easy-to-remember name is great for word-of-mouth marketing.

Think: Google. Skype. Twitter. Amazon

Don't think: *Buy-discount-widgets-online-from-us.co.uk*

And a short name also fits onto business cards and other printed material more easily.

2. Make it easy to pronounce and spell

You should also make your name easy to pronounce and spell. A good test to use is tell ten people your brand's business name and ask them to spell it. Then find another ten people, show them your business name written down and ask them to pronounce it. If more than a few people struggle with either, you may want to reconsider your choice.

A site like *flickr.com* has a memorable name (which is great) but an unusual spelling.

However, a site like *dribbble.com* (three bbbs) is equally memorable, but it could easily lose traffic to *dribble.com*? (with the proper spelling of just 2 bs).

3. Avoid hyphens and numbers

Hyphens and numbers make the name less memorable, and more difficult to spell or communicate verbally without confusion. Be careful with certain letter combinations that may lead to mis-spelling errors e.g. *Illogical.com*

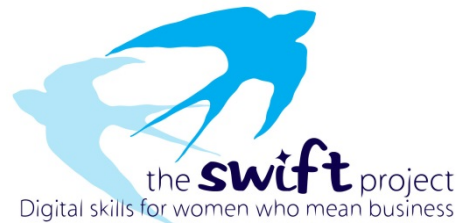
4. Including keywords in your domain name

Having relevant keywords in your domain name can be helpful when your site's listed in the search results. Google highlights the searched keywords - so your listing looks more relevant.

A second benefit is that when people link to your site, they're more likely to include a relevant keyword in the link, which can give a good boost to your site's rankings.

Here are some more examples of sites that use keywords in their domain, yet also have good brand recognition:

Hotmail.com, Travelocity, Paypal.com



When choosing your domain it helps to have in mind a few terms or phrases that describe your business. Once you have a list, you can start to pair them or add relevant adjectives.

For example, if you're launching a site that sells and delivers tea, you might start with words like tea, drinks, delivery, organic and so on.

So, if you can, include relevant keywords. But, not at the expense of being brief or memorable.

5. Avoid copyright issues and trademarked names

Once you think you've found a great domain check that you're not going to be infringing on anyone else's copyright or a name too close to someone else's trademark to avoid problems down the road. That last thing you want is to have to change your domain unexpectedly after establishing your brand online or having to fight an expensive legal battle. For more information see <https://www.gov.uk/topic/intellectual-property>

6. Choose appropriate top-level domain(s)

The TLD - or top-level domain - is just the ending - the .com .net .org or .co.uk

Many people who use the Internet will assume your site's address ends in .com and often that's what they'll type in. By all means buy and use a .org or .net address. But, if you do that, it's best if you own the .com version, too, otherwise, your marketing efforts may end up sending traffic to someone else's site.

If you own various versions of your domain name you can automatically redirect traffic to your website. This is a great way of making sure that if someone uses the wrong domain extension (.net, .org, .com etc) they will still end up on your site.

Owning multiple versions of you domain name also prevents others from registering them and thus risking losing customers who find themselves on your competitors site because they typed .com instead of .co.uk for instance.

7. Be Creative and Unique

Building a distinct brand that stands out from your competitors is no easy task, but it begins with your brand and domain name. Most single-word domains are taken and you might need to create your own word.

You can try merging two whole words like YouTube, using a phrase (WeBuyAnyCar), tweaking a word (Flickr), affixing a word with a prefix or a suffix (Shopify), or making up a completely unique name (Odeo).

8. Are you listed as the Registrant?

Make sure YOU are the registered owner (registrant) for your domain. If the domain name is registered in someone else's name (e.g. the company or person building your website) you may have problems transferring your domain to another hosting company in the future as you will need their consent and cooperation. You can check the ownership details for any domain using one of the many WHOIS services e.g. <https://who.godaddy.com/> to identify the relevant information.



9. Don't allow your domain name registration to lapse

Domain names are registered for 1 or more years at a time and if you do not renew before the expiry date you risk losing the name as someone else could see it is available and register it for themselves. You should be notified before the expiry date so do not ignore warnings or else you risk losing your domain and all of the investment you have made in building up your online brand. You may be forced to pay someone an exorbitant price to buy back your name or alternatively rebrand entirely with all of the associated problems and expense. You can register some domain types for longer than one year and there may be discounts available for doing so. Most companies you register your domain name through will have an auto renew option that will protect you from forgetting the renewal date. If you save a credit or debit card details for payment make sure the card is still valid or else the payment will be rejected.

Also be aware of scams e.g. emails from unknown sources telling you that you must renew your domain name, usually at inflated prices and possibly transferring to a different company thus forcing you to do business with them in future.

10. Shop around for value.

Domain name prices vary so shop around. You may get a free or reduced registration for your first year but check the ongoing charges.

My preferred domain name is already taken, what can I do?

Here are some sites that offer tools for generating domain name suggestions. May be useful for giving you some ideas if you haven't already decided on a name for your business/site or if it is already registered to someone else. You don't have to buy through them so be careful not to be drawn into purchasing on the spot. Once you have identified a potential domain name you like you can register it with your preferred provider.

<http://www.namemesh.com/>

<https://domainr.com/>

(NB These tools/sites are not intended as my personal recommendations but hopefully they give you some ideas to work with)

Test your ideas for a domain name on friends and family and see what their reaction is. Encourage them to be critical and don't be offended if they challenge your choice, it may help you to avoid choosing a poor or inappropriate domain name.

WHOIS

This is a generic name for services that allow you to check the ownership and renewal dates of your or your competitors' domains. There are many sites providing this service e.g.

<https://who.godaddy.com/>