



Guide to choosing a domain name

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Choosing a domain name for your site is one of the most important steps in creating your online identity and one of your key marketing tools. Domain names can be fun! A lot of people enjoy the creativity involved in thinking up a domain name.

Happy endings

Each domain has its own extension, such as *.com* or *.org.uk*. *.com* is the most popular extension and one of the oldest. It is often the first extension that most people try when searching for a website. Unfortunately, it is not easy to find a good *.com* domain that hasn't already been bought.

Hence if your target audience is in the UK, we suggest a domain name that ends in *.uk*. Domain names tend to be more readily available. Examples include *.co.uk*, *.ltd.uk*, *.plc.uk* or *.uk.com* for businesses, *.org.uk* for non-profits, *.me.uk* for individuals.

Businesses could register both *.co.uk* and *.com*, and redirect one to the other automatically. Click websitesahoy.com and see what happens.

Parish councils and other government organisations could be eligible for a *.gov.uk* extension. It involves jumping through more hoops and is much more expensive. It also depends whether you are aiming for more official or more informal presentation. So you might prefer *yourparish-pc.org.uk*.

Other options include:

- *.biz* and *.co* for businesses, *.info* for information sites, *.net* for networks or tennis clubs, *.online* for internet businesses, and *.org* for non-profits.
- New descriptive domain extensions are being published all the time, and you could get creative with *.accountants* or *.art* or *.blog*. Prices vary a lot.

Always make sure that you promote your website with the full domain name. Otherwise potential visitors may assume a *.com* extension and access the wrong site.

What's in a name?

Here are general guidelines for choosing a good domain name.

First, your domain name must be **valid**. Domain names can be a maximum of 63 characters and only use letters, numbers, and dashes. Spaces and symbols are not allowed. Domain names are not case sensitive.

If possible, your domain name should **reflect your web service or organisation name**. There are fewer things for your visitors to remember, and if your name is also your domain name, they'll automatically know where to go.

Your domain name and website should **fulfil expectations**, so when someone hears about your domain name for the first time, they should be able to guess the type of content on the site. Try to pick something **memorable**, rather than say a combination of common keywords, so you can benefit from word-of-mouth.

Make the domain **easy to type**, and avoid difficult spellings and words prone to typos. Also avoid names close to common typos, as search engines assume your visitor has made the typo. Numbers, digits or spelled-out, could be confused in word-of-mouth. Finally watch out for unfortunate combinations when you run words together!

'Memorable' and 'easy to type' also imply **the shorter the better**. The name will also fit more neatly on your website and business cards. On the other hand, spelling out your name might be more meaningful than an obscure acronym, and search engines may give preference to any keywords found in longer domain names.

Make the domain **unique**. You don't want your website to be confused with a popular site already owned by someone else, so avoid plural, hyphenated or misspelled versions of an already established domain.

Similarly, avoid possible **trademark infringement** by avoiding domain names that are too similar to other brands and your competitors. The **Intellectual Property Office** holds trademark information. If in doubt, seek the advice of a professional or use an online trademark service to check.

Finally, when you have several available name choices, **ask around** and see what your friends and clients have to say. Is your domain easy to say? Is it hard to spell? Do you have to explain why you chose the name?

Mind gone blank?

Here are some online tools that might stimulate your imagination:

- **NameBoy** will suggest different variations of a domain name and tell you if they're available.
- **More Words** allows you to search for words with wildcards, and provides lists of words with first letter and length, or words ending with a letter pair such as "ly".
- **Dot-o-mator** is a web tool that suggests site names based on prefixes and suffixes that you've entered, or categories such as colours. It also has a tool that will generate a random name for your web company.
- **Bust A Name** allows you to combine words you provide, similar words and prefixes, and uses linguistic data to sort results by readability.

Check your name's availability

Having decided on your domain name, you then need to check whether it's available or whether it has been registered already by another user. Some of the tools above also check availability of the generated domain names, but only include a limited number of extensions. Most website hosting providers will also provide domain registration and a domain checker.

Sometimes the domain name you really want isn't always available. If you have an existing brand name that is well-known, you may want to try to buy the domain name from the current owner. Look up the "whois" information for the domain, and ask the person listed if they're willing to sell it. They are likely to want to charge a higher fee than is usual when buying a new domain, assuming they want to sell it at all.

Again, here are some online tools that may help:

- **Whois Check** checks both availability and provides information on any owner.
- **Expired Domains** helps you find domain names that previous owners have not renewed, and names that are soon to expire.

- **SnapNames** monitors the status of your desired domain and tries to acquire it for you. Reviews indicate the success rate is good, and that the price for a year's subscription is expensive for a domain registration, but quite inexpensive for the amount of work it saves.

Another option might be to obtain a domain name first, and name your website or organisation after the domain.

Register your domain ASAP

It's important to register your new name before someone else does. The cost is low, so even if you're not quite sure, register it anyway!

Don't forget to call on **Websites Ahoy!** if you need any help. Registering your domain name is part of our Hassle-free website design & development package.

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