



Selecting Your Domain Name - A guide for navigating domain names and how to choose the best one for your business

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Introduction

I have been asked many times by new clients how to select a business domain name. I'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) they'll connect it with your website, which makes repeated visits to your site easier for your customers.

The first questions I generally hear is, *"What if the domain name I want is already taken?"*

All is not lost! You have some options:

- 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 ["Whois" lookup](#). Inquire as to whether they are open to selling the domain name, but be aware they'll likely charge a higher fee for it than you would normally pay.
- Back Order – This is becoming a very popular trend. Domains can now be "back ordered"; meaning simply that when the current owner'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.
- Alternate Ideas – If your business is relatively new, it may be wise to consider alternative extensions. For example, mybusiness.com may not be available, but "mybusiness.net" or "mybusiness.biz" 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?

Yes yes yes! This is also the other .1% of the time that your business name may not be the only name you'll want to register. Say, for instance that you are "Michael's Consulting," a firm whose primary area of service is Six Sigma consulting and training. Registering the name "michaelsconsulting.com" while providing general information about who you are and what you do, probably isn't helping you leverage the power of search engines. Consulting is a vast industry and chances are you're marketing at a national level as well as a local level. That being said, you'll want to increase your chances of being located in the search engines by targeting keywords for what you're building, selling or providing.

For this reason, I recommend my clients register not only their business name, in this case "michaelsconsulting.com", but also a domain name which relates to the specific product or service that they provide. For example, the names "sixsigmatraining.com", "sixsigmaconsultant.com" or "learnsixsigma.com" are all excellent choices. They are easy to remember, concise and provide keywords related to the specific area of consulting expertise. Chances are always better that the

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customer has a general idea of what *type* of consultant they are looking for. Therefore, they are far more likely to try out phrases like "six sigma consultant" or "six sigma training" in the search engine rather than just "consulting" because it will produce more 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.

Additionally I would optimize my client's site and submit to the search engines using the keyword driven phrase name. This (along with other factors) helps to increase the chances of landing in the results set for search phrases like "six sigma consulting" or "six sigma training." Specific phrases are more likely to be searched under than just the general term "consulting." Both domain names working together can become a powerful tool to delivering client's to your Internet doorstep.

3. What Extension....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 ".com" extension for your domain name is not available? In this instance it's likely that you can register the ".net" or ".org" (or other) variation of your business name. Which do you choose? Is a ".net" or ".org" extension better, or should you consider a country specific alternative such as ".ru" or ".co.uk"?

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 specifically to the United Kingdom. Should a UK buyer be looking for car parts in his neighborhood "mikescarparts.co.uk" is more likely to be a local shop than "mikescarparts.com".

Businesses with an International audience can benefit from registering their name with the ".net" extension in this case while ".org" can be useful for identifying a non-profit organization. Since the registration restrictions for ".org" have been removed 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 will 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. 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.

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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 can and decide to register a short name, possibly your company's acronym, be sure it's a meaningful combination of characters that is easy for your customers 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 might need to shorten their domain name down to assist users with having to remember and type long names; shorter names are also easier to fit in the title bar.

5. Can 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, it's my opinion that the disadvantages far outweigh this. The first being, hyphens are easy to forget. Users are comfortable with typing phrases like "jarcandles.com" but may have trouble remembering to include a hyphen if you registered "jar-candles.com". 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 "anas-jar-candles.com." This may translate at some point to: "Wow, I visited Ana's Jar Candles dot com today and saw some really neat stuff." Later, you would probably type "anasjarcandles.com" into your browser hoping to visit. Ouch.

Prior to purchasing your domain name it's important to carefully consider your business community, target market, and target keyword phrases that you'll be using on your website. Just ten minutes spent jotting these down can mean the world of difference when it comes to success with your online business.

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About the Author

Krista Garren is a website design consultant and webmaster who specializes in assisting clients with taking their business to the Internet without being overcharged, blown up, or obliterated. Visit her website at <http://www.ridethewebandwin.com> for more details.