

Choosing a website name

By DanShaw.com

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Your website, or domain name, is vital to the success of your business. How do you choose the most effective name possible? Here are the rules I go by. You must weigh and balance all the rules, since there are always exceptions and trade-offs.

Your website name becomes your business name.

Never write or say your business name without adding the “.com”. Reinforce the website address at every opportunity. If you have a storefront, your .com address should be on the sign outside the shop.

Your web address is your own .com.

“.com” is the default type of domain name. If you get a “.biz” or “.info” or some other type of extension, people will forget and go to the .com first, and you will lose traffic. Even if you get a .org or .net, you will still need to get the “.com”, too.

Get your legal name as your domain name.

For example, DanShaw.com. If your name has already been taken, get it now even if you are not planning on using it right now. Better yet, put up a page with your contact information. Many people use the web instead of opening up a phonebook, and many people don't even have a land-line listed in a local phone directory. Make it easy for people to contact you. Your legal-name-as-domain name may be too broad for any single business, but works great if you have numerous divergent businesses and interests.

Choose a name you don't have to spell

You (and hopefully many other people!) will be repeating your domain name many thousands of times. Choose one you don't have to spell out.

Bad: Auctions4u.com

Bad: ClairesTyes

Bad: Gonzalos (“What did you say?” Gonsales? Gonzales?)

Good: Auctionsforyou.com

Good: BobsTies

Choose a short name

Choose a name which is about 15 characters or less. Some people will type your name directly into their browser address bar (not to mention how many times you'll type and write your name). Shorter names are not only easier to say and spell, they're less subject to typos.

Choose a name without any dashes or underscores.

People are likely to forget dashes or underscores.

Bad: Collectible-Coins.com
Good: CollectibleCoins.com

Choose a name that is memorable.

You don't want people forgetting it!

Bad: TheGoodPlumber.com ("the" is forgettable)
Good: BestDamnPlumber.com (humor is memorable)

Choose a name that describes what you do.

In most cases, choose the most descriptive name you can. Consider that your website address can be all you need. If you need more, you'll need more room to print it, you'll have to print it smaller, and people will need more time to read and understand it. Choose a name that doesn't need a tag line.

Bad: PinkPanda.com: Exotic Pets
Good: exoticpets.com

Choose a new that will make people want to look you up.

For example, if you saw the name JohnDoe.com on the back of a bus, would you go seek it out? No.

Bad: JohnDoe.com (Unless your name is a household word.)
Good: DonaldTrump.com (Redirects to Trump.com.)
Good: VideosForDancers.com ("I'm a dancer who wants video, I'll look that up.")

Differentiate your business.

Choose a name that describes your unique offering, your 'radical monopoly'.

Bad: RalphpAutoParts.com
Good: AntiqueFordAutoParts.com

Choose a name that is broad enough.

Bad: ValleyAvenueHaircuts.com (what if you move to another location?
What if you want to sell some other product or service besides?)
Good: VelvetSalon.com

Choose a name that is narrow enough to help your search engine standings.

The more narrow your market, the easier it will be to differentiate yourself, promote just a few keywords, get ranked highly in the search engines, and identify and reach your target audience.

Bad: RalphpAutoParts.com
Good: AntiqueFordAutoParts.com

Choose a name that people will search for.

Will people type your company name into Google? Only if they already know about your company. If you expect to get business from people through search results, do your best to put keywords into your domain name.

Bad: VelvetCloud.com
Good: VelvetShoes.com

Avoid word conflation.

Since there are no spaces in domain name, choose words that won't be mis-read.

Bad: whorepresents.com
Bad: whoistheiragent.com (tendency to be read, "who is the iragent?")
Good: talktomyagent.com

Always Use Intercaps

Intercaps make your name more readable. Intercaps help avoid conflation of terms.

Bad: danshaw.com
Good: DanShaw.com

"www." is not part of your domain name.

All websites are "www.". It's the default, there's no need to type it into the browser address bar. It's hard to say. It unnecessarily takes up space in print.

Brainstorming tips.

Write down all the possible relevant words and phrases you can think of and recombine them. For example, if you're in the auction business, high bid, higher, highest, bid, winning, auction, block, gavel, lot, going once, highbid, bidhigh, winningauction, winning bidder, etc.

Should you get the singular or the plural, or both?

For example, should you get videosfordancers.com, or videofordancers.com? That depends of meaning, but also on how the name sounds, and how people will remember it. You don't want to have to re-emphasize, to try to get people to remember, for example, "that's 'shows' with an 'S'." You may want or need to get both if they're both available.

Bad: spotpetfoods.com
Good: spotpetfood.com

Check to see if a domain name is available only through internic.net!

You can check to see if a domain name is currently hosted simply by typing in to the address bar in your browser.

However, to see if a domain names is already registered, check your domain name only at:

<http://www.internic.net/whois.html>

Do not check for domains at any other site! Checking for names at unknown sites may mean someone is watching.

Domain names registration is cheap.

Domain names are registered by the year through many resellers. One of the largest registrars is godaddy.com, though they have had some involvement in promoting porn. As of this writing, domains are about \$10 per year. So if you think of a better name, you can always switch.

Take the time to find just the perfect domain name.

When you're figured it out, you'll know it's perfect. You won't have to call me to ask me what I think of the name.

Register the name for at least two years.

It's likely that domain names that are registered for just one year are deprecated by the search leader, Google.com.

Always Use Intercaps

Intercaps make your name more readable. Intercaps help avoid conflation of terms.

Bad: danshaw.com

Good: DanShaw.com

Parking domain names.

You may get any number of domain names and have them all point to the same website. This is called parking. For example, if you qualify for a .org, you will still want to get the .com name, and redirect the .com to point to the .net address.

If you'd like further advice and support, I invite you to contact me, DanShaw.com. Telephone 541-951-3394.