

10 Tips for Choosing a Domain Name

By Anita Campbell

A rose by any other name may smell as sweet, but if your business name isn't followed by a dot-com your customers may never find your business.

Does your choice of domain name for your website really matter?

I'll say it does!

Your domain name is like your street address. How will customers find you if they don't know where to look -- or worse, if they go to what they think is your address only to find your company is not there? Here are ten tips to choosing a domain name for your business:

1. Make it a dot-com -- Henry Ford is rumored to have said about his Model T Ford that you could have it in any color "so long as it's black." That same attitude pretty much sums up one naming philosophy: choose any domain name, so long as it's a ".com" extension. In the United States, most people typing in a domain name will type ".com" by default. With over 70 million registered URLs, the ".com" extension is by far the most popular, with ".net", ".org", and ".info" lagging far behind in popularity, [according to the ICANN Wiki](#).

2. Short and easy to spell -- Shorter is better. A short URL is easier to remember and less likely to be misspelled than a long one. For obvious reasons, avoid any domain name that by its nature is hard to spell or confusing.

3. Company names and brand names -- Whenever possible, register your company name as your main URL. It's what people usually try first when looking for your business website. You might also consider registering your product/service names as additional URLs. The reason? Some companies now create mini-sites specifically for products and services -- think Jif.com or Tide.com. Or they point the product URL to a section of their main website that features that product.

4. Keywords and household words -- Some companies register industry-specific terms, common words or short phrases that your customers or prospective customers may commonly type into a browser. According to Monte Cahn, CEO of [Moniker.com](#), "Seventy percent of people type directly in the browser address field, while the other 30 percent go through a search engine." This has increased the value of domains that are household words, easy-to-remember phrases, or keywords. Domain names such as Autos.com and Seniors.com sold for more than \$1 million each, he says.

5. Personal names -- Register your own first and last name as your URL if you are a consultant, writer, or other professional whose reputation in your field is critical to drawing customers. Think TomPeters.com. You have several options here. For instance, you can use your personal name as your business domain. Or, you can point

your personal-name URL to a separate company website. Either way, people looking for you are more likely to also find your business website.

6. Be defensive with misspellings -- Buy up common misspellings of your domain name. That way, you don't leave traffic on the table -- and competitors won't be able to buy the misspelled domains and siphon off traffic intended for your site. According to Cahn, try this method to find misspellings: Get a number of people in your office to type in your domain name 100 times each in a browser. If you don't have employees, get your family and friends involved. Keep track of every mistyped URL. Those are the URLs you want to buy and point to your site.

7. Protect your brand with other extensions -- While the ".com" extension is the most popular, as a defensive measure consider also snapping up other extensions of your domain name. Secure the .net, .info, .biz and similar extensions. If you do business internationally, think about securing country extensions, also (such as .co.uk).

8. Don't forget mobile -- With mobile devices becoming more popular, big brands are starting to register and develop their .mobi sites specifically for mobile users. So do what the big boys do and register that .mobi. You may have no plans to build out a .mobi site today. But as mobile usage grows you may be glad you have that domain in two or three years.

9. Avoid long hyphenated URLs -- Ochool of thought in vogue a few years ago was to register domain names with strings of keywords separated by hyphens. The reason? It was thought that you could get higher rankings in the search engines if these keywords were in your URL. This approach led to some ridiculously long URLs prone to misspellings and confusion. This approach has fallen out of favor in most camps, as it is [not clear that search engines give any preference to hyphenated keyword URLs](#).

10. Register domains for as long as possible -- A final word of advice: secure your main domain names for a minimum of several years so they don't expire out from under you. Ten years is best. What's \$89 (the current cost of a 10-year registration through GoDaddy.com) when your company's entire Web presence is at stake?

The larger domain name registrars will send pre-expiration reminders or even automatically renew on your behalf. Sign up for these protections whenever available. Be especially careful when using smaller resellers of domain names, as they may not offer these expiration-avoidance features. More than one small business owner I know has been rudely surprised by an expired domain.

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