10 Tips

for Choosing & Using Your Domain Name

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SiteSetupKit

10 Tips for Choosing & Using Your Domain Name — SiteSetupKit

What's a Domain Name?

You can't have a website without a web address. When people open a web browser, they need an address to type that will lead them to your site. The most important part of this address is the **domain name.**

Everybody uses domain names every day, whether they realize it or not. Your e-mail address, for example, is made up of two parts:

1. A **username** before the @ symbol
2. A **domain name** after the @ symbol

So you might have an address that looks like this:

> username@yahoo.com
> username@gmail.com
> username@verizon.net

If you have your *own* domain name, like many of us do for our businesses, you can use that domain name in your e-mail address(es):

> Wendy@SiteSetupKit.com
> Pamela@SiteSetupKit.com

Choosing a Domain Name is a Branding Decision

Your domain name will represent a big part of who you are on the web, and a custom name will help build your brand. It will serve as the very first touch point between you and your customers.

If you choose your domain name well, your customers will be able to find you and your products or services a lot easier!

How Do I Get a Domain Name?

People commonly refer to "buying" domain names, but this isn't quite accurate. What we're really doing is leasing them for a period of time (1 to 10 years). The company that leases the name to you is called a **Domain Name Registrar**, and the process is called **registering**.

There are many registrars out there, with different prices and features. You can find some recommendations for companies we've used on the last page of this report. They all have access to the same central database of domain names, so there's no difference in selection or availability of names.

What's in a (Domain) Name?

URL (web address)

http://www.sitesetupkit.com/our-products/sitesetupkitcourse/

Sub-domain   Domain Name   Path to the page you're viewing

URL is synonymous with **web address**. It's the entire address of an individual web page, beginning with the "h" in "http" and ending with the very last character.

The **domain name** is the star of our show. It's everything between the first period ("dot") and the single forward slash. So **yourdomain.com**, **yourdomain.org**, and **yourdomain.net** are three completely separate domain names, and can be registered by three different people.

A **subdomain** is anything between the final slash of the http:// and the first period ("dot"). It's optional.

The **path** is everything that follows the forward slash. It's exactly the same as specifying the location of a file on your computer with an address like c:/my_files/project_1/overview.doc.

Rules of the Domain Name Game

There are a few rules set by ICANN, the international body that governs the registration and use of domain names. When choosing, keep in mind that domain names:

- Can use letters, number and hyphens
- Cannot begin or end with a hyphen
- Are limited to 63 characters in length
- Are NOT case-sensitive (though the rest of the URL can be, see definition of path above)

Tip #1:
Use your brand name or company name as your domain name if possible.

If you can register a name that's the same as your brand, business or personal name, grab that and use it.

Also, if possible, grab the "big three:" .com, .net, and .org versions of the same domain name. *(More on this in Tip #2)*

Keep your domain name and your company name consistent. Ideally, if you tell me your company name, I should be able to figure out your web address by simply adding .com.

Of course, that's not always possible, especially because many .com names have already been snapped up *(more on this in Tip #2 — keep reading!)*

So you might have to get creative *(but not too much — more on this in Tip #7)*.

New, small businesses have a huge advantage over bigger, more established companies here: If you haven't established your business name yet, as a startup or home business owner, you can simply change the name of your business to match an available domain name.

Tip #2:
.com is still king.

"Dot-com" was the first domain name suffix available for commercial use, and it remains the gold standard.

If someone types your domain name in and doesn't remember the suffix, they will assume it's .com. Also, if they type a partial URL and leave off the suffix, today's web browsers will automatically add .com to the end (try it: Open your browser and type in the single word "Amazon." Where do you end up?). Both of these "default" behaviors will benefit you—but only if you have a .com address.

If you cannot find your business name in either .com, .net or .org, you may want to consider changing your business name.

There are a couple of suffixes that are available for specific industries or professions. For example, .pro domains may only be registered by doctors, lawyers, and CPAs; .travel is reserved for "travel-related entities," and .coop is for co-ops.

Here's a complete list of suffixes and the restrictions and requirements for registering them. **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains**

In some cases, even an "open" (anyone is eligible to register) suffix like .name, .info or .mobi might be perfect for your individual situation.

But in general, you should try to get a .com address, and supplement it with additional suffixes for good measure.

Tip #3:
Aim for 5-30 characters in length.

Domain names are limited to 63 characters, which is actually pretty long. So if you can't find YourCompanyName.com, you could consider longer and more descriptive names, slogans, or company catchphrases.

YourCompanyNameMakesTheBestWidgetsInTown.com is only 40 characters, for instance, so you could even go with YourCompanyNameAPassionForExcellenceInWidgetCrafting-Since1983.com (just under the limit at 61 characters).

Silly examples, maybe, but you get the idea: You can say a lot in 63 characters. However, a 63-character domain name will be almost impossible to remember.

Studies have analyzed the length of registered domains, as well as the length of domains that are indexed by Google. These have found that domains between 11 and 30 characters seem to hit the sweet spot. They're registered more frequently and they're more frequently returned in Google searches.

That number actually includes the "http://" which is six characters, so we're really talking about 4 to 24 characters for the actual domain name. **We'd suggest keeping your domain name below 30 characters if you want people to be able to remember it and type it in.**

There probably are not a lot of domain names being registered that take up the full 63 characters, and almost everything that is five letters or shorter has already been registered (and a considerable number of the 6-, 7- and 8-letter domains as well), so there are practical reasons for this limit as well.

Tip #4:
Domains are cheap! It's hard to over-invest in them.

The most I've ever paid for a .com domain for one year is $10. If you register for more than one year at a time, and if you register more than one domain at a time (see Name-Cheap's bulk domain registration info in the Resources section), the price comes down.

The point is, it's hard to over-invest in domain names because they are very cheap. For something that represents your business to the entire online world, 10 bucks a year is a fantastic bargain.

So don't limit yourself to a single must-be-perfect domain name. Buy 10 or 20 or 50 and use domain forwarding to point them all at the same website (or use specific domains for specific products or campaigns).

After you purchase multiple suffix versions of your domain like .net, .biz and .org, you can start to look at spelling (and other) variations. If you spell your name unusually, then snap up the phonetic spelling or a couple of variants (like Andersen and Anderson, for example).

Consider registering versions of the domains you already have, with hyphens between the words. Other options to consider include plurals, verb forms, and locations.

For example, say your business is all about being a positive parent. You could register:

- PositiveParent.com
- PositiveParents.com
- PositiveParenting.com
- PositiveParentGroup.com
- PositiveParentsInc.com
- PositiveParentsInCalifornia.com

…and that's just for starters. Brainstorm a list — it can be fun!

Tip #5:
Find a "no explanation needed" domain name.

Be aware of how you're going to tell people about your website.

If you're going to be telling people verbally or advertising on the radio or having an Internet radio show, you want something pronounceable that is spelled phonetically, that doesn't have hyphens or too many abbreviations.

Even if you find something that looks great, make sure you know what it sounds like, that it's intelligible, and that you don't have to explain it 10 times over to people.

This is another case where having a longer, but more self-explanatory, domain name can be better than a shorter one that you have to spell out or explain.

Here's an example: I have a client called Healthy Families International. They were concerned that HealthyFamiliesInternational.org was too long to be a good domain name, and asked about using HealthyFamiliesI.org or HealthyFamiliesIntl.org or HealthyFamiliesInt.org.

My recommendation (which they took!) was to simply use the longer domain name, because explaining an abbreviation took more time than simply saying the entire domain name out loud.

Try this test: can you explain to a total stranger how to get to your website, without resorting to spelling words out or explaining what abbreviations mean? Can you just say the domain name and have a pretty good chance of them getting it right? If not, think simpler, even if that means longer.

Tip #6:
Keep domains in print human readable!

When you use your domain name in print, humans are going to have to read and understand it. We are not machines, so leave off the http://www. part. If you are using another subdomain, do use that.

"In print" includes not just business cards, flyers, and print ads—it also includes e-mail, e-mail signatures, your own website, and pretty much anywhere you can read a URL.

And please, please, please, don't create problems by asking people to remember and type something after the slash, like www.YourDomain.com/customers/survey. **They. Will. Not. Remember.** This is a job for a subdomain: Survey.YourDomain.com is much much better.

And keeping in mind Tip #4, why not just register YourDomainSurvey.com?

Tip #7:
Don't get 2 cre8ive.

Stay away from cute contractions or short cut names.

It might be tempting to cobble together a domain name with things like the number 8 in "gr8" or the letter U for the word "you" or the letter C for the word "see."

This has a "cute factor," and I'm willing to admit that there's a certain market that might go for that "text speak."

But for the rest of the world, you'll find yourself having to explain that they can get to your website by typing "Gr plus the numeral 8 plus the capital letter C…" every single time you tell someone your web address. You've just used 30 seconds explaining, and the person is not going to remember it.

Tip #8:
Capitalization is your friend.

Remember: domain names are not case sensitive, so when you're typing out your web address (or printing business cards or designing advertisements), use this to your advantage.

Do capitalize each word to help us read. For instance, writing SiteSetupKit.com instead of sitesetupkit.com makes it easier on our eyes to quickly read the URL. It doesn't matter if they type it with the caps or not, it's still going to get them to your site.

This includes your e-mail address, by the way. Be consistent in the way you write (type) your e-mail address and your website address, and be consistent whenever you write out your website address. Your e-mail signature is one place to make a change immediately. Also check your business cards, advertisements, e-mail auto-responders, online profiles…you get the idea: make it easy to read your URL.

Tip #9:
Ask for objective opinion.

Make sure you don't end up saying something totally unintended.

Sometimes you get unexpected results when you run an otherwise-great phrase all together in one word. My favorite example is a company called **Speed of Art**. When you put that to-gether URL-style, you get **speedofart**. Oops. Nobody wants to be a Speedo fart!

When you are considering a domain name, remember that you are going to run it all together with no spaces. As I mentioned in Tip #8, you can use selective capitalization to help out, and you can register domain names with hyphens in them, but that's pretty much all the help you get.

Ask somebody to look at it. Get a fresh set of eyes to check it out before you purchase a do-main name.

Even if you're going to use selective capitalization (and you should), you can't always count on others to do so. And you do want other people to link to your site, mention and review your products and services, etc.

So make sure that when your domain name is written in all lower case (or all upper case) letters, it doesn't morph into something that makes you look ridiculous.

Tip #10:
Get more free website info!

Wendy Cholbi
WendyCholbi.com

Pamela Wilson
BigBrandSystem.com

You're invited

Want to learn all the steps for setting up an *inexpensive*, *easy-to-maintain* and *beautiful* website?

Click to register for our free Love Your Website class.

Resources

Picking Your Domain Name:

Good URL, Bad URL blog:

Lots of funny domain examples, plus links to domain research:

http://goodurlbadurl.blogspot.com/

List of generic and country-specific top-level domains:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains

Buying Your Domain Name:

NameCheap:
We are proud to be affiliated with NameCheap, our favorite domain registrar. They offer a clear, no-nonsense website that lets you easily register your domain name. They also feature low prices and have great customer support. We highly recommend them!

http://www.namecheap.com