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# Building an internet business from the ground up.

## DOMAIN NAMES

### The big idea

**So you've got a great idea for an internet business.**

You've spoken to your friends, your family and your bank manager - everyone agrees it's a winner. You've thought about how the website should look, you've developed some ideas about branding and written your business plan. You've registered the company name and a trademark. Things are coming together now.

Then, after all this time, after months and months of work and planning, you finally do a search for your chosen domain name (web address) - and find, to your horror, that someone has already registered it and that your whole business plan needs to be revised.

The purpose of this article is to empower start-up businesses with the knowledge to help them avoid making this classic mistake.

### Domain names

A domain name is a web address. It's what people type in their browser to get to your website. An example of a domain name is "easily.co.uk". A domain name can be relatively inexpensive when purchased new, but can hold tremendous value for a business. A domain establishes identity on the Internet and is the primary link between the offline and online worlds. It is an integral element of a successful company - whether the majority of its business is conducted online or not.

We recommend a holistic approach to making decisions relating to branding, trademarks and domain names, as it can be an expensive and tiresome business trying to secure a domain name that you consider essential for your business further down the line. Domain names should be factored into a

business proposition from the outset, **BEFORE** registration of company or trademark. If you've got an idea, go and search for relevant domain names **NOW**. It's free to search and at the same time you will get an idea of what is already out there and who your competitors might be.

**Simple generic domain names can be extremely valuable. The problem is that most, if not all of them, were purchased long ago. Business.com was recently re-sold for \$350 million and dictionary.com for \$100 million - these examples indicate the value of strong domain names in today's market.**

### Consistency

We believe the ideal situation for a business is to have consistency between its company name, its trademark and its domain name. That way there is a much reduced chance of potential clients making a mistake or getting sidetracked when trying to find your website and finding their way to a competitor's instead. For example, imagine you want to set up a new business called NewBiz. You should register your company as NewBiz, register a trademark of "NewBiz" and register domain names such as newbiz.com, newbiz.co.uk, newbiz.net and newbiz.eu.

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### Making a name for yourself

Over 120 million domains have been registered worldwide. Nearly half of these are .coms, but there are many other types of domain extension, some of which denote particular countries, or industries. Some domains have quite rigorous application procedures, with certain criteria having to be met by applicants, e.g. a professional certification (.pro), or local registered office or trademark (.ca - Canada). Others are quite generic in terms of what they stand for and aren't restricted at all (e.g. .com, .net). The .co.uk domain extension indicates a presence within the United Kingdom, but has always been unrestricted. The relatively new .eu represents geographical location within the European Union and has only one restriction - the owner must have an address within the EU.

Because many of the short or obvious domain names have been registered already, it can take a little work to come up with a good domain name for your business – but it is still possible to find memorable, catchy domains! Although short is often considered best, the important thing is actually how memorable your domain is. Sometimes it can be desirable to choose a domain name that combines your brand with a word which is representative of your business – this may make it a bit longer, but people may find it easier to remember because of the business description.

Here are a few suggestions to help you come up with good domain names:

**Brainstorm with your colleagues** Find yourself a nice, quiet, secluded space and let all hell break loose. Be as creative as you want – just keep reminding yourselves of your main objective: is it memorable, does it say what you want it to say?

**Try continuous writing on a theme** Start with a generic word or phrase that describes the sector you want to do business in. Then just keep on writing without thinking too consciously about it. Words will lead into other words and you'll be surprised by what comes out. See how long you can go on for.

**Check out competitors' websites** A quick search on a search engine should bring up a number of your potential competitor's sites. See what they have gone for in their internet address. It can also be useful to see how they have organised their site.

**Check availability as you go along** Be structured and organised about this – draw up a list of possibilities as you go along and note what is available, what has been registered and what is being actively used. Searching for available domains is free and secure at [www.easily.co.uk](http://www.easily.co.uk). If a domain is already taken, you can find out some information about the owner by clicking to see the "Whois" lookup.

**Put yourself in a potential customer's shoes** Does the domain suggest what type of business it is? Does it give the right impression? Is it catchy and memorable?

**Sanity check your final shortlist** This last point is incredibly important. Make sure you write your domain name ideas down and look at them carefully. Can the letters make up a different word to what you intended? Read it aloud. Spell it out. Get other people to look at it. See if your friends can remember it. See what it will look like on an ad or a business card. Choosing a name for your internet business is like choosing a name for your child – you don't want to be changing in the future, if at all possible.

Bear in mind that a hyphen is a valid character in a domain name and can be useful to visually break up words within a domain. Also hyphens can help to separate out the keywords that search engines "read".

And lastly, if your business is going to be operating abroad, make sure you check that your domain name doesn't mean something inappropriate or rude in another language. Look into registering the appropriate local domain extension(s) for the region(s) you plan to operate in.

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### Type-in traffic – consider variations and different extensions

Internet users often try to guess the domain name of the company they wish to visit rather than look for it through search engines. Whether this is due to the sheer number of results a search will generate or just because users would rather cut out the middleman and go straight to the source is uncertain.

A recent study conducted by Opinion Research Corp. found that as much as 64% of web surfers surveyed bypass search engines and type keywords directly into their browsers.

However, what is clear from another report by CommonName (a provider of keyword navigation and internet search services) is that 60 % of internet users have up to three goes at guessing a company's domain name before they give up looking. Indeed, 71% of respondents to its survey said they switched to a rival company after failing to find the one they were looking for.

This "three strikes and you're out" model emphasises the importance of creating a domain name that customers will either recall or could easily guess. And there is more to bear in mind: you should consider registering variations on a domain name, using different extensions and simple misspellings. They can still lead to the same website and will help capture genuine visitors who inadvertently mistype or misspell your domain name – creating a ring of protection against those wishing to hijack your brand and customers.

### Trademarks

A quick word about trademarks. There can be value in choosing a mark that does not have direct meaning in relation to the product or service which is being provided. Consider successful internet brands such as "Amazon", "Ebay", "Kelkoo" and "Firebox". In the UK at least, the Trade Marks Registry tends not to register marks which are descriptive of the goods or

services which will be provided under the brand. A benefit of choosing a mark that is, at the very least, creative in the way it describes what you do, is that you may well find it easier to register the corresponding domain name - since the majority of descriptive domain names have already been registered.

These days some new online brands are composed of made-up words, or words with letters substituted instead of numbers. There is also a tendency to drop vowels e.g. "Flickr.com". Techniques such as these can help keep your business domain name short and memorable.

### Media

Don't forget to consider the media through which your marketing campaigns are going to be delivered. For instance, the Home Office had to curtail a radio campaign advertising a website that promoted safer internet browsing for minors - the domain chosen was "thinkUknow.com". The only problem was that the spelling of this domain could be misinterpreted when heard over the radio, as "thinkYOUknow.com", a site which at the time included some links to online dating websites and potentially adult material. You should certainly consider all possible spellings of your internet domain, and in some cases actually register alternative spellings, in order to safeguard against the loss of potentially valuable traffic.



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### Summary

If you are starting a business in the UK, you should definitely register both the .com and .co.uk versions of your chosen domain name to start with. You should also consider .net and .eu - this will help protect your potentially valuable brand. If your brand becomes huge and attracts high levels of internet traffic, you will find yourself registering all available versions of your domain name in order to prevent "cybersquatting". This is when people register available versions of a brand for profit; either from the resale of the domains (back to the rightful owner), or from pay-per-click advertising links. In fact, sometimes the squatters will register misspellings or alternative spellings of a domain in the hope that they will still capture some traffic – this is known as "typosquatting".

To put it simply, you don't want someone who's trying to find you being led to the "wrong" kind of site! Nor do you want to be forced to pay out a large sum of money down the line in order to recover your intellectual property. Even though the law is essentially in your favour if you are making legitimate use of your brand's internet domain name, it can still cost several thousand pounds just to bring a case to arbitration. For a domain that would have cost only tens of pounds in the first place.

**Searching for domain names is free and secure at [www.easily.co.uk](http://www.easily.co.uk)**

Easily.co.uk provides everything a business needs to establish and develop its internet presence, quickly and affordably.