

Choosing a Domain Name

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Introduction

A Domain Name is an easy to read name that people can use to refer to a web site or e-mail address. When you enter a domain name into your web browser or e-mail program (i.e.: enovationsdesigns.com), it is quickly translated into a specific machine address comprised of a series of numbers separated by decimal points (i.e.: 68.178.175.93). Basically this series of numbers serves as a type of “road map” directing the data you are sending to a specific computer connected to the world wide web.

As a business owner with a well designed web site, you may never need to have known this information. We mention it here because we feel it underlines the purpose of this document: If people can't read or remember your domain name, they are less likely to reach your web site.

However, just making your domain name memorable is not enough to maximize its potential to draw traffic to your web site and ultimately draw customers to your company. We have identified 6 key areas that you should consider before choosing your domain name or domain names!

Which TLD? (Top Level Domain)

The Top Level Domain is the part that appears after the ‘.’ of a domain name. The most common ones are .COM .NET or .CA but there are literally dozens of Top Level Domains, each with specific pros and cons. Many have specific eligibility requirements too, which means some may not be open to you. We will explain a few of the common ones here for you:

.COM

.COM was intended to denote US Commercial domains but exploded into the most dominant TLD on the net. With no eligibility requirements, any individual or company can register ANY available domain name in seconds. The .COM TLD is so wide spread that it has become a generic household term with sayings like “They are a .COM business” or “In the .COM boom” or “What’s your .COM?”. Its popularity has made it nearly essential to all web site owners as it is a natural mistake for potential customers to enter .COM instead of any other TLD. Even if a customer consciously reads a .CA or .NET, they may sub-consciously enter .COM. In fact, there are programs in common use that assume .COM even without the user’s knowledge. It is our suggestion that you make every possible effort to procure the domain name you choose within the .COM TLD. (Please note that in some cases, you may find the name you want has already been taken. You may also find that it has been registered by a “cyber-squatter” wishing to sell the domain name for a profit.)

.CA

Nearly every developed country around the globe has their own TLD. Canada’s is .CA, the United States’ is .US and the list goes on. These country based TLD’s are known as ccTLD or Country Code Top Level Domains. They are most useful for denoting a web site or enterprise that has products, services, or information pertinent to the residents of that country. For example, Future Shop is a “big-box” electronics retailer operating in both Canada and the U.S. and their web site domain name is “futureshop.com”. However, this web site contains products and pricing relevant to the American market only. To better serve the Canadian market, they developed and maintain “futureshop.ca” which has products available to the Canadian market and contains Canadian prices. Many of the ccTLDs have eligibility requirements, mostly restricting eligibility to people or companies operating within that country. If you are planning on servicing a market solely within one country, or anticipate the need to separate content based on the country to which it’s being offered, you may want to consider securing your domain name within the relevant TLD(s). The .CA TLD is gaining popularity as Canada’s tech savvy businesses compete internationally and as foreign businesses recognize the vitality of the Canadian market. If you or your business is eligible for a .CA TLD we highly recommend making the small investment.

.NET

The .NET TLD(along with .COM and others) was created at the inception of the internet and was intended to serve companies offering Internet related services. Open to any registrant, the .NET TLD has become a second .COM for many. Some use it to provide an Internet like communication structure within their organization (known as an “intranet”). Gaming and gambling companies often use .NET alongside their .COM to separate for-fun games from real-money games. Companies offering internet related services and products commonly use the .NET TLD on it’s own, or in conjunction with a .COM or a ccTLD.

.BIZ

A newer addition to the list of TLD's, the .BIZ is a response to the realization that the .COM TLD will eventually run out of names. It was also intended to offer an alternative to companies whose preferred domain name has already been taken in the .COM TLD. The .BIZ TLD is managed slightly different from the .COM TLD. You must be a "bona fide" business to be eligible. There is no "cyber-squatting" allowed and "personal sites" are prohibited.

Existing Web Sites

If you have chosen the Top Level Domain or Domains in which your domain name will reside, you then must choose a name or names that will serve as your web site address to the public.

In most cases, you will want to make your domain name as close as possible to your actual business name or operating name. If your business operates as "Jenny's Landscaping" your preferred domain name will likely be "jennyslandscaping.TLD". You may find however that the domain name you want is already taken.

As a rule of thumb, a Canadian business should check both the .COM and the .CA TLDs for their desired domain name. If you are a Canadian company, servicing a Canadian market, and you wish to register a .CA domain name you may find that the same name already exists in the .COM domain. What does this mean to you? That can vary, but it is important to consider the implications.

Using our example, you want to register "jennyslandscaping.ca" but have discovered that "jennyslandscaping.com" already exists. As a landscaping company you will likely focus your services on a specific geographical region. What region does the .COM site owner focus on? Will they compete directly in your market? Are they across town? Across the province? Across the country? In another country? Since they have the dominant TLD, the coveted .COM, you can expect that at least some small portion of your potential customers will reach their site by mistake, thinking they have reached yours. What message will the .COM site send to your potential customers? Is it possible for your potential customers to become customers of the .COM business? If you feel that there is a significant risk for your potential clients to use your competitors because of a mistyped TLD, you may want to look at alternative domain names.

You may also find that while the .COM is already registered, it is not being used for purposes that would interfere with your business. The .COM domain name may even be for sale. Consider your choices carefully. If the .COM is not being used now, it could be in the future. If it is for sale, you may wish to purchase it. If you don't, a competitor might.

Alternatively, you may wish to register "jennyslandscaping.com" and find the "jennyslandscaping.ca" is already registered. If you will be servicing a Canadian market, you should make the same considerations you did in our first example.

Consider alternatives to your domain name as well. Your company is called "Jenny's Landscaping" but your friends or customers call you Jen. What is found at "jenslandscaping.ca"

or “jenslandscaping.com”. Also consider different annotations of the same name. (i.e.: “jenslandscaping.com” or “jennys_landscaping.ca”)

Competitors

Collect and evaluate the domain names used by your competition. Are any of them similar to the domain name you wish to use? Will you benefit from that similarity or would your competitor benefit? What TLDs is your competition represented in? Do you denote a pattern or a gap that could give you a competitive advantage?

Generic Domains

Generic domains can be an effective tool for drawing traffic to your web site but they are best utilized as supplementary domains that work in conjunction with your main domain name. Staying with our example “Jenny’s Landscaping”, Jenny may register “jennyslandscaping.com” and “jennyslandscaping.ca” and perhaps even “jennyslandscaping.net” or “jennyslandscaping.biz”, but there are other strategies to exploit that can increase your web site traffic. Jenny might register “landscaping.com”, a generic web site that is company non-specific, but clearly would be a stopping point for a potential customer looking for information about landscaping. Jenny might also consider “perennialgardens.com” or “flagstone.ca” as a way to draw traffic to her main site from people who are perhaps looking for information on a specific part of Jenny’s landscaping business.

Each generic domain can be optimized differently to rank high in search engines for that specific topic. The domains can be run independently or automatically forward to Jenny’s main domain name ‘jennyslandscaping.com’.

The purpose is to draw as many potential clients to your web site as possible. Then it is the design of the web site and the message it delivers that will convert them into customers.

Trademarks or Slogans

If you have developed a slogan that is synonymous with your company or have registered trademarks to protect the name of your products, services, or trade names you should consider making them into domain names as well.

Back to our example of Jenny’s Landscaping... we can pretend that she has a slogan that is on every piece of promotional material Jenny puts forward. “Jenny’s Landscaping – Making Durham beautiful, one lawn at a time”. Registering the domains “makingdurhambeautiful.ca” or “onelawnatatime.com” allows Jenny to promote her business with an emphasis on her slogan.

Similarly, if Jenny had registered trademarks for services her company offered, she could register the trademark as a domain name and promote her business with an emphasis on the

trademark itself. For example, let's say Jenny has developed and uses a special concentration of fertilizer that she has named "Gro-Fast". She has also taken the necessary steps to register "Gro-Fast" as a trademark to prevent her competition from being able to use the name. She could register "gro-fast.com" or "grofast.ca" as a way of promoting her business through the special formula she uses.

Potential Loss

The final thing to consider before choosing your domain name or domain names is the potential loss of customers. If Jenny has decided to register "jennieslandscaping.ca" and not "jennieslandscaping.com" even though it is available, there is nothing to prevent her competition from registering it and having it forward traffic to the competitor's web site; traffic that Jenny's hard work and marketing dollars earned, but lost because of an all too common typo.

As you can see, much care and thought should go into deciding your domain name or domain names. Your options, alternatives, competitors, and pitfalls must all be considered before a decision is made.