

- » Finding your web name
- » Following the rules of registration
- » Expanding the limited nature of domain name options

Chapter **1**

What's in a (Domain) Name?

In the offline world, the mantra of success for business is “Location, location, location!” It’s not much different for your online business. Rather than use a numerical address on a building, though, you now use a virtual address or *domain name*. Usually, your online address includes your company’s name or initials or some other derivation. Whereas your traditional business address was once listed in the Yellow Pages, your online address is now listed with search engines.

As you might guess, securing the best possible domain name is an important piece of your overall online strategy. The name you select can provide an indication of what your company does, give a hint of your brand personality, and potentially influence how easily customers can find you.

How do you get the perfect name to drive customers to your online place of business? Not to worry: After using the information in this chapter, you’ll find that choosing and registering your address is only a few clicks away.

Basics of URL Structure and Why It Matters

Let's start with the basics. A *URL*, or *uniform resource locator*, represents the unique address for each page on a website or document posted online. Your website might be made up of several web pages, each with a unique URL.

Before you start creating web pages, your first order of business is to determine your domain name, or the part of the URL that specifically identifies the name of your website. We break down a typical URL in Figure 1-1.

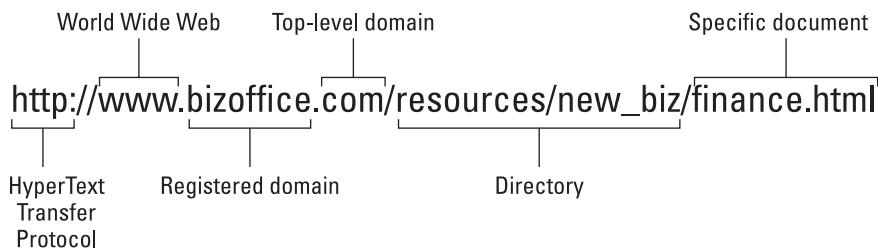


FIGURE 1-1:
A URL,
deconstructed.



REMEMBER

Although your website usually has only one domain name, it has more than one URL. The URL for the *home* page, or *entrance* page, of your site often looks the same as your domain name. Every page of your site, however, has a unique URL, such as

- » `www.myveryfirstwebsite.com`: The home page
- » `www.myveryfirstwebsite.com/index.html`: Also, the home page (the same as omitting the `index.html` portion of the URL)
- » `www.myveryfirstwebsite.com/services.html`: The web page that contains information about the services you offer



REMEMBER

As an online business, it's beneficial to get a valid SSL Certificate. This ensures your website is secure and that data is properly encrypted when a visitor's web browser is communicating with your site. In this case, the URL will contain `https`, which translates to *HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure*. In addition, there is also a small icon that shows up next to the URL in the web browser's address bar where you can click to see security details for that. We discuss this further in Book 5, Chapter 1.

Approaching your domain name carefully

You can take one of several opposing approaches when you select your domain name:

» **You have an existing business or have already named your start-up.**

If that's the case, you usually should match (as closely as possible) your company's name to the domain name. Using your existing business name is simple, straightforward, and often quite effective. It's possible that your exact name is not available, in which case you have to use some form of the name or add descriptors to the name.

» **You want to gain traffic by matching popular search phrases.** This was once considered an effective domain naming strategy because it served as a shortcut for directing organic (or free) search traffic to your website. Referred to as an *Exact Match Domain (EMD)*, this is a domain name that's a duplicate of an exact phrase that lots of people use to search for a product or a service. For example, if you sell running gear for women, you might use the domain name `www.bestrunningshoesforwomen.com` because you know a lot of people type in "best running shoes for women" when searching for that product. With your domain name matching this exact phrase, your site will show up higher in search engine results because it is the best match for that search query. Due to the popularity of EMD, it's often difficult to find a domain that's not already in use. Other popular phrases for EMD are available for sale, but they're typically very expensive. But if you find an available EMD that works for your business, it can be helpful in gaining traffic.

However, Google consistently updates its search engine algorithms (how search results are determined). It has since determined that some EMDs are "spammy" and don't always have the best quality content, despite the domain name (in other words, Google realized some people were trying to scam the system to get more traffic, even if the actual sites weren't completely relevant to the search phrase). You can still try the EMD strategy to gain some boost in traffic, but if Google determines the content on your page isn't top quality or truly an exact match of the search phrase, this domain naming strategy might not pay off at all (and could instead hurt your rankings).

» **The success of your online company benefits from the domain name itself.**

Maybe you're starting an Internet company that sells e-books (electronic, downloadable information) telling readers how to start a business. In that case, your legal company name might be irrelevant. A more important consideration is to find a domain that clearly indicates your type of business or the customers you're targeting. In this scenario, your company name might be John Smith dba JS Enterprises. A more effective domain name for your business, however, might be `www.bizstartuptips411.com` because it tells visitors exactly what you do. This approach is different from EMDs in that you



WARNING

may use one or more keywords, or specific search terms, in your domain name, but you do not try to exactly replicate a phrase someone might use in search, such as “helpful business tips for start-ups.”

Optimizing your domain name for SEO

How much does your URL matter when it comes to *search engine optimization* (SEO)? This topic is always hotly debated by SEO experts. Most agree that your URL once had a big impact on a website’s search engine ranking position. But Google is constantly adjusting the algorithms it uses to rank websites in search — and that means the weight it gives to a URL in search results has changed, and may likely change again!

A factor that always seems important is having HTTPS in the URL to verify that the site is secure. The value of using keywords in the URL and the length of the URL may vary in the future. We recommend that you take SEO strategy into account when picking a primary domain name and the URL naming structure for your *subpages* (pages other than the home page) but don’t get too wrapped up in determining the perfect searchable URL. Instead, also consider what makes sense in a URL to your customers. No matter what approach you take to choosing your online-business name, consider the following list of common denominators in determining the best possible domain for you. A good domain name should generally have these characteristics:

- » **Easy to spell:** As anyone who depends on a computer’s spell checker can testify, the average person doesn’t do well in a spelling bee. That’s why we’re firm believers in avoiding hard-to-spell words in your domain name. Although `www.BriansBodaciousRibs.com` seems harmless enough, it’s fairly easy to flub. Why not try `www.briansgoodribs.com` or `www.goodeating.com`? The easier your domain name is to spell, the more likely customers are to find you without a hassle. (And, when they do find you, the more likely they’ll be in the mood to buy some of your bodacious eats!)
- » **Simple:** Your domain name doesn’t have to be catchy or trendy to work. Simplicity goes a long way in our crowded, overhyped world.
- » **Relatively short:** A shorter name is easier for customers to remember than a longer one, and shorter URLs often have some benefit in search engine rankings. Consider the (fictitious) law firm Brewer, Mackey, Youngstein, Yale, and Associates. Its URL might be

```
www.BrewerMackeyYoungsteinYaleandAssociates.com
```

Wow! That name takes a while to type, not to mention that you have to spell everybody’s name correctly. Instead, consider the name `www.BrewerandAssociates.com`. See the difference?

» **Contains important keywords:** This characteristic is generally important for two reasons:

- Using descriptive words in the domain clearly says what you do and is helpful to your customers.
- Using relevant words in your domain that reflects content on your site could help improve your domain authority, or how credible Google considers your site. Just like writing content for your site, never stuff too many keywords in there. One or two is plenty! (We explain keyword stuffing and other factors of search engine optimization in Book 6, Chapter 5.)

The law firm used in the preceding example can easily use *keywords*, or words that might be easily associated with the type of business, to create one of these domain combinations:

- www.legalfirmforhire.com
- www.breweryounglawyers.com
- www.bmyassociates.com

» **Intuitive to customers:** You want a domain name to provide, ideally, a sense of who you are and an indication of the type of products or services you're selling. You don't need a *literal* translation, such as www.isellbooks.com — depending on your business, that approach could be detrimental to sales. What if you're selling to a highly targeted or specialized market (such as teenagers or radical sports fans)? A straightforward domain name is labeled as boring and undermines the image of your company, whereas an edgy or more creative name can win customers. For example, a bookseller specializing in romance novels might use a domain name such as www.romancingthepages.com or www.steamyreads.com. The point is that your customer base, whoever it consists of, should be responsive to your domain name.



TIP

In the examples we use, you notice that the domain names usually end with `.com`, but that *domain extension* isn't your only option. Today, you can choose from a long list of specialized domain extensions that reflect your type of business (an LLC, for example), type of organization (such as a nonprofit), or even your specific industry (like technology or auto dealerships). This is an alternative way to get a name that is already taken, but it may not significantly help with search engine rankings. We discuss these options in more detail at the end of this chapter.

Registering the Perfect Name

Congratulations! You chose your domain name, and you're ready to make it official. The next step is to register the name with a domain registrar. You can sign up using any company that specializes in domain registration. The registrar takes care of all the paperwork that's required to activate your new domain name, including these tasks:

- » Submitting contact information
- » Determining the duration of the registration period
- » Listing your domain in the official Internet list of domains maintained by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) at www.icann.org



TIP

If you're launching an e-commerce store, the storefront solution you use may include free domain registration, in which case it's best to register through that solution provider.

You have a choice: Domain registration options

Who registers domains? Your ISP (Internet service provider) might do it because many now provide this service along with hosting options. Or you can use any other company or website that acts as a third-party affiliate for registrars. If you're creating a website or blog in WordPress, you can register your domain there. In other words, now you can register a domain name with almost anyone!

Although finding a place to sign up is a piece of cake, the annual price for a domain registration varies from a single dollar to more than \$30. Several factors influence pricing, including the number of years for which you're registering the domain, the provider, and the type of extension (such as `.com`, `.net`, `.biz`, or `.tv`). If you add features such as private registration (which restricts the registration details available to the public), the price goes up. Or you can wind up paying nothing for domain registration if you buy several services at one time. (Most domain registrars also offer services such as hosting, email, websites, and blogs.)



TIP

Most domain registration sites regularly offer discount domain pricing. Shop around for the best deal.

Let's make it official

After you make a decision about where to register, it's time to get down to business. The registration process is similar regardless of the service you use. To show you how painlessly you can reserve your domain name, we walk you through the process using the GoDaddy service. Note, though, that we aren't recommending GoDaddy over other services.

Follow these steps to quickly register your domain name:

- 1. Go to the GoDaddy website at www.godaddy.com.**
- 2. Enter the name you want to register in the domain search box on the home page of the site.**

Type only the name you want, and don't preface it with `www`. The registrar adds that part automatically. (Some registrars' domain search boxes place the `www` in front of the search box to remind you that typing that part isn't necessary.)

- 3. To the right of the search box, click the Search icon.**

A page appears listing the results of a search for the default extension, `.com`, along with additional options.

- 4. If your domain name isn't available, start over at Step 2.**

Read the rest of the chapter first for tips on finding a domain name.

- 5. If you want to register an additional name, select the Make It Yours button next to each name you want.**

You can have multiple working domains even when you have only a single website. Simply *forward*, or redirect, the domain by pointing all other extensions to the designated domain of your choice.



REMEMBER

- 6. If you want to register an extension other than `.com`, select it from the list.**

When you're registering a `.com` extension, you may also want to register the matching `.net` or `.biz` version if it's available. These extensions are still among the most common, even though there is an ever-growing list of alternatives. If your site is successful, a savvy competitor is more likely to snatch up the `.net` version over any other. This statement is especially true if the domain name is descriptive with a wide appeal (such as `partygoods.com`) or falls in a popular search category (such as `starwarsfans.com`). If the `.com` version of your domain isn't available and you're registering another extension, one domain is plenty for starters. After your site grows, you can determine the value of registering other names.



TIP

7. Click the Cart icon at the top of the page.

You see a list of add-on products, including private registration, hosting, and email. At any point, you can skip these add-on suggestions and continue with the registration process.



WARNING

During the process of registering your domain, GoDaddy tries to get you to buy other services, from privacy protection to web hosting. If you do not want any of these additional services, you can skip the offers by scrolling down to the bottom of each page and clicking the Continue to Cart button.

8. Select the term, or number of years for which you want to register the domain.

Your order's total appears.

9. Log in to an existing account (as a returning customer), or set up an account as a new customer.

If you're a new customer, you provide basic information (your name, address, and email address) to set up your account.



TIP

To set up your account, the information you provided in the initial domain registration process is automatically used by GoDaddy to fill in your technical, administrative, and billing contact information, unless you specify otherwise. Use these default settings for now. You can always change this information later.

10. Click the Continue button.

You see a page summarizing your order information.

11. Review your information and place your order.

A thank-you page appears. Congratulations — you now have a domain name that's all yours!

Finding Out What to Do When Somebody Gets There First

We hope that the domain you want is the one you get when you register. Sometimes, though, your first choice for a domain isn't available. Nothing bursts a bubble faster than having this sort of event happen. Don't let it frustrate you, though. You still have several options.

Exploring your domain name options

When you initially search for your domain (as described in the preceding section), the registrar might tell you that it isn't available. Below that notification is typically a box containing a list of suggested alternative domains that the registrar has available. Don't be surprised if the automated system returns a few decent alternatives. At this point, you can choose one of the suggested runners-up generated by the registrar.

If you don't find a perfect match on the suggested list, the next-less-appealing choice takes you right back to the drawing board. Yep, you can start a brand-new search for an entirely different name.



WARNING

There may be a charge for some of the suggested names that are automatically shown to you if your first choice is not available. Read carefully when alternatives are displayed to determine if that alternative is “available” only for a set fee or as part of a domain auction. Some alternatives shown to you are available — but only if you pay hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars!

Negotiating what you want — at a price

Starting from scratch again usually isn't your preference. After all, you might have fallen head over heels for a domain name and no substitute will work. In that case, you should know that you can pursue that domain name, even though it's already taken.

Here are the ways you can go in hot pursuit of your dream domain name:

- » **Put the name on back order.** Think of this strategy as the official waiting list of domain names. A registrar keeps your name on file and notifies you when the domain you want expires and becomes available. The back-ordered domains go to auction, and you can bid for the opportunity to buy (or register) it. You usually pay a nonrefundable fee for this service.
- » **Make an offer.** You might be too impatient to wait and see whether a domain expires. The owner can decide to renew it, and then it's gone for at least another year. That's why several registrars will contact the owner on your behalf and try to confirm whether they are interested in selling, and if so, negotiate the purchase of the domain name. For this service, you pay a flat fee plus commission. Using this technique makes sense for a couple of reasons:
 - *You can find out quickly whether an owner is willing to give up a domain name.* The seller must respond within a specified time.

- *Your name and personal information are kept private.* If the offer is accepted, you pay the registrar by credit card and the money is transferred to the seller. The registrar handles the entire process, including the transfer of the domain name.

» **Contact the owner.** If you prefer to negotiate directly, contacting the domain owner in person is another option, provided the owner's registration information is open to the public. Even though you lose your anonymity in this process, you avoid paying service fees. Better yet, direct contact provides the opportunity to plead your case and use personal charm to try to get a good price for the name. (Okay, that's not always enough to sway a seller, but it might help.) Many companies have negotiated directly with sellers with much success. One domain owner, who no longer had an active site for the URL, gave away the domain. The moral of this story: It never hurts to ask.



TIP

If a domain owner has chosen a private registration, you may still be able to locate them. If the website for the domain is *active* (you can view it), search the pages for contact information (a phone number or an email address). If you find a name, you may also be able to find the person on social media, such as LinkedIn, and make contact that way.



REMEMBER

Finding the owner of a domain name is easy to do when you use the WHOIS feature sometimes offered by registrars after a name is shown as already taken. Or, you can go directly to the source and conduct a search for a domain owner via the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) WHOIS lookup service at <https://lookup.icann.org>.

All the Good Ones Are (Not) Taken

You might think that all the good domain names have been taken (or are being held hostage for a huge ransom). Not true! Plenty of great domain names are available. The continued popularity of the Internet has prompted lots of acceptable and creative alternatives for domain registration.

Varying the extension

One of the easiest ways to find a good domain name is to use an alternative extension, although we can't deny that the old favorites .com, .net, and .org (for nonprofits) remain the most recognizable. Thousands of extensions, referred to as general top-level domains, or gTLDs, including specific country codes, are now

in use and growing in popularity. Using these alternatives is no longer considered a stigma.

In fact, ICANN (the organization responsible for domains) occasionally releases new gTLDs that are based on business industries and professions (such as .accountants) and other recognizable categories (such as .TV and .coupons). Expanding domain extensions also helps ensure more people globally can access the Internet in local languages. The decision to offer new extensions is made in an effort to address both accessibility and demand overflow for domain names such as the .com and .net extensions, and make it easier to get the right domain name for your business or organization. Because ICANN understands that new gTLDs may also soar in popularity, business owners with trademarked names get preference for reserving or obtaining the domains over owners without a trademarked name. So, if you own the trademark name “Crazy Cats,” you can get first rights for reserving the domain name `www.CrazyCats.pet` instead of someone who may want to have a site that shows videos of crazy cats submitted by pet owners.

How do you get one of these new domains? It’s no different than the registration process for any other domain. You simply choose the extension you prefer when registering for a domain name (in keeping with our previous example, you choose .pet instead of .com). The exception to this rule is for any new gTLD that is not yet publicly available. If you want to weigh in on future extensions, the next round of consideration takes place in 2026 as part of ICANN’s New gTLD program. Learn more about the process at <https://newgtldprogram.icann.org>.

Table 1-1 lists some of the most common extensions, plus additional extensions by country (but note that more are available, including the popular .asia, for example). Don’t shy away from any of these. Looking through the list is a simple way to find the domain name of your choice.

TABLE 1-1

Sampling of Extensions Used in Domain Registration

Extension	Generally Used For
.com	General business (.com stands for <i>commercial</i>)
.net	Internet business (.net stands for <i>network</i>)
.org	Nonprofit and trade association (.org stands for <i>organization</i>)
.info	Resource
.biz	Small business
.tv	Entertainment, media

(continued)

TABLE 1-1 (continued)

Extension	Generally Used For
.me	Personal use, typically freelancers and consultants
.mobi	Mobile business sites
.travel	Travel industry use
.media	Magazines, reality channels, digital publishers, graphic designers, and so on
.author	Writers and published authors
.shop	Retailers
.ai	Organizations specializing in artificial intelligence (AI)
.io	Technology companies and start-ups
.co	Business use, represents “company” or “corporation”
.us	United States
.vg	British Virgin Islands
.co.uk	General business in United Kingdom
.org.uk	Nonprofit and trade association, United Kingdom
.de	Germany
.jp	Japan
.be	Belgium
.at	Austria
.com.mx	General business, Mexico
.com.nz	General business, New Zealand
.ly	Country code for Libya, also used by tech start-ups
.xyz	Open for general use
.site	Open for general use
.edu	Educational institutions, universities, and colleges

Getting creative

Acquiring the domain name you view as most suitable for your business may involve a little creativity on your part. As you have probably seen, most general names (applying to wide or popular categories) were scooped up during the first Internet craze of the 1990s. All the gems — *Business.com*, *Politics.com*, *SportsFan.net* — are long gone.

Don't let this information stop you. Keep in mind that plenty of domain names are as effective as those first category-busters. Here are four creative ways to find an outstanding domain name:

- » **Make the domain name specific.** One recent trend is that of niche (or specific) sites. You can find out more about growing a niche on the Internet in Book 8. For now, we want you to know that the same trend applies to domain names. Creating a more specific and telling name, rather than one that's broad, serves you well in search engine rankings and with your customer base. For example, *www.ilovecheese.com* is specific about its subject and audience.
- » **Make the domain name creatively telling.** Ever hear that saying about thinking outside the box? Even though it's a cliché, it holds true with domain names: Sometimes, you're trapped into seeing only one way to describe something, and that usually means being literal. If you sell food and toys for cats, you're tempted to find a domain that says exactly that: *cattoys.com*. Rather than continuously circle around the same type of name, think about other ways that your products, services, or target audience are viewed. Make a list of terms and phrases that people use when they talk about these items. You can still be specific but with a more creative tone. That cat site may do extremely well using a domain name like *mouseloveronly.com* or *thescratchingpost.com*.
- » **Make the domain name perfectly meaningless.** Have you ever stumbled across a website with an outrageously different but perfectly applicable name? Google and Yahoo! were some of the first companies to use this approach, which is now fairly common. Websites with extremely odd, fun, or funky domain names can grow a following like any other site.
- » **Use add-ins.** If your domain name uses common words, finding an exact match available isn't all that easy. Not to worry: Just mix it up a bit. Abbreviate your words or use a few initials rather than spell out the whole thing. You can also add *inc* or *corp* to the end of your company name (only if you're incorporated, of course) or add another word that indicates the industry you're in — for example, *SmithJewelersInc.com* or *SmithPearlsandDiamonds.com*. Another trick is to include words such as *official*, *favorite*, *original*, or *popular* to the domain name (*FavoritePearlEarrings.com*, for example).

