

HOW TO CHOOSE A GREAT DOMAIN NAME FOR YOUR BUSINESS

By Michelle West

A domain name is your little piece of real estate on the web. Each one is unique, and each one can only point to one web page. If you're starting your own business from scratch, perhaps you've already come up with a solid name for it. You can choose to use the same name as your planned site or a store you already have, for example FabulousNames.com — or you can choose something that is just descriptive. Something like GetYourDomainNameHere.com.

If you join any existing business on the web as an affiliate, you will be given a URL for your replicated site, but sometimes it's like 50 characters long (or longer!). It is so much easier to advertise a short & sweet domain name, and it's definitely easier to give people a simple domain name over the phone, rather than that 50-character-long site URL with the weird characters in it.

Most businesses require affiliates to have their own domain name on their copy of the site anyway. This way the whole system won't come down if one guy gets caught for reckless spamming.

I've been in the domain business since 1998. And I've been working on the web for the same amount of time. The most important thing I learned about domains in that period of time is this:
THE COOLER YOUR DOMAIN NAME IS, THE MORE PEOPLE WILL CLICK ON YOUR ADS

If your domain is something lame like BobsHomeBusiness.com, hardly anybody will ever click on it. But if you have something exciting and curiosity-raising — in other words COOL — people will click on your name just to see what the heck they will discover there.

So what should you consider when looking for a domain name for your site? It used to be that domains with only one or two words were ideal, but all the good short ones are already pretty much taken. So do not be afraid to take a longer domain now. Over the past few years domains have been getting longer by necessity, as the shorter ones all get taken. I couldn't even get my site TheGreatestSiteInTheWorld.com entered in a

domain auction before, because of its length, but it's acceptable now. One of my most successful ones is ThisIsYourGoldenOpportunity.com — I get so many clicks on that, even though it's really long. This is a perfect example of a really cool name. Everybody wants to know what it is. Everybody wants a Golden Opportunity!

So think about what your domain is saying to people. It should make sense, it should mean something. It should represent you and your business well. Everybody would understand if for example you had a domain like CouldaWouldaShoulda.com — but if you just string 3 random words together that don't have any association to anything, that would be very weak.

I personally like to play on my domain names when writing ads. A very effective ad can be written simply using your domain name link as the punch line. My most effective ad ever is so simple —
Have you been to Cash Heaven?

It just might be the answer to your prayers CashHeaven.com

That simple ad has made me hundreds of thousands of dollars over the past few years. It works because it raises curiosity. People want to know what Cash Heaven is. So when you're considering different domain names, think about how you might work those names into ads. Short & sweet works best with ads too. People these days do not have time to read an ad that fills two or three or more screens. Your ad to your capture page should be cool and curiosity-raising — once people have seen the capture page, then the main business site should do all the heavy lifting and explaining for you.

If you are doing a business that is based outside of the United States, think about your domain carefully. Do you sell something that is available only or mainly within your country or part of the world (like Asia, Scandinavia or "Down Under")? In that case, then you should probably use your country-specific extension on your domain, like co.uk or .au or .jp, etc. Then people know they are dealing with somebody who is local. If you live in any Non-USA country but are working a USA-based affiliate program and want to advertise to people all over the world, then it's best to use a .com or .net. Whatever web-based program you are working, people from the United States and Canada will be most likely to join. More people throughout the world will click on the domain in your ads if they think you or your program is based in the USA, even if it isn't.

They have been releasing a whole bunch of new domain extensions over

the last couple years, but you really should have a .com if you can. The .com (which stands for commercial) is still the gold standard, and always will be, no matter how many other extensions they invent. Most people will type in .com automatically, without even thinking, through force of habit. But if you find a name that you really love, and the .com is already taken, you can certainly take another extension. You will just have to make it very clear to people that it is .net or .info or whatever, and not the .com .

But I am big fan of having more than one domain for any affiliate business. I use a .com for the main replicated site the company gives me, but I ALSO use a .net or .info version of the domain to take people to another page. The best example is if your affiliate business makes people fill out a form if they want to enter the site or watch the presentation. If somebody wants to come back and look again, or show their partner, they will balk at having to fill out the form again. So I have a .net or .info version of my domain names too, and I tell people it's a special secret link that will allow them to sneak into the site without filling out the form. It makes them feel special and would encourage them to visit the site or show it to others as many time as they want. You can also set up a separate domain extension that will take people directly to the sign-up form, or the pay plan page. Registrars like GoDaddy will give you a special deal if you buy more than one extension of the domain you choose.

But I personally hate the extensions .co and .bz — they are so easily confused with their much better counterparts. If you have something else, perhaps .biz, you will be okay if people see it somewhere where they can just click on it. But if you have to give it to people over the phone, or need to count on them to copy it out of a magazine or something, then you could be in trouble. People write and type .com automatically without even thinking. If you want to use .biz or one of the others, you must be prepared to lose some of your visitors to the guy who has the .com version of the same domain.

There are various opinions on using hyphens between words, like Coulda-Woulda-Shoulda.com. People used to be told that if you did that, you might be likely to get picked up better in the search engines, etc. I don't know if that was ever true or not. However, hyphens are out of favor now. You can still use them, but you hardly ever see them anymore. So use them with care.

Also be careful if using a word in your domain name like Don't or Here's — the punctuation is not allowed, so it will appear as Dont or Heres. It's

perfectly ok to use a word like this if it doesn't look too weird, but you'll have to be careful when giving domains like this to people on the phone — make it very clear how it's spelled. If they try to put in the punctuation, they will get an error message instead of your site.

I also really dislike domain names that contain u instead of you, 2 instead of to, and 4 instead of for, etc. These slang words should never be used in a domain name for a serious legitimate business. Your domain represents you and your business — I don't think you want it to look like you're some teenager using these slang terms. I personally wouldn't want to do business with someone who still uses teenage slang. If you're a serious businessperson doing a serious business, you need an appropriate domain name on your site.

Also be very careful if you want to try to do something unique or funny. Some people misspell their domain names on purpose, for example, hoping to have something different and memorable. Again, this can be ok if the link is somewhere where people can just click on it. But if you have to spend 5 minutes on the phone making sure that the guy you're talking to really understands what you've done with your domain, and being absolutely sure that he has it right, that will get old very quickly.

Domains are NOT case sensitive, so you'll want to capitalize each word in your domain name to make it easier for people to read. You want them to be able to grasp what it says even if they just give it a fleeting glance. If it's really great, really interesting, people will remember it, and might even go look it up later. This is why domains on bumper stickers and highway billboards work so well — but only if they are short & sweet & memorable. Everybody knows GoldenPalace.com, right?

If you find a domain you just ABSOLUTELY LOVE, one that is absolutely perfect for your business, but it's already taken, you might still be able to get a variation of it. You can put 2019 before or after the name, or ABC or 123, etc. I had great success with the domain 2011WealthSolution.com in the classified section of Entrepreneur Magazine. It pulled really well, so I repeated this success with the 2012WealthSolution.com the next year, and 2013 the next year, etc.

You can have several domains pointing to the same web page. During the recession I used a more serious type of advertising geared towards helping people get out of debt and change their future, and so used a more serious domain name. But even today I have several domains pointed at my same capture pages. Sometimes I write really serious ads, and need a more serious domain. Sometimes I write cute funny ads, and

need an appropriately light cute domain name. It all depends on how you plan to promote your business. After the very cool movie Sharknado came out, I thought of a clever ad — More Exciting Than Sharknado, CASHNADO.com. I had a banner made with a cute cartoon hammerhead shark on it, and did very well with that promotion. A little touch of humor can really work well, and people are apt to remember it.

Often when you join a business, they will have separate links for the capture pages and the site itself, so you can have two domains and advertise them both at the same time — one to go directly to the site, and the other to go to a capture page. Sometimes you'll want to collect the name & emails with the capture page, and sometimes (like when you're doing certain types of advertising, like the traffic exchanges) you'll just want to send people directly to the main site or presentation. In certain circumstances people will not stop to fill out the capture page, and you can lose a lot of prospects by making them do that before they can see the site.

Nota Bene: If you are working an affiliate program on the web, and looking for people to join the business with you, do not use the name of your business in your domain name, it will cause you problems. If you are using a domain name that does not mention the name of the business, you will get way more clicks. If people don't know what company your domain represents, they will not have any prejudice against what it might turn out to be. I learned this valuable information way back when I was an affiliate working a travel program. They said to NEVER use anything even vaguely associated with travel in our domain name. If people see that, most would think "Oh, I don't want to sell travel", so would never even click. Some travel programs even forbid their members from using the program's name when they advertise. Better that your domain simply raises curiosity, so that people will click without prejudging, just to see what it is.

However if you are a travel agency or business SELLING travel, that is different. That is when you'll want to advertise what you're selling. A good example is the domain HotTravelBargains.com.

When you do your forwarding of the domain to your business site, always choose the "stealth" or "masked" forwarding. This way, your domain name will show up in the address bar when people are on your site. This is what you want. It will confuse people if they click on your domain, but the long 50-character affiliate URL shows up in the address bar instead. We do not want to confuse anybody. The more simple you can make things for people — with an easy-to-spell and easy-to-remember

domain — the more likely they are to both visit your site and remember it.

And once you buy your domain, go right away to Gmail or Yahoo or wherever and get an email address with the same name. This will make it easier for people to recognize your follow-up emails, remember you and find you again. Always make things as simple for people as possible.

So how do you come up with the right domain name for you? Well first you need to know that sitting in front of the GoDaddy.com site does not inspire creativity. You needn to find your most comfortable chair, and grab a pad of paper and a beverage of your choice. Select a few appropriate words, and start simply free-associating. (See illustration below.) Write down everything that pops into your head, no matter how silly it might seem at the time. Plan to stay at least a half hour or more, as once the creative juices start really rolling, you'll see that the quality of what you come up with really improves over time. When you feel your well has gone dry, then get up and go to GoDaddy and check which ones are available. More will pop into your head as you reread your earlier list. Write down everything that is available. Then evaluate each one against the points I outlined above. If the name is cool, and you can think of a cool ad to use with it, then you have a real winner. Grab it fast. It should only cost you about \$12. GoDaddy will try to sell you all kinds of other things, but you don't need ANY of them — unless you want to use their email service and have an email address using your domain name. But you will get a good deal from them if you want to take more than one extension of the name you have chosen. If you buy the .com you can probably get the .net and .info or others at a special lowered price.

Here's a sample illustration of how your free-associating might work. Let's start with wealth. WealthToday, WealthForYou, WealthForYouToday, WealthForYouNow, WealthGivesYouFreedom, FreedomForYouNow, MoneyFreedomNow, FreedomFromMoneyWorries, NeverWorryAboutMoneyAgain I think you get the idea. Just let it flow out of your brain uncensored write it all down without thinking or prejudice and evaluate it later.

Happy domain hunting!

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