

## First steps 2 | Buying a domain name

**Having your own distinctive domain name is an essential precursor to building a successful website. This article answers some of the questions you may have about acquiring and managing domain names.**

### Buying a domain name

Your domain name is your address on the web - the virtual location of your shop window. Like conventional addresses, some domain names are more fashionable and valuable than others. So, just as an address in London's Saville Row tells the world that you are a top quality tailor, so your .com (or .co.uk or whatever) address also says something about your company.

It is therefore essential that you choose your domain name(s) carefully. Your customers should be able to find your site easily, without being directed to competitors or similar addresses on the Internet. So finding, acquiring and managing website domain names effectively is vital for any business with a presence on the web.

Choose a short memorable name that reflects your company, products or services. You should aim for a name that is catchy and will stick in people's minds rather than one such as johnwalkersbiscuits.co.uk, unless your company is already very well known by that name. Avoid the over-use of hyphens as these are hard for people to remember.

### Some Frequently asked questions

#### What kinds of domain names are there?

There are two kinds of domain names:

- generic domains, such as .com, .net, .org, .info, .name, .aero, .biz, .coop, .museum; and
- country code domains such as .uk in the United Kingdom.

The most popular domain names for commercial organisations in the UK are .com and .co.uk. A .com domain is generally perceived as being 'better' than a .co.uk domain but, unfortunately, is not recognised by some directories as being British.

#### Can you have more than one domain name?

You can buy as many domain names as you want. They can all 'point' to the same website if you like, or you can have separate websites at each domain. It is common, especially for bigger companies, to buy several similar domain names so that users don't accidentally go to another site. For example, ntl.com, ntl.co.uk and ntl.biz all take you to the same website. If people frequently misspell your name then take out that domain name as well (for example, if your domain is stonemasonry.co.uk then buy the name stonemasonary.co.uk and have it point to your correct URL)

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### How do you register a domain name?

The easiest way is to ask a registration agent to do it for you. Typically these are Internet service providers (ISPs), or specialist companies who act as intermediaries between the registry and the domain name holder. There are literally thousands of agents in the UK alone: a full list (in random order) can be found at the website of Nominet UK (<http://www.nominet.org.uk>), the registry for .uk internet names. Most agents can also supply .com names.

### What do I need to be aware of when registering a domain name?

You should always make sure that your registration agent registers your domain name in your business's or your own name, which will make you the domain name "holder" or "registrant" and give you the necessary authority to make subsequent changes to the registration.

When you register a domain name, you are actually entering into a contract with two separate organisations. Firstly with your registration agent, who has registered the domain name on your behalf. You should ask to see copies of their Terms and Conditions for Domain Name Registration, which should be provided on their website or in paper form.

Secondly, you are entering into an agreement with the registry, in the case of .uk this is Nominet UK. Your registration agent should make you aware of Nominet's Terms and Conditions, or alternatively you should refer to Nominet's website at <http://www.nominet.org.uk/terms.html>

### What is involved in registering a domain name?

For a domain name registration to take place, your chosen registration agent will require specific contact information from you. It is vital that you keep this information up-to-date throughout the life of your registration.

As the registrant or holder of the domain name, you will be asked to provide a contact name and address which will be shown on the public register. A registrant can be a company or an individual. However, in the former case, there must be a named personal contact within the organisation. Nominet will also require other details, such as the type of organisation, and a telephone number and e-mail addresses, these are not shown on the public register.

Your registration agent will also be asked to specify administrative, technical and billing details for the domain name. These functions are normally fulfilled by the agents themselves. Once the application has been received, accepted and processed by Nominet, the domain name will be available for use by other Internet users, who can then access your website by name and use the name in email addresses.

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### How long does my registration last?

This will vary between registries, but a common timescale would be two years for a .co.uk domain. Under normal circumstances, the current registrant has the first right to renew their domain name registration as long as they have not breached the terms and conditions of the initial agreement, and that no other source has proved they have better entitlement to that particular domain name. Your registration agent should send you a notice that your domain name is due for renewal. However, you should also make a note of the date on which your domain name is due for renewal. If you fail to renew your domain name, you could risk losing it altogether.

### How much does a domain name registration cost?

Each registration agent sets the price it charges for registering names, and prices can vary significantly between different agents. In addition, some offer discounted or free registrations in connection with other services, such as web hosting.

Domain names can cost from £3 - £12 per year for a .co.uk name and from £20 - £35 per year for a .com name depending on the registration company you choose to purchase your name/s from. There are now hundreds of registration agents (ISPs) in the UK offering a wide range of Internet services.

Making the right choice of provider is quite a daunting task and Nominet offer the following broad advice:

- Overall, you should shop around to find a registration agent that provides the service or range of services you need.
- Get competitive quotes - but remember, the cheapest price is not necessarily the best deal. Check your contract for any 'hidden' charges.
- You should ask to see copies of the Terms and Conditions for domain name registration. If these are not easily available to you - usually via their website - insist on having a copy and study it thoroughly.
- Seek recommendations from other Internet users and ask the prospective registration agent for testimonials from other customers.
- Check whether the registration agent has signed up to an industry code of conduct.
- Consider whether you need any specialist services - not all registration agents offer the same package
- Research what is available from which registration agent through the Internet media.
- Pay particular attention to your rights to move your business and your domain name to another registration agent, and whether there is a charge for doing so.

Popular domain name resellers include <http://www.123-reg.com> <http://www.clicknames.net> and <http://www.lowcostnames.co.uk>

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### **Somebody else has registered a domain name I feel I am entitled to, what action can I take?**

Most domain names are allocated on a first-come first-served basis, however, disputes may arise when another party feels they have a greater right to use a domain name. Nominet has a Dispute Resolution Service (DRS), as a method for resolving disputes in the .uk Top Level Domain. Further details can be found by accessing <http://www.nominet.org.uk/ref/drs.html>

The registrars for the top level domains .biz, .com, .info, .name, .net, and .org follow the Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP), developed by ICANN. Further details concerning the procedure can be found at <http://www.icann.org/udrp/udrp.htm>

The procedures noted above do not replace the role of the courts and complainants are entitled to follow the legal route if they wish.

Extract taken from <http://www.scottish-enterprise.com>

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