



Choosing a Domain Name for Your Business’s Website

There are many ways to promote yourself or your business online, but a website with your domain name is one of the most effective. Setting up one for your business isn’t difficult, but it’s best to know some of the basics. Read the entirety of this bulletin first to familiarize yourself with the primary details, including what domain names are, how they work, what types there are, how to select the right one, what fees are involved, and whether or not to set up a web hosting service.

Understanding the Structure of Your Internet Address

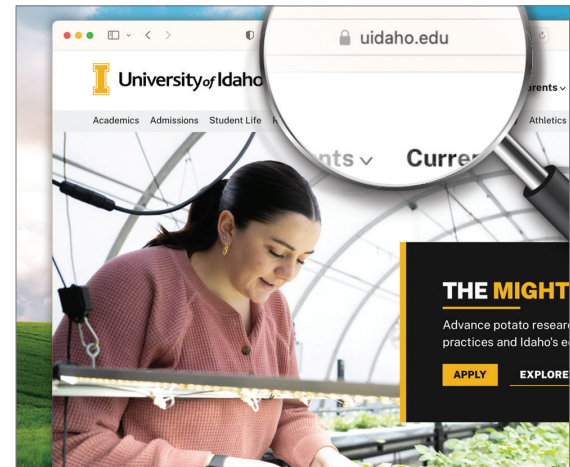
Domain names are essentially website names (also called a uniform resource locator or URL). They are unique and consequently are regulated by an international overseeing organization, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Domain names are associated with websites, to which ICANN assigns special numbers, called an Internet Protocol address (IP), an identifier system (e.g., 192.0.32.7). A website IP is a permanent contact number listed in an internet directory — just like names with telephone numbers in a telephone directory. Thus, when we type a website name into a browser, the IP address enables the connection to that registered website. The one-to-one correspondence is so precise that no two websites have the same name nor IP.

ICANN wanted to make remembering websites easy. Thus, they decided to use domain names instead of IP numbers. They allow us to identify a website using letters, which are easier to recall than strings of seemingly random numbers. Each domain name has two or more parts that are divided by a period (a small, dot-shaped punctuation mark). The part following the very LAST period is called the first- or **top-level domain**. The part before the top-level domain is called the **second-level domain**. Together, these two parts form the **registered domain name**.

Crafting Your Own Domain Name

Choosing a Top-Level Domain

As noted earlier, a top-level domain (TLD) is the word after the very last period in a URL and says something about your organization. For example, companies or service organizations usually choose a .com or a .net domain. Nonprofits frequently pick a .org domain. Also, government websites end in .gov and those of educational institutions in .edu. TLDs can also be country codes, like .ca for Canada, .uk for the United Kingdom, or .mx for Mexico. That does not mean that a company in the United Kingdom, like the BBC, must use the .uk extension; they can use a .com as well. However, the reverse is usually impossible. To use a country’s TLD, your business must operate in that country.



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Websites with TLDs like .com, .net, and .org have become familiar, but over the years, ICANN has gradually introduced others, such as .shop, .pizza, .art, .lawyer, .design, etc. This opens many possibilities for website owners. Since a domain name combines top- and second-level domains, the new TLDs increase the probability of using a second-level domain name that you like, even if the latter is already in use. For example, AdaCounty.com may be already taken, but AdaCounty.blog might not and, even better, it likely more adequately identifies your website's purpose.

bbc.com	cbc.ca
idahoptv.org	unam.mx
Idaho.gov	uco.es
uidaho.edu	uchile.cl

Traditional Versus New TLDs

Traditional TLDs, such as .com, .org, and .net, have existed for many years, are widely recognized, and are thus trusted by internet users. Indeed, they have become the default choice for businesses and individuals, often carrying a certain level of prestige and authority.

However, new TLDs, like .io, .app, .design, .club, and many others, offer more specific and niche options that better align with certain industries, interests, or geographic locations. Hence, the newer domains provide an opportunity for businesses to use more relevant and memorable domain names, potentially differentiating themselves from the crowded .com space.

The choice between new TLDs and traditional TLDs depends on various factors. If you're looking for maximum brand recognition and universal appeal, a traditional TLD like .com is still a safe bet. It's instantly recognizable and commonly associated with commercial websites. However, if you operate a specific niche or industry-focused business, a new TLD could offer a more targeted and memorable domain name option.

Ultimately, the success of a domain name is not solely determined by its TLD but rather by the overall branding, marketing, and user experience associated with it. Both traditional and new TLDs have their merits. Thus, base the decision on your specific business goals, target audience, and branding strategy. In short, for naming your website, choose a TLD that fits your purpose.

Choosing a Second-Level Domain

A second-level domain name is the word *before* the top-level domain — the *uidaho* of *uidaho.edu* or *idahoptv* of *idahoptv.org*. Choose any name that consists of only letters and numbers and, if you like, one or more hyphens *within* the name. Also, as discussed earlier, select a unique domain name so that it is searchable.

Dots and Domains

Sometimes you see several dots in a website address, like *arts.idaho.gov* or *extension.uidaho.edu*. Any word followed by a dot before the second-level domain, like *arts* before *idaho.gov*, *extension* before *uidaho.edu*, and even *www* at the start of a domain, indicates a **third-level domain**, usually called a **subdomain**. It allows a different focus within your website, but does not indicate a new domain name.

Keywords in Domain Names

An issue that often comes up when creating a domain name is its searchability on the web, which involves keywords. **Keywords** are words or phrases that enable internet users to find a site via search engines, like Google. During the early years of the internet, website owners used keywords to make up a domain name. For example, *Nampa-orthodontists.com* has two important keywords: the place of business and the specialty. If people searched for an orthodontist in Nampa, the search engine would easily prioritize the website's hyperlink in its results. Remembering how to type the website name is less obvious — specialty first or city name first? How about a hyphen? And note that the orthodontist's name is not at all prominent. So, former best practices prioritized important keywords in the domain name to facilitate searches — something now called **search engine optimization** (SEO). The second priority was ensuring that people could remember and spell the name.

Today, creating a domain name relies less on including keywords than on name recognition and branding. Indeed, only if your business name is actually “Nampa Orthodontists” will the domain name improve name recognition and your brand. Thus, **don’t worry about including keywords in a domain name**. Instead, try to choose a domain name that reinforces your brand. If that is “SmokyMaltBrewery.company,” then select that name. If it is “NampaBrewery.com,” then go with that. Note that the most memorable trade names have no keywords whatsoever: Google, Starbucks, and Xerox grew their name recognition via their business.

Since there are almost two billion websites, there is a reasonable chance that your first domain name choice is already in use somewhere. To find out, do a search using a **domain name registrar** (a site that tracks domain name registrations by mapping them to IP addresses).

Dos and Don’ts

- Make it easier to remember and spell your domain name. Keep it as short and simple as possible.
- Avoid using double letters unless it makes sense. For instance, a domain name like McCall.com, with a double *l* and double *c*, makes perfect sense for people who know the Idaho town.
- Make sure to secure permission to incorporate a brand name, trademark, celebrity name, or anything else that may be protected or copyrighted.
- Do not purposefully misspell a name to attract traffic from someone else.
- Don’t rush your decision, even if the domain name you want is available. Test it out with friends and family. Hopefully, it will stick around for a long time.

The takeaway: when *registering*, choose only top-level and second-level domains.

Fees

After settling on the domain name you prefer and confirming that it isn’t already in use on the web, register it with a domain name registrar. Expect two fees, the annual registration fee (usually \$10–\$20) and one for domain privacy protection, which is optional.

Registration Fee

You can register a new domain name for as little as \$10, although prices vary considerably depending on the company, the top-level domain, and any additional services you buy. But be careful. Many offers quote a low price for the first year with a much higher renewal, sometimes one that is quite hidden. Compare annual renewal fees to avoid surprises — your website will hopefully be around for many years.

Privacy Protection

Some registrars offer domain privacy protection for free, but most charge anywhere from \$3 to \$10 per year. You may opt out if you have a company website that lists your contact information, but you’ll also need to list your name and contact information for verification purposes on the WHOIS registry (see WHOIS Registry). Otherwise, opt in to prevent receiving a lot of spam messages.

WHOIS Registry

The **WHOIS** registry, short for “who is” responsible for a domain name, is a publicly accessible database maintained by ICANN that stores information about registered domain names, including details about ownership, registration dates, contact information, and name servers. It serves as a directory, providing transparency and accountability in the domain name system by allowing individuals and organizations to access information about a domain name and its owner. Recent privacy regulations have led to the introduction of domain privacy services, which allow domain owners to protect their personal information by masking it with the contact details of privacy service providers in the WHOIS database.

Note: Registrars may try to sell you more services than you need. But you only need yearly registration and optional domain privacy protection (see Privacy Protection) to lock in your domain name. Whether or not you immediately start a website with your domain name may determine if you need a web host service. Consider the following two scenarios to help determine if this is necessary:

Scenario 1: Registration and Webhosting

You want to start your website as soon as you register your domain name. Before registering your domain, decide where your website will reside. Why? Most website owners use a company or website builder that, for a monthly fee, stores their website onto the company's computer servers, lists their website's IP address with the domain directory, and keeps it connected to the internet. These companies, called **web hosts**, also offer domain registration. Since you would have to transfer your domain to them before they can host your website, it may be easier to register with your web host directly, if it offers domain registration services (most do).

If the company you registered with does not host or if it offers hosting plans you don't like, transfer your domain name to the web host of your choice. This requires some extra steps, all done online, and can take 5–7 business days to take effect, but the process is straightforward.

Scenario 2: Registration-Only

You want to start a new business, but the build-out is still a year away so you'll want to take your time developing its website. You already know the name you will use and that the domain name is available. Lock it in before you lose it to someone else by registering right away. If you know you may want to transfer the domain to a web host later, explore the options as discussed in the scenario 1.

Further Reading

Alan Charlesworth's *Choosing the Right Domain Name: A Marketing Perspective* (2009) is a helpful resource that provides an overview of domain name creation. <https://www.alancharlesworth.com/domain-names/choosing-the-right-domain-name>.

Other resources to explore are domain name registration platforms, whose knowledge bases and support documentation cover various aspects of domain names. Browse their websites for articles, guides, and FAQs related to domain names.

ICANN's website also provides comprehensive information about domain name registration, policies, and guidelines. Visit their website at <https://www.icann.org/>.

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