

# Choosing and Registering an Internet Domain Name

Business Information Factsheet  
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## Introduction

Choosing a domain name for the website and e-mail address of a business (or other organisation) takes careful consideration. A domain name is more than just an online address. It is a way to stand out online and create a favourable impression.

This factsheet explains what a domain name is and what to consider when choosing one. It explains what is meant by registering a domain name and how to register. It also outlines how to move a domain name from one registration service to another and how to sell a domain name.

## What is a domain name?

A domain name is part of the electronic address that directs people to a specific website or e-mail inbox.

In the following examples, the domain name is 'yourbusiness.com':

- www.yourbusiness.com.
- j.smith@yourbusiness.com.

The last part of a domain name is called the extension. In the examples above, the extension is '.com'. Other commonly used extensions are '.co.uk' and '.org', but there are many others to choose from.

## How to choose a domain name

Ideally, a domain name should closely match the name of the business (or other organisation) itself, to make it as easy as possible for potential customers or suppliers to locate it online and to avoid causing confusion.

This means that it is important to think about possible domain names at the same time as deciding on a name for the business. Many business names (especially those using made-up words, such as Shpock and Pinterest) are chosen on the grounds that they work well as domain names.

The following considerations are important when choosing a domain name:

- **Is it easy to remember?** Short words that are easy to read, pronounce and spell are usually more memorable than longer, more difficult words. Numbers and hyphens can make domain names harder to remember.

- **Does it reflect what the business does?** Using words that potential customers are likely to choose when searching online (such as 'plumbing', 'design', 'security') can make a business more likely to appear near the top of search results.
- **Will it continue to work well as the business changes?** A domain name that is closely associated with a single service or product range may cause problems if the business changes its focus. For example, if there is a possibility that a gym might expand to include a spa or complementary therapies, a domain name that contained the words 'fitness' or 'training' might be too restrictive.
- **Is it misleading?** It is against the law to promote a business in misleading ways. Business owners may be committing an offence if they use a domain name that falsely implies that they are associated with another business or that they have professional accreditation. A domain name that very closely resembles the name or slogan of another business may also be a trade mark infringement.

Many online domain registration services have free domain-name-generator tools that enable anyone to type in words relating to their business to receive domain name suggestions. For examples of domain name generators, go to [www.shopify.co.uk/tools/domain-name-generator](http://www.shopify.co.uk/tools/domain-name-generator) and <http://domainwheel.com>.

## Choosing the right domain name extension

The choice of a domain name extension is an important decision, as it can say a lot about a business.

For example:

- '.net' is a popular choice among tech-based and app-based businesses.
- 'co.uk' is a way to make it clear that a business is UK-based.
- '.com' can make a business appear trustworthy because it is often associated with long-standing brands.
- '.org.uk' or '.org' are usually used by non-commercial organisations such as charities.
- '.mobi' is used for websites that are specially designed to be accessed by mobile devices.

Some extensions are restricted to certain types of business. For example:

- '.ltd.com' is restricted to limited companies registered in the UK.
- '.plc.uk' is restricted to public limited companies registered in the UK.
- '.pro' is restricted to professionals such as registered lawyers, accountants, doctors and engineers.
- '.coop' can only be used by co-operatives.

For a list of other available extensions, go to [www.names.co.uk/domain-names/new-domain-extensions](http://www.names.co.uk/domain-names/new-domain-extensions).

## How to register a domain name

A domain name cannot function as part of an electronic address until it is added to a 'domain name registry', which is a database of domain names together with information about who owns them.

Domain name registration services, usually known as 'registrars', are accredited organisations that have permission to add new domain names to a domain name registry. There are thousands of registrars to choose from.

Many domain name registrars also offer additional services. For example, registrars such as GoDaddy (<https://uk.godaddy.com>) and Shopify ([www.shopify.co.uk](http://www.shopify.co.uk)) provide website building and hosting services and a wide range of marketing and e-commerce tools. Other registrars simply register domain names for businesses that build and host their sites independently.

When choosing which registrar to use, it is important to be clear about which (if any) additional services are required and to shop around to find a registrar that offers the required services at a competitive price.

Once a registrar has been chosen, the registration process is quick and easy. Most registrars have a free online tool that enables users to check if their preferred domain name is available and then select and pay for it. If the name is unavailable, the tool will usually suggest close alternatives.

### How much does it cost to register a domain name?

The cost of registering a domain name is typically around £10 to £30 (excluding VAT) per year. Generally, the cost of a domain name depends on the desirability of the extension, so domain names with more popular extensions, such as '.com' or '.co.uk' are usually more expensive.

Payment is made online and registration usually takes about 24 hours, after which the domain name is ready to use. If it has been purchased as part of a package of services including web hosting, the registrar will provide a link to the new website so that content can be uploaded immediately.

### Can domain names be moved to a different registrar?

When a business or individual registers a domain name for their website and email address, the domain name becomes their property. This means that they are free to move it to a new registrar if they choose to, for example if they find a better deal. If the business is changing its web hosting service at the same time, the new service will provide detailed instructions and ensure that the domain name continues to work once they begin hosting the website.

### Can domain names be sold?

Domain names have become a business asset just like any other, so they can be bought and sold, either directly to an interested party, or via a domain name marketplace. Examples of domain name marketplaces include [www.sedo.com](http://www.sedo.com) and [www.snapnames.com](http://www.snapnames.com).

Business owners who find that all of their preferred domain names are already taken may be able to purchase a suitable previously-registered name by visiting one of these marketplaces.

## Hints and tips

- Remember that a domain name registration must be renewed periodically. Registrars will send a reminder, but if this is ignored a business can lose its website and possibly the rights to its domain name as well.
- It is important to consider registering several variants of the same domain name with different extensions. These can all then be redirected to the same business website. This makes it easier for customers to find the website and prevents competitors from registering similar domains in order to draw customers to their business.
- Nominet has a domain name dispute resolution service at [www.nominet.uk/domains/resolving-uk-domain-disputes-and-complaints](http://www.nominet.uk/domains/resolving-uk-domain-disputes-and-complaints).

## Further information

BIF326 Choosing and Using a Website Designer

BIF368 Choosing Business and Company Names

BIF400 A Guide to Setting up an Affiliate Marketing Programme

BIF494 Legal Requirements for Business Websites

## Useful contacts

Nominet holds the register of all '.uk' domain names and has a list of all '.uk' domain name registrars.

Tel: (01865) 332244

Website: [www.nominet.org.uk](http://www.nominet.org.uk)

The Internet Service Providers' Association (ISPA) is the UK trade association for providers of Internet services. It publishes a list of members with links to their websites.

Tel: (020) 3397 3304

Website: [www.ispa.org.uk](http://www.ispa.org.uk)

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is responsible for the co-ordination of the internet's domain names.

Website: [www.icann.org](http://www.icann.org)

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