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A guide to selecting domain names - Courtesy of ThinkHost.com -

What's in a name?

Finding a domain name that isn't taken these days is pretty hard to do. If you have ever tried to get a user ID with a service such as Yahoo, you will understand how frustrating it can be when you think up the perfect name that nobody else could have possibly thought of, only to find that yes, you can have that name if you are happy to have 7865 tacked on to the end of it. King Solomon is reported to have said "There is nothing new under the sun".....or the Internet it would seem.

Don't set your heart on any one name, but make a list of possibilities. It's a good idea to be online at the time and to access a WHOIS application to determine whether a name has been taken. You can access a free WHOIS application on the [ThinkHost](#) web site in the domain registration section.

Typing an address into your browser will not be an accurate way of ascertaining ownership as approximately 86% of all domain names currently registered are not in use. A WHOIS query is the most accurate way to tell.

Generic, Business names and Trademarks

Most people choose to register their business name as a domain name, but it's well worthwhile considering selecting a generic name, something that is related to your subject area or industry. Not only will it be easier for people to remember, but it will also have greater resale value if you should choose to sell your site in the future.

It is also worthwhile to check whether the name you are registering encroaches on any other trademark. Many people have registered celebrity or company names hoping to make a quick buck by selling them back to their "owners". This usually backfires, as it is an illegal practice called "cybersquatting". It's definitely not worth the court case; even registering a misspelling of a popular brand name can land you in hot water. Generic terms cannot be trademarked to the point of the exclusion of others using the word combinations. Since generic one word domain names are virtually impossible to locate now, try two word combinations that inspire and promote your products or services; e.g. [solidbargain.com](#).

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[ThinkHost](#) - Domain Name Registration and Quality Web Site Hosting.

Keep it short and simple

Ok, so you have found your name and decided that you wish to build a worldwide empire. You have chosen [www.zack-saysevry1has2visitmywonderfulsite.com](#)what's wrong with this? Sure, it's descriptive, it challenges and it's generic. But it's also a mixture of numbers, letters, abbreviations, hyphens and horribly long.

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A domain name should be easy to remember, easy to relay to someone over the telephone and where possible, the first letter should be as close to the letter "a" as possible. A number of search engines and indices categorise alphabetically. Domain names should also be as brief as possible. As far as I am aware, all 3 and 4 letter names for .com and .net are taken at this time. Unfortunately, when I began my first major site in the mid-90's I didn't consider some of these issues.

Choosing a domain extension

Many countries now lease out the rights to use their extensions globally. The best example of this is the .tv domain, which actually belongs to Tuvalu. There are now over 250 TLD's globally

A number of new Top Level Domain (TLD) extensions including .biz and .info were also recently released amid a great deal of fanfare. These are usually more expensive to register.

There is the temptation that if your first choice of names isn't available as a .com, to register the name as a .net, .biz or .tv etc. Think carefully before making this decision. Not only might it cost you more, but also these extensions do not have the recognition of .com - which is the "Beverly Hills" of domain extensions. One of my biggest mistakes in selecting my domain name was to wait for too long - the .com version was already taken by the time I had gotten around to domain name registration and I had to settle for the .net version of my site. Many people now go to the wrong address!

Nationalistic pride is great, but remember that the Internet has broken down international barriers. Think of your target audience. If it is only the people within your own country, a country specific domain is fine; but remember that we are still in the growing stages of the real global economy and it's best to go for .com - why limit yourself? Also, some countries such as Australia have very complex requirements for registering a local domain name.

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Investing in domain names.

Many people are involved in domain name speculation. While the great domain rush was happening, investors made huge profits in reselling domain names. This boom has now become a bust, never to recover. I would advise not to spend your hard earned money in this area unless you can afford to lose it. The only names with real value are one-word generic English names.

Beware of the sharks.

To register a domain name, you need to locate a Registrar. Domain name registrars are commonplace on the Internet, but you need to be very careful whom you register your domain through. Bigger is not necessarily better.

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For example, a very well known International company currently offers domain name registration for US\$35 a year. For that price you get lousy customer service, delays and very few "freebies" thrown in. But on the other end of the scale, you can pay as little as \$10-20 a year and receive quite the opposite - but anything for under that price, be extremely wary of and read the fine print.

Domain Registration and Hosting - 2 Separate services

Many people are under the impression that registering a domain name also includes space for hosting your web site. While this can be the case with some package deals, it is important to understand that they are two separate services. To learn more about web site hosting, you can read our free guides and tutorials on the [ThinkHost Site](#).

Summarising.

If all this seems pretty confusing, it may be wise to engage the services of a consultant. It will cost you anything from US\$25 upwards for the service, but the fee of a good consultant is money well spent. Your domain name is a very important part of your online business, and there are many traps set for the unwary.

In summary, here are the basic guidelines for choosing a good domain name:

- 1) As short as possible
- 2) As generic as possible, but related (resale value, trademarks etc.)
- 3) No hyphens, numbers or misspellings
- 4) First letter as close to "a" as possible
- 5) Easy to remember (would you remember it if you heard it on the radio)
- 6) Easy to spell (especially for international clients)
- 7) .com is universally recognised and remembered - the "Beverly Hills" of extensions. The new extensions such as .biz etc will take a few years to be accepted.
- 8) No doubling up of letters - e.g. developmenttools.

We hope that you have found this guide to be of value, please don't hesitate in contacting us if you have any questions - we're happy to assist! [ThinkHost](#) is simply the smart choice for all your web site hosting and domain registration needs.

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