

Choosing a Good Domain Name and Avoiding Cyber Embarrassment

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I am often tasked with helping a customer decide on the domain name for a brand new site. This is a daunting task because people have very specific ideas it - even if they are not enthused about anything else regarding the site. The choice is an important one. Your domain name is sort of like the *headline* on a newspaper article. It should reflect something regarding the content and nature of your site. Here are my tips for choosing a domain name.

Make it as easy to spell as possible

If your company is "Avacodo, Macadamia, Watermelon, and Cantaloupe PC", I *do not* think you should go with "AvacodoMacadamiaWatermelonAndCantaloupePC.com" - unless your help people with carpal tunnel and you are trying to drum up business. Many business owners have trouble distinguishing between the name of the business and the domain name of the business. Just because you have *your* name as a part of the business doesn't mean you should have your name as a part of the domain - especially if your name is hard to spell. Remember, people have to *type* the domain into the address bar. Sit down and type your new domain name 3 or 4 times to gauge how easy folks will be able to do it. If you struggle with it they will too. "Ok," you say, "if I can't put my full company name in the domain, what else can I use?" How about referencing what you do. If you are fruit growers, how about something with the word "fruit" in it. You can always prepend your initials to make yourself feel better (like amwcfruit.com).

Watch out for Similar Sites

If the spelling of your site is similar to the spelling of another site you will get cross-traffic. This may not be what you want. If the *other* site is inappropriate it's going to make some folks upset. Take your domain name and deliberately misspell it in the browser a few times to see what else is out there. A good example is Barnes and Noble. The book site is *www.barnesandnoble.com*, but if you misspell it and add an "s" at the end (i.e. *www.barnesandnobles.com*) you get a redirect to a stock tool. Notice something else. If you miss the "e" in "Barnes" you still get the book site. Why? Because a wise web person at Barnes and Noble registered *both* domains. That's a very good idea if it's in your budget. Domains are cheap these days. Get as many as you can afford in order to avoid confusion.

This especially holds true if you get a domain that is *not a .com domain*. If you register a domain with a .net extension for example you can bet that folks are going to type in .com out of habit. Make sure that whoever owns the ".com" version of your desired domain doesn't have anything embarrassing or folks will remember your site - but not in a good way.

Avoid Embarrassing or odd-looking Combinations

See if you can see what is embarrassing about any of these domains. I've used Mixed-case notation to make it more obvious what they are *supposed* to be.

- WhoRepresents.com - An agent/attorney search engine.
- ExpertsExchange.com - A great site with resources for IT folks and others.

- TherapistFinder.com - help for finding therapists of various stripe.
- PowerGenItalia.com - an extranet for an Italian power company

When they are capitalized this way there isn't anything odd about them. But if you look at them another way you get:

- WhorePresents.com - for that special someone.
- ExpertSexChange.com - when you just aren't feeling yourself.
- TheRapistFinder.com - I hated to include this one, but is pretty awful don't you think?
- PowerGenitalia.com - when you are feeling egomaniacal.

These are all humorous takes on domains, some of which have long standing pedigrees. It's not just a funny take though - it's difficult to come up with domains that make sense. For instance a friend of mine wanted to start a site called "full life ministry" but when he put it together it was "fulllifeministry" - which looks like it includes the word "feministry", making it seem like a quirky science involving Ann Rand and Lithium (stare at it a while).

Personally, I prefer short and cryptic to long and explanatory. I think it's easier for someone to explain "abandf.com" than "abercrombyandfitch.com" - even though the latter is a well-known retail name and the former is an acronym.

If you have a funny "domain naming" story please feel free to comment - right after your ick-clay on the ad-ays ;)