

Domain Name Registration

Registrar System

Historically, Network Solutions was the only company authorized to register domain names. This has now changed as the domain name market has become open to competition and several dozen companies have become authorized to act as domain name registrars.

Domain name registrars are permitted to access and modify the master domain name database that contains the records of all the domain names registered to date. This database is currently maintained by Internic, a non-profit spinoff of Network Solutions.

Domain name registrars must pay Network Solutions a small fee for each domain name they register, but beyond that fixed cost they charge different amounts to cover their costs and make a profit. This means that whereas a year or two ago the going rate for a domain name registration was fixed at \$70 for 2 years, now different companies offer different registration rates, for periods from 1 to 10 years.

The requirements that must be fulfilled to become a domain name registrar are not particularly stringent, and this has sometimes led to trouble since some registrars do not have the robust technical infrastructure necessary to handle and process large volumes of domain name registrations. Some registrars have also cut corners by not implementing certain technical functionality in their local databases, such as the ability to transfer names to another party.

Many companies register domain names, but only registrars have direct contact with the underlying mechanisms of the domain name industry such as the global database of domain name information. Other companies register their names through a partnership with registrars, adding their own markup to the transaction. For that reason, registrars usually often offer cheaper registrations than other companies, though the level of service you receive may vary widely.

The domain name industry is regulated and overseen by ICANN (<http://www.icann.org/>), which is the organization responsible for certifying companies as domain name registrars. A list of all companies current operating as domain registrars is [available here](http://www.internic.net/alpha.html) (<http://www.internic.net/alpha.html>), and the list of all accredited companies (including those that have not yet set up their operations) is [available here](http://www.icann.org/registrar/accredited-list.html) (<http://www.icann.org/registrar/accredited-list.html>).

Selecting a Name

There are many different ways to research domain names and to find inspiration for new domain names to register. The way you research domain names will be colored to a large extent by the intended use for the domain name i.e. is it being registered for a new or existing site, for investment purposes or to "protect" an established brand or trademark.

1. Domain name for a new website

You'll need: a few blank sheets of paper, a thesaurus (or [Thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com)) and some patience...

Start by noting down what the site will be about, in a paragraph or two. Then boil down this description into a maximum of 2 sentences. Don't worry about covering all the details - just make sure you're addressing the essentials of what the site will be about.

Now take your short description, and underline all the "key" words that describe your site. Let's take a specific (fictional) example: -

"Our website will be the leading source of information on weaving and knitting, providing knitting patterns and design ideas, an introduction to weaving, a guide to selecting and caring for looms, and a store for people to buy wool, yarn and books."

Now try to come up with a domain name that either addresses the one fundamental concept of the site, or that marries two or more key concepts in a single name.

In our example: weavingandknitting.com, knittingandweaving.com, knittingpatterns.com, knittingworld.com, weavingworld.com etc.

Once you've drawn up a short-list of domain names to "test" for availability, it's time to fire up your favorite domain name search engine.

In the above example, "weavingandknitting.com" and "knittingandweaving.com" were both available as of December 2000. But we can do better than that! "kntandweave.com" and "weaveandknt.com" are both available, and while neither has the instant impact of an "amazon.com" or "internet.com", both will be acceptable to our target audience - in fact, at the low prices today's domain registrars are charging, it would be worthwhile picking up both names!

If you're having difficulty coming up with useful domain name combinations from your keywords, try a single keyword and add prefixes or suffixes. Not all prefixes and suffixes are appropriate in all situations - use your judgment when deciding which to add.

If you still can't find any names you like, try brainstorming using some of the domain name research tools listed in the Resources section of IGoldRush.com!

2. Domain name for an existing website

In the case that you're looking to buy a domain name for a website that is already up and running, your options will be more limited than if you're starting from scratch.

First, have you already been operating the site under a clearly-recognizable "name" or "title"? Even if your site is hosted on cheap space at an ISP, or on a free host, you may have given it a short title in large letters (or in a logo). This is the obvious place to start when looking for a domain name.

For instance, if your site is called "The Knitting Expert" then your search is over, as both "knittingexpert.com" and "theknittingexpert.com" are available (as of the time this article was written.)

If your site's name (as given in its title) is very generic, you may well find one (or many) other sites already using it - and the corresponding domain name(s) long since gone. In that case, you have to decide whether you will make a bid to buy the domain name you want, look for an alternative extension or use the brainstorming tricks outlined earlier in this article to find a suitable alternative. You can also consult the guide to choosing the right domain name for more help.

3. Domain names as an investment

Please visit IGoldRush.com for more information as this will not be covered here.

Extensions

Once upon a time, there were essentially just a handful of different domain name extensions to choose from. (A domain name extension is the topmost part of the domain name under which all domains are registered, such as .com or .co.uk)

While it's not possible to cover every minor variation, the list below will give you a broad overview of the various types of domain name extension currently on the market, together with a "feel" for their general credibility and usability.

Remember: in the domain name industry like in every other industry, the name of the game is "buyer beware"! If you don't know what you're doing, you may be buying a domain name that only a fraction of the Web can reach - or one that has no real existence outside a database and an accounting entry, one that cannot be used for an actual site! To avoid being caught out with the wrong kind of domain name, it's important to understand what different types of domain name extension exist. A full list of extensions is below and more information is available at [ICANN](#)

.aero	2001	Air Transport Industry	Limited to the Air Transportation Industry
.asia	2007	From Asia / For Asia	Limited to Asia
.biz	2001	Business	Limited to Business Services
.cat	2005	Catalan linguistic & Cultural community	Limited to Catalan linguistic & Cultural community
.com	1995	Commercial Organizations	Unrestricted and widely recognized around the world
.coop	2001	Co-Operatives	Limited to Cooperative Business and Organizations
.edu	1995	US Educational Institutions	Limited to the US Educational Institutions
.gov	1995	United States Government	Limited to US Government use
.info	2001	Unrestricted Use	Not Limited
.int	1998	International Treaties Organizations	Limited to Organizations established by international treaties between governments
.jobs	2005	Human Resources	Limited to International community of human resource managers
.mil	1995	United States Military	Limited to the United States Military
.mobi	2005	Mobile content providers and users community	Limited to mobile content
.museum	2001	Museums	Limited to Museums
.name	2001	Individuals	Limited to registration by individuals
.net	1995	Network Providers	Unrestricted and widely recognized around the world
.org	1995	Non-Profit Organizations	Unrestricted and widely recognized around the world
.pro	2002	Professional Services	Limited to Accountants, Lawyers, Physicians, and other Professionals
.tel	2006	Contact Information DNS	For individuals and businesses to store and manage their contact information in the DNS
.travel	2005	Travel Industry	Limited to Travel and tourism community

Register a Name

Now that you have presumably decided on the domain name(s) you are going to register, the next step is to choose a Registrar and register the domain name. You will find a selection of Registrars below.

While each Registrar may have slightly different requirements in terms of the information you will need to provide when registering a domain name, a registration generally requires 5 pieces of information.

Information Needed:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| A) Registrant | This is the company or individual to whom the domain name actually belongs.
YOURSELF |
| B) Administrative Contact | This is a person authorized to make certain changes to the domain name, such as alter the address associated with that domain name. YOURSELF |
| C) Technical Contact | This is a person authorized to make certain changes to the domain name, such as alter the DNS servers associated with that domain name. YOURSELF or REGISTRAR |
| D) Billing Contact | This is the person to whom all bills and other correspondence will be sent.
YOURSELF |
| E) DNS Server Settings | This is where you specify the primary and secondary DNS server settings you would like to associate with the domain name. Supplied by your web host |

NOTES & WARNINGS:

- 1) It is possible to specify the same person or company for each of A-D above i.e. you can specify the same Administrative, Technical and Billing contact
- 2) In practice, there is very little to distinguish the roles of B-D.
- 3) Some Registrars may streamline the registration process, or may not even allow you to enter certain information (some do not require Billing Contact information, for instance).

BE CAREFUL: If a Registrar does not ask for registrant information, you should be cautious and read every inch of their terms and conditions carefully... some unscrupulous Registrars take their client's money, set their clients up as the Admin, Technical and Billing contacts, but put THEMSELVES as the Registrant (which effectively means that registrar ends up "owning" all the domain names belonging to its customers).

- 4) You will also be asked for payment information, but payment procedures vary widely from Registrar to Registrar.
- 5) You may be asked for additional information, such as a user name and password (so that you can log into the Registrar's control panel and make changes to your domain name information)
- 6) Some Registrars may let you register multiple domain names in bulk; others will require you to go through the whole lengthy registration process for every name you want to register.

While it may seem very tempting to use a false name and address when registering a domain name (to maintain your privacy and keep your personal details out of the reach of direct marketers) there are a number of downsides to this approach:

- A) It is, theoretically at least, against the registration rules of most Registrars. There have been several cases in which domain owners have been forced to provide accurate contact information at short notice, or risk losing their domains.
- B) You run the risk of not finding out about important changes that could affect your domain name. E.g. if you don't supply a real "snail mail" address, your registrar may not alert you when it's time to renew your domain name registration.
- C) You cannot be contacted for legal challenges. While this may sound like a positive benefit, you actually run the risk of losing your domain name by default if you do not respond to a complaint against the domain.

If you really want to maintain your privacy many registrars now offer "Private Registration" for a domain name for a small fee per year. This allows you to enter your details during registration then alternate contact information is displayed by the registrar. You still get the important information without most of the spam.

Remember to write down the URL of the Registrar you used to register your domain name; occasionally, an emailed or mailed confirmation can go astray and you'll have no record of which domain name you registered or where you registered it. This information is key if you need to make changes later.

Registrar	Whois	1 Year	5 Years	10 Yr max	Privacy
NetworkSolutions.com	whois	\$ 34.99 yr	\$ 19.99 yr	\$ 14.99 yr	\$ 9.99 yr
eNom.com	whois	\$ 29.95 yr	- X -	- X -	\$ 8.00 yr
DomainIt.com	whois	\$ 19.95 yr	\$ 14.95 yr	\$ 8.95 yr	- X -
WebSpaceRegistry.com	whois	\$ 19.95 yr	- X -	- X -	\$ 9.95 yr

For a full list please visit the [ICANN Accredited Registrars List](#)
We have only interacted with the first two (2) and only endorse Network Solutions.

Domain Name Protection

In order to understand how to protect your domain name, you first have to focus on what constitutes domain name ownership: the ownership of a domain name is determined by the information recorded in the central Whois database under the Registrant information section of a particular domain name record.

While there have been well-documented incidents in the past of unscrupulous people making use of bugs in the Registrar system - or flat out hacking the Whois database to attempt to wrest control of a domain name - there are a number of steps you can take to minimize the potential risk of losing your domain name.

A) Use a complex password if your registrar supports password protection

Many registrars these days offer various kinds of password protected interfaces for users to manipulate their domain name registrations (e.g. to change ownership or name server information). Obviously, this exposes you to the possibility that a determined hacker might guess your password and hence take control of your domain names.

To protect yourself, make sure that the password you have selected to protect your registrar user id is a complex one. Good complex passwords have the following characteristics: -

- * Minimum of 8 characters
- * Mixture of UPPER and lowercase letters
- * At least one digit, somewhere WITHIN the password (i.e. not at start or end)
- * No recognizable words
i.e. "guusd32DF" is a good complex password. "fish4brains" is much less safe

B) Ensure you keep full control over your domain name

The registrant and the Admin contact generally can make changes to the ownership information for a domain name. Under certain circumstances, the Technical contact may also be able to act to make changes to this information (if the Admin contact does not respond to email questioning a requested change, for example)

Always make sure using a Whois tool that your name and details appear as the Registrant, Admin and Technical contacts. If your domain name registrar or ISP appear in one of these positions, contact them and request them to change your domain name registration so that you are in exclusive control.

C) Make full use of any additional safeguards offered by your registrar

Each registrar offers a slightly different array of services, so it's not possible to talk about specifics here. Make sure that you read up on all the safeguards your registrar has put in place to guard your domain name registration.

For example, some registrars may allow you to "lock" a domain name registration so that change requests sent in by email (a traditional way of requesting changes to a domain name record) are automatically refused. In such a case, the only way to make changes to a domain name record is to log into the registrar's admin interface and unlock the name, and then make the requisite changes manually.

D) Read all email messages relating to any domains you own VERY carefully

While this practice may shock you, it's a fact that some registrars automatically authorize actions such as a domain name transfer (in which ownership of a domain name passes to a different person) unless the email message they send to confirm the transaction is acted upon within a specified number of hours or days.

In other words, a determined domain name hijacker (a person out to steal control over one of your domain names) could use this kind of "loose" registrar to instigate the transfer of YOUR domain name. If you did nothing (e.g. didn't respond to the email the registrar sent you, or deleted it unread) the transaction would automatically go through and you would LOSE YOUR NAME.

It's generally not a good idea to make public any extended time period (such as a holiday) in which you will be away from your computer. It may be very tempting to post on your favorite discussion group "Well, I'm not going to be logging in for the next 3 weeks since I'll be surfing in Hawaii - have fun, guys!" but you've just fed a potential domain name hijacker all the information he needs to take control over your domain names while you're unable to respond to emails denying transfers or other modifications to your domain name record.

E) Always REPORT any suspicious activity on your domain name record immediately to your Registrar

If you receive a suspicious email relating to changes on your domain name, or you notice via Whois that something has changed on your domain's record (such as a registered email address) then alert your Registrar (the company through which you purchased the domain name) immediately!

Explain to them what has happened, and forward to them any documentation (such as an email, or information on what has changed in your Whois record) that can help them to track down and nip any problems in the bud.

F) Always keep an off-line (paper) copy of your Whois records

Each time you register a domain name, it's a good idea to print out a copy of the Whois record for that domain name, as well as any receipt or other information provided by your Registrar. If you file these printouts in date order in a large ringed binder, you'll not only have documentary evidence proving that you own(ed) a domain name, but you'll also be able to quickly see when domain names you own are coming up for renewal.

G) Be sure to use a "secure" email address when registering a domain name

Since most domain name operations, such as change of ownership, can be carried out via a series of email commands and emailed confirmations of these commands, it's vital that the email address you entered when you registered your domain name be a secure one.

An example of a dangerous email address would be a free email account, such as Hotmail. Hotmail suspends user accounts after 30 days of inactivity, so conceivably somebody else could end up having the email address you used to own. Also, free email services have the nasty habit of shutting down without notice when their funding runs out, leaving you unable to block changes requested on your domain name (see D) above for more information on this)

If you're going to use your "work" email address when registering a domain name, you need to consider whether you'll be working at the same company (and have the same address) by the time the domain name comes up for renewal. If you leave your job and lose access to your email address, you've just lost control of your domain name!

In summary: In general, whoever controls the email address associated with a domain name Registrant controls that domain name. Make sure that you control that email address, and keep controlling it.

H) Stay on top of your domain name renewals

Most of the time, domain name registrants lose control of their names through neglect or carelessness, rather than through malice on the part of a third party. It is imperative that you renew your domain names within the timeframe specified by your registrar to avoid losing them.

Remember: a domain name is only "yours" for as long as you keep paying to own it. If you stop paying for it and it expires, it will be deleted and made available to anyone to register - first come, first served! In most cases, once you lose control over your domain name in this way, the only way to get it back is to go cap-in-hand to its new owner and BUY IT BACK - often at significant cost.

To avoid this risk, keep track of the renewal date for your domain names, for instance by writing each domain name's expiry date in on your calendar. Be sure to renew your domain names several days - or preferably weeks - before they expire, since payments sent at the last minute may be delayed and arrive after your domain name has already been released, and grabbed by somebody else.

This information is courtesy of:

IGOLDRUSH.COM The Web's #1 source of domain name news, links and information