

# The Naming Game – How To Choose Your Domain Name

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You want to create an internet presence, but you're stuck at the first step: acquiring a domain name. Where do you begin, what do you call it, what mistakes should you avoid? For anyone choosing a domain for the first time, this article will answer those questions and make you a domain naming pro!

**What is a domain?** Your domain name is the name that people will type into their browser address bar to arrive at your website. It is sometimes also known as a URL or web address. If you want a website, you must choose a domain name where your website will reside.

To begin your search, visit an online registrar (a domain registration company that sells domains), and start searching for possible domains. Working online like this lets you see immediately which domain names are already taken, and which are still available. There are many registrars, but GoDaddy.com is one of the least expensive so we recommend you start there.

**Using Your Company Name.** The first name you should search for is your own company name, because this will be easiest for people to remember or figure out on their own. However, if it is a common name you may find it is already taken. In that case you could always contact the current owner of the domain to see if they would be willing to sell it to you. Keep in mind however, that usually they will be looking for a decent fee, especially if you're asking them to part with a domain they are already using. There are times when this is worth the money, especially if you have already created a lot of awareness around your company or brand name.

Now, if you haven't named your company yet, and it's imperative that you have a matching domain, consider the available domains as you go through the naming process. For instance, when we hired our branding consultant to help us name One Lily, we started looking at domains first and what was available. We could have added terms to the end of the name, such as "design group", or "media" or something similar to secure the domain if we needed to, but we found a great domain that was short and easy to spell, so we acquired that and then named our company to match.

If your company name is not available, you're now faced with the task of being a bit more creative. Many registrars will automatically generate a list of alternate suggestions or variations when the name you want is already taken. This can be helpful, but we don't recommend adding "my" or "the" as a prefix, or "online" to the end as they are extremely vague. Consider what you could possibly add to your name to create a good domain. For instance, can you add "group", or "company" or something similar to make it work?

## Tips for Choosing a Domain.

**Look Professional.** A domain that ends in .com is the most common extension on the web today for companies in the U.S. While there are other extensions (such as .org, .info, .net, .us, .tv etc...) these are less common. Subconsciously they convey that your company may be second rate since you couldn't acquire a top level extension. Also, if the .com extension is already taken, securing that same domain name but with an alternate extension may just result in confusion for your customers and they may end up at someone else's website. If your competitor has the .com extension, you can bet that you will be losing traffic to them.

**Consider Your Marketing Plan.** Should you hyphenate your domain to get what you want? The answer depends on how you plan to market your web presence. If you will rely on offline marketing (such as word of mouth, print materials, advertising, referrals, etc), then we do not recommend hyphenating your domain just to secure it. The domain name should be memorable so that people can intuitively type it in when they get to a computer. Most people will not think of typing in a hyphen and would more than likely not end up at your website. As mentioned above, your competition with the unhyphenated form would probably love you for this. However, if your website is relying solely on search engine traffic (hits from Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc), then the use of a hyphenated domain can actually benefit

you. Hyphenation separates the words in your domain name, allowing the search engines to recognize each word in the name. If your domain name includes popular search terms people use, then you'll have that added benefit.

**Length.** How long can your domain be, and what characters can it include? Generally there is a limit of 67 characters, including the .com or other extension. Your domain name can only consist of letters, numbers or hyphens (dashes). No other characters are allowed.

We recommend you try and keep your domains short, but as available domains grow scarce, increasingly longer domains are being utilized. As long as it's easy to spell, length is a secondary consideration. For example, if your company name was Your Best Website Designers we recommend you go ahead and register yourbestwebsitedesigners.com. This is your name, and will be the first thing people try and type in since that's how you're known to them.

**Alternate Spellings.** If you have a domain with tricky spelling, or commonly misspelled words, we recommend you also reserve those misspelled domains. For example, my last name is a bit tricky for some, Angela Nielsen, and if I wanted to use angelanielsen.com as my main website, I would probably also want to buy angelanielson.com, and angelanelson.com, which are the two most common ways my last name is spelled. Another example would be if your company was named Your Best Marriage. You would get yourbestmarriage.com as your domain, but since marriage is a commonly misspelled word, you should also reserve yourbestmariage.com and yourbestmarrage.com, two ways marriage is commonly misspelled.

You may register more than one variation on your domain name, but this doesn't mean you will need multiple websites. Just ask your registrar (or hosting company) to forward the misspelled domains to the main domain. This way if someone types the domain in wrong, they still end up in the right place. For an example of this in action, if you type in 1lily.com, you will still end up at onelily.com (our main domain).

**Maintain control of your domain names.** When you begin the naming and selection process, you will probably register a number of domains – possibly more than you will actually use. You may buy some that you think you might use in the future. You shouldn't pay more than \$10 a year for your domains, so the investment is very minimal. Make sure you register domains in your name, not the name of your web design company or host, as they would then become the owner of record, not yourself. Also, it's easier if you stick with one registrar. Too often we see people with domains registered at many different registrars, and they risk losing track of what domains they own. Register them in one place, and keep them all under one account.

You should now be ready to tackle the naming game. You know the dos and don'ts as well as several tips. Have fun searching for your perfect domain, and if all else fails, ask for suggestions from friends, colleagues or even a branding consultant.

**About the Author:** Angela Nielsen is President of One Lily Inc., an award-winning web development company located in southern California. To find out more about Angela Nielsen or One Lily visit [www.onelily.com](http://www.onelily.com). Copyright by Angela Nielsen, All Rights Reserved.