



Fact Sheet

Registering A Domain Name

A domain name is the unique electronic address that identifies an Internet site. In order to send emails around the world and to host a functioning website it is necessary to have an electronic address. This address is unique in the same way that your postal address is and like your postal address, you can receive mail and be visited at it. This fact sheet includes information on:

1. What is a Domain Name?
2. How to register a Domain Name...
3. What to do if someone has already registered your Domain Name...
4. Issues surrounding buying Domain Names...
5. How the Domain Name works...
6. Different types of Domain Names available...

1. What is a Domain Name?

Domain Names always have three or more parts, which are separated by dots. They usually begin with 'www.', which stands for worldwide web. Next is the organization name (or the nearest they could get to it). The next few letters can give us a clue as to the nature of the organization (e.g. '.gov' means a government organization, '.org' means a non-commercial organization). Finally all countries, except the USA, use a final 2-letter code specific to their country. This is '.fr' for France or '.uk' for the United Kingdom.

Each individual page of a website also has its own address known as the Unique Resource Locator (URL). The URL of the 'homepage' (which sits at the top of the site pyramid) is the

website address and all the other pages are branches from this. As it is organized hierarchically individual pages are arranged so they can be linked to and from other pages.

2. How to register a Domain Name

You can register domain names through thousands of online agencies. This usually works as a lease agreement, where you pay a set fee for the address and have rights to it for a set period. It is not usual practice to buy a domain name outright, but with most agencies you will get first refusal on renewal (this is something you should check before you purchase). On average national domains (e.g. '.co.uk') can be registered for around £10 and International (e.g. '.com') addresses around £30. The standard registration package usually lasts for two years.

If your first choice of domain name is available then the best option is to register it as soon as possible (before someone else does). There are hundreds of inexpensive deals available and many people have them registered for years before they actually add content.

As a starting point you may want to ask your Internet Service Provider how much they will charge to register a domain for you. There are a lot of companies who can provide domain names, though, so shop around for the best deal. Alongside simply registering the domain name you choose, they may also offer hosting and email packages. Don't just assume the cheapest is the best deal for you! A few examples of these companies are:



www.easily.co.uk, www.netnames.co.uk,
www.oneandone.co.uk
and www.123domainnames.co.uk.

In the UK, all domain names that end with .uk are handled by Nominet UK, which is the national registry. They do not sell domain name registrations, but provide neutral advice on registering and maintaining your name. The Nominet website (www.nominet.org.uk) has a useful on-line search tool to allow users to see if the domain you are interested in has already been registered.

3. What to do if someone has already registered your domain name

If someone already owns the domain name you wish to use there are several things you can do. Firstly you should think laterally and look for other email addresses that may suit your needs. When registering a website for the Matrix movie series, the makers used a combination of email addresses such as matrixmovie.com and whatisthematrix.com because www.matrix.com had already gone to a styling firm.

If you cannot think of a substitute then you can try negotiating with the owners to buy the address, as it is possible to transfer a domain from one organization or individual to another. As a general rule, however, obtaining an already registered domain will be far more expensive than buying a new one.

If the current owner agrees to sell the domain name to you and it is a UK address, you will need to write to Nominet and ask them for a 'Transfer of Domain name Registration' form. Both the transferor and the transferee must submit signed letters to confirm this. If you are using an international extension, the transfer can be done by email. Visit www.internic.org

and follow the menu option. You will need to send an email from the transferee email account to confirm.

If the person you are negotiating with resists, you could call upon the services of the USA based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names (ICANN). You can reach them through their website at www.icann.org. The final resort is to enter into litigation, but you should have a very strong case to consider this as many have tried and failed (and lost a lot of money in the process).

4. Issues surrounding buying domain names

There are some unresolved issues surrounding web domains since the registration of websites is a parallel, but not interlinked, process to the registration of company names, trademarks and Intellectual Property Right (IPR) issues.

Although in practice most major businesses have website names that relate somehow to their core business, There is no official mapping of site names to company names. This has caused serious difficulties for individuals and companies whose names have already been registered.

It has led to a whole cottage industry known as 'cyber-squatting'. This is a situation that arises when people register domains they think others may want, not to use themselves, but to hold the individual or company to ransom. For example within minutes of the announcement of the birth of Tony Blair's son Leo, leoblair.com (and leoblair.co.uk) had been bought up by a Norfolk primary school teacher who subsequently made them available to the highest bidder. There have been some moves from regulatory authorities to prevent this type of activity but it is still a live issue.



5. How the domain name works

The Internet works through a set of common standards or protocols. These are known as Transmission Control Protocol/ Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). Because the Internet was originally set up using the Unix operating system, the paths to find any particular directory on a machine are unreadable to the non-technical eye. To enable the system to be used by the masses, a system of coding has been developed to allow users to find what they are looking for in their own language. Domain names are essentially aliases created so that the masses can access websites without having to learn to use operating systems.

The name of a website's homepage should always be registered as the site domain. This is like the cover and contents page of a magazine combined and to be effective should advertise the content of the website and provide links to it.

If you own a domain name then you usually also own the right to set up email addresses at the address. Traditionally e-mail addresses are attached to the domain name such as my.name@first-steps.info (with first-steps.info being the domain name and my.name being the addressee). This provides a neat co-ordinated approach to your Internet communications.

You can register more than one address and direct them to the same website. The website, however, will only display one of these. For example www.bbc.com and www.bbc.co.uk both redirect to the BBCi homepage, but only www.bbc.co.uk is displayed.

6. Types of domain available

There are literally hundreds of types of domain names available, but for UK businesses there

are two sets of serious options. You can either register a generic international address or a UK specific address. Both can be accessed from online computers across the world, but the UK addresses are usually cheaper and have a lower profile in other countries.

Generic top level names:

.at – (example: www.buycars.at).

The national domain for Austria. Purchasing one offers the opportunity to make up memorable names like www.findoutmore.at or www.sendflowers.at. Many are still available.

.biz – (example www.gamesindustry.biz)
International alternative to .com for businesses.

.com – (example: www.microsoft.com)
The first set of domain addresses commercially available and generally perceived as the international industry standard.

.edu – (example:www.harvard.edu)
Indicates an academic or educational organization or resource. Many of these are based in the USA, as there are national variations such as ac.uk.

.eu – (no example available)
The EU commission decided upon the introduction of .eu (European Union) as a new top-level Domain for Europe. These are currently available to pre-order for European enterprises, organizations and individuals. They are set to go live in 2004.

.fm – (example: www.jazz.fm)
The .fm domain compliments the .tv domain nicely for radio, music and multimedia sites. It's actually the national domain of the Federated States of Micronesia in the South Pacific.

.gov - (example: www.whitehouse.gov)



Government related. Many .gov addresses are also from the USA as other countries have national variations such as gov.uk.

.info - (example: www.first-steps.info)
One of the newest international domain names. These were originally created for public information sites and organizations, but once again there are no restrictions on purchasing them.

.mu – (example: www.muse.mu)
Fits anything to do with music, such as bands, labels and artists. It is actually the national TLD for Mauritius, who are probably making a tidy profit from it. Not that easy to get hold of...

.net - (example: www.orange.net)
Originally reserved for Internet companies, now anyone can buy one. Companies have regularly used these as a replacement for .com

.nu – (example: www.isbn.nu)
International alternative to dot-com with a pun on nu/new.

.org – (example: www.cancer.org)
Aimed at non-commercial organizations, such as charities or trade unions, but there are no real restrictions on using these. Usually used by American firms because there are national variations such as '.org.uk'.

.pro – (No example available)
Launching in December 2003, initially you can get these domains only if you are a lawyer, doctor, accountant or other professional. A self-certification that you belong to one of these groups is necessary.

.tv - (example: www.liverpoolfc.tv)
The national domain name for the Tuvalu islands in the South Pacific doubles nicely as an address for websites devoted to television,

movies or multimedia. Anyone can buy them, but they can be more expensive, with the best subject to auction.

.ws – (example: www.ism.ws)
A new alternative to the .com domain that stands for website. Offers a second chance to get meaningful and keyword-rich names in an international context.

UK specific names

.ac.uk - (example: www.oxford.ac.uk)
Reserved for academic institutions such as schools, colleges or Universities.

.co.uk - (example www.bbc.co.uk)
Widely available, but targeted at commercial businesses based in the United Kingdom.

.gov.uk - (example: www.ukonline.gov.uk)
Reserved for government organizations based in the United Kingdom.

.ltd.uk – (example: www.evans.ltd.uk)
These can be somewhat complicated to set up and generally cost a little more, but can be good for limited companies. The domain name you choose must be identical to the name of your company as registered at Companies House

.net.uk - (example: www.doctors.net.uk)
Originally reserved for Internet businesses or networks based in the UK, now available to the masses.

.org.uk – (www.tate.org.uk)
Available to non-commercial organizations based in the UK. Used by everyone from charities to art galleries.

plc.uk – (example: www.morrisons.plc.uk)
Addresses for Public Limited Companies from banks to supermarkets.