

Mining the Internet with Domain Names

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Mining the Internet with Domain Names



by John H. Sandy

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••• Choosing a Great Domain Name

A GREAT DOMAIN NAME IS THE KEY TO ESTABLISHING A STRONG PRESENCE

and making the riches of the Internet more accessible. Indeed, a domain name is akin to the location of a premium piece of real estate. Only, in this case, the location is a virtual home in cyberspace. Emphasizing the importance of a domain name, a broker of domain names at iDomain.com recently said, "The Internet is not really about technology—it is about marketing yourself and your products."

A high-impact domain name can be a short-cut to branding, a process important in marketing a company or organization and its products.

With a solid name, it's easy to reach new and existing customers. Accordingly, many companies are willing to spend huge sums of money to acquire and promote a good domain name. But finding the right name is not always an easy task. The explosive growth of the Internet leaves fewer good names from which to choose.

The explosive growth of the Internet leaves fewer good names from which to choose.

To some observers, the frenzy to register domain names is a reminder of the California gold rush days of 1849.

Whoever thinks of a

great domain first and stakes a claim with domain name authorities (gets it registered) is the owner. In many cases, individuals have registered hundreds of names, hoping to sell them later at a high profit. Owners of generic names, especially if the name is related to an entire industry, such as milk.com, have reported huge offers to sell.

Choosing a Name

Choosing a good domain name is a critical step in getting started on the Internet. While many businesses and organizations are already on the Internet, millions more are signing on each year. Latecomers to the Internet soon discover that most high-quality domain names are already taken. Jill Serjeant, author of a Reuters News story (7 January 2000), reported "some 97 percent of the words in *Webster's Dictionary* have been registered, and the total number of domain names in the United States has swollen to six million from one million in three years." The competition to register domain names is intense, with approximately 10,000 new names being registered each day, according to iDomains.com.

As of July 2000, DomainStats.com reported 13,072,946 registered InterNIC domains. Of this sum, .com accounted for 9,482,427 (72.5%), .net 2,265,298 (17.3%), .org 1,318,818 (10%), .edu 5,637 (.04%) and .gov 730 (.006%). During the same period, statistics showed 17,804,717 domains, worldwide. It's not surprising that for many businesses and entrepreneurs the search for a domain name is like looking for the proverbial "needle in a haystack."

Occasionally, like early-day mining claims, disputes occur as to the rightful owner of a domain name. Fortunately, for many companies, their names are protected by intellectual property laws, specifically trademark. But not all names are protected, particularly if they are words of common usage. A major U.S. company recently challenged an individual on the use of the term Ajax (a character from Greek mythology) in a personal web site, but upon further investigation, quit the challenge.

The Domain Name System (DNS)

An understanding of the domain name system is important for selecting a domain name. The domain name system is set up to make regular words map to IP (Internet Protocol) addresses. An IP address is a series of numbers used by networks to connect all computers on the Internet. A domain name may be up to sixty-three characters, consisting of letters, numbers, or the dash symbol. In the world of computer networking, the web address flyhigh.com becomes the IP address 125.133.4.4, for example. But it's the domain name that people use when looking for Web sites or sending e-mail.

Domain names are organized hierarchically. At the highest level is the top-level domain (TLD). Three TLDs are commonly used worldwide: *.com*, *.org*, and *.net*. Just below the TLD, reading right to left is the subdomain. A business might choose *redbuffalo.com* as its domain name, for example. Second-level domains are the focus of attention when trying to settle on a domain name. A

As business owners strive for brand recognition, good domain names can save millions of dollars in advertising costs.

name may be expanded locally to a third level, say *calf.redbuffalo.com*. The combination of two or more levels is referred to as the hostname. The hostname describes the computer on which a resource is located.

According to the original plan of the domain system, the *.com* TLD is reserved for commercial firms, *.org* for non-profit organizations, *.net* for computer networks, *.edu* for educational institutions, and *.gov* for federal governmental bodies. It's now common practice, however, for anyone to register in all but *.gov* and *.edu* names.

A less common TLD is the designation *.us*. This is the country code for the United States. Anyone can register a domain name in *.us*, but because of the cumbersome naming convention required, the *.us* TLD is mostly used by schools, libraries, counties, and other state and local governmental jurisdictions. The name for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, for example, is *dnr.state.wi.us*.

Domain names are often a part of a URL (Uniform Resource Locator), a name that identifies a document or service on the Internet. In the example *http://www.calf.redbuffalo.com/auction/adv.html*, reading right to left, parts of the URL are the file name, directory, top-level domain, subdomains, and the computer protocol.

International Domains

Internationally, domain name authorities have designated about 240 additional TLDs, referred to as country codes. Frequent Internet users will recognize *.de* (Germany), *.fr* (France), and *.ca* (Canada). Many country codes are not so intuitive. The country code for Switzerland is *.ch* and for Ireland *.ie*. A few domain name registrars specialize in international country

codes. *Alldomains.com* registers domain names in country codes worldwide.

Country codes may be either widely used or restricted. Anyone can register the name *Best-Cheese.ch* from the Swiss domain name registrar. The main requirement is payment of an annual registration fee. But domain authorities in many other countries require that the registrant have a presence in the country. In Canada, a firm must have a local presence to register in the *.ca* domain. Policies for local presence vary widely from one country to another.

Smaller political entities such as the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, *.cc*, don't have much demand locally for domain names. Cocos (Keeling) Islands domain names are marketed internationally for an annual \$60 registration fee. All TLDs work on the Internet and can be located on domain name servers anywhere in the world. A *.cc* domain name works just like a *.com* name.

Registering a Name

When the domain name system was first set up, Network Solutions, Inc., under a contract with the U.S. government, had responsibility for assigning domain names. Recently, other companies have been given authority to register domain names. The New York-based firm *Register.com* is an especially active registrar.



Networksolutions.com will register a domain name for a cost of \$70, good for two years. Upon renewal in the third year, the fee is \$35 annually.

Network Solutions makes it easy to tell if a domain name is already assigned. A search in Network Solutions' WHOIS database is a convenient way to find out if a specific domain name is taken. In a single lookup, the search covers names in the .com, .net, and .org TLDs.

Value/Valuation of Names

The shortage of domain names has caused a surge in value for quality domain names. At auctions, domain names have sold for nearly one million dollars. At a recent auction, drugs.com sold for \$823,456, according to a news report out of Los Angeles. In July 2000, the name our.com saw twenty-six bids on eBay.com (an online auction company), as bidders scrambled to acquire rights to this popular name.

Experts on domain names agree that certain names are very valuable property. Names in the .com domain command the highest prices, followed by .net and .org names. Short names with five or less character have a very high value. Such names are easy to remember and use in commerce. Other factors, such as the type of industry to which a name relates, are also important. As business owners strive for brand recognition, good domain names can save millions of dollars in advertising costs. The objective is for the public to remember the name and thereby generate high traffic at web sites.

The crunch for good domain names has spawned a huge aftermarket for domain names. Greatdomains.com lists several thousand names for sale. The company aims to bring buyers and sellers together. Sales and auctions of domain names, like re-sales in commercial real estate properties, result in the highest use for a particular name. One might ask how much Ducks Unlimited would be willing to pay today for ducks.org, if the organization hadn't been first to register the name.

Useful Web Addresses

Internet Name Administration:

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)
www.icann.org

American Registry for Internet Numbers (ARIN)
www.arin.net

RIPE Network Coordination Centre
www.ripe.net

Registration of Domain Names:

Network Solutions, Inc.
www.networksolutions.com

Register.com
www.register.com

Alldomains
www.alldomains.com

Selected National Domain Registries:

United States
www.nic.us

Germany
www.dnic.de

Italy
www.nic.it

Mexico
www.nic.mx

Domain Registries around the World:

www.norid.no/domreg.html

Buy/Sell Domain Names:

www.igoldrush.com

www.greatdomains.com

www.domains.com

www.thedomainexchange.com

Alternative Uses

Huge companies have registered hundreds of names, hoping to drive traffic to their web sites. Using a function called redirect, a name is acquired and set to automatically send the user to a company's Web site. Hunting.com redirects the user to Basspro-shops.com, a supplier of outdoor products. Gerd.com, GERD being a common digestive disorder, automatically sends the user to the GERD Information Center, a web page sponsored by the international pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca LP. And Love.com opens a personal relations web page at America Online (AOL).

Some individuals use domain names in very deceptive ways, without the public good in mind. Registrants often acquire names of prominent American symbols and then use the names for web sites that many people would not want to view or read.

Names as a Reference Tool

Domain names are a powerful tool in the hands of reference librarians. In many research situations, assurance of appropriate and quality information is important. Using some search engines, searches can be limited to a

top-level domain. Web sites in the .edu and .gov domains produce good results in wildlife searches. A search in Alta Vista for domain:gov AND "grizzly bears" finds many quality sites. A search on domain:com AND outfitters generates sites for hunting and fishing guides.

Hostname searches are another effective way to find information. A search in Alta Vista for host:ucla.edu AND "student union" retrieves many good hits. For environmental information, a search on host:doe.gov AND "air pollution" AND "alternative fuels" produces good results, as well.


Using full domain names or terms embedded in subdomains is another approach to finding solid information. Netcraft.net maintains a searchable database for locating registered domain names. Search options include: site containing, site starts with, site ends with, and subdomain. A search in Netcraft.net for domain names containing the term "yosemite" retrieves 245 web sites, many on target.

Impact of Web Browsers

The way web browsers work adds additional value to domain names. Netscape Navigator's approach to processing words, called Smart Browsing, gives .com TLDs a big boost. In the browser's configuration screen, users can choose to enable a feature called "What's Related." When searching a word from the Location dialog box, the browser displays the word in the .com TLD. If the word "schools" is entered in the Location dialog box, the browser opens the web site for schools.com, for example.

With Microsoft's Internet Explorer, when a generic term is entered in the Address dialog box, the browser automatically defaults to the .com domain name. The default selection gives enormous value to .com domain names.

Conclusion

Many changes are ahead for domain names. Because of the high demand, the International Corporation for Assigned Name and Numbers (ICANN) is proposing to add even more TLDs. Working Group C of the ICANN, in its spring 2000 meeting, proposed the addition of between six and ten new TLDs. Possible new TLDs are .web, .shop, .firm, .info, .arts, .rec, and .nom. Register.com reports news of domain name developments. By most estimates, millions of new users will soon flock to the Internet. Many will need a domain name. Unlike old California mining claims, the future of domain names seems secure. 

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