



# **Your Domain Name**

*Getting it, Keeping it, and Using it Wisely*

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## Table of Contents

Introduction  
Choosing a Domain Name  
Getting a Domain Name  
Keeping a Domain Name  
Email Accounts  
Protecting Your Domain Reputation  
About the Author

**Dedicated to my family, without whose love and support I can't function!**

Version 1  
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**We are not tax experts, or legal experts. We advise you to seek further assistance from a professional if you do not feel able to make decisions about difficult issues. We do not assume any risk for your success or failure.**

**We provide general guidelines to get a business off to an intelligent start, and to avoid some types of problems later on. You are solely responsible for verifying legal requirements for your business, and for timely application for necessary licenses and for payment of taxes.**

No business is without risk. Even if you do it right, unforeseen circumstances may intervene with unpredictable results. Starting on firm footing though can help you to make those risks as few and as small as possible. We make every reasonable attempt to help you understand the necessary elements for building that foundation.

## Introduction

**Your domain name is more than just an address that people use to get to your website. It provides permanent email addresses, an online identity, and becomes part of your tradenames and copyrighted business image.**

Protecting it, choosing a good one, and then using it wisely is one of the first steps in creating a solid online identity. People will associate the URL with your organization or business if you do it in the right way. Done wrong, it will become a point of confusion and distraction.

**The purpose of this booklet is not to overcomplicate a small thing, merely to provide some simple instructions about a few issues which are not evident to the average person. By considering each point, you'll be better prepared to protect the asset that your domain name will become.**

## Choosing a Domain Name

The rules about choosing a domain name are simple:

1. **Choose the shortest one that will do** – but do NOT try to use complex initials instead of real words!
2. **Choose words that mean something.** Chances are, the domain name you really want is taken, so you'll have to choose a variation. Three and four word domain names are now common, and fine as long as the combination is easily memorable.
3. **Choose something that is easy to remember**, and easy to associate with your company. People remember things that are the same better than they remember small differences.
4. **You do not, EVER, need to purchase more than one domain, UNLESS** you have a name that is easily confused. For example, we purchased both firelightwebstudio.com and firelightwebstudios.com, because we knew that some people would put an “s” on the end. Both point to the same site, but having both helps us keep traffic that would otherwise go astray due to a spelling error. You only need to worry about this if there is a major likelihood of error. Purchasing several extensions is not necessary (.com, .org, .info, etc). If you have a .org, then purchasing the .com is also wise, because people default to .com – that is the only other exception.
5. **Get a .com if you can. PEOPLE default to .com, and so do browsers.** .biz is becoming more common, as is .info, simply because .com names are so hard to get anymore. But a little creativity can **still yield a great name.**
6. **If you have not named your business yet, get the domain name first.** You may stumble on a treasure when searching for a domain name. Otherwise you may choose a business name and find that you cannot get a logical domain name for it. This is how we got “SkinnyShoestring.com”. It was so much better than the original name that we went looking for, and it has helped us create an entire image around it.
7. **Keywords are helpful for some things, but never put keywords ahead of memorability.** People come first. Search engines are of secondary concern with a domain name.

So, keep it logical, and memorable.

## Getting a Domain Name

You can purchase a domain name one of two ways:

1. **From a hosting company.** Every hosting company out there offers you the chance to purchase a domain name. Many offer one free for a year when you get hosting from them. Beware though – most hosting companies charge more per year for a domain name than a separate registrar does.
2. **From a separate registrar.** You should not have to pay more than \$10 a year for a domain name. We generally purchase ours from GoDaddy.com, because they are low cost, fast to purchase, and the company has easy to use management services. We would not ever use their hosting (too slow), but their domain name registrar services are tops.

**Do NOT purchase a domain name from your web designer! Do NOT allow anyone else to register it for you! Register it in the name of the LEGAL OWNER, because the name on the registration IS the owner! Fail in this, and someone else can hold your domain name hostage!**

You can purchase it for a year at a time, or for up to 10 years at a time. Typically, discounts apply to higher term registrations.

**Do not get Private Registration.** It hurts a business site, and makes you look suspicious to some people. Do not worry about any other add-ons either. Your hosting will typically contain everything else you need. Just get the domain, and check out.

**Keep a record of your username and password.** If you work for an organization, those items belong to the organization, not you, so keep a record, but protect it from those who have no business with it. You can share it with your web administrator to allow them to do their job, but otherwise keep it confidential.

## Keeping a Domain Name

In most cases, there is little advantage to changing a domain name – doing so can cause a series of inconveniences. So it is usually something you'll want to keep long term, and protect from losing it.

**First of all, pay the yearly fee promptly.** At less than \$10 a year, there is rarely an excuse for losing a domain name because you did not pay the fee.

**Second, protect the access information,** and do not share it lightly.

Your domain name is worth retaining – traffic goes with the domain name, not with the hosting company. So if someone else manages to get your domain name, they also get your traffic. If you ever change domain names, you'll have to redirect traffic to keep it.

**Traffic tends to build over time, so a domain name gains value over time. The longer you have it and tend your website, the more valuable the name becomes.**

## Email Accounts

**Email accounts can be attached to a domain name, but they LIVE in the hosting space.** So your email accounts have two parts, not just one. In order to function correctly, both parts have to be set up right.

**Your domain name is set to point to your hosting space. Email accounts are set up in your hosting space, and you can pretty much pick what you want for the email addresses – [name@yourdomain.com](mailto:name@yourdomain.com).**

You also set your account features through your hosting account – space limits, etc.

**Now, if you change web hosts, but keep the same domain (move it to a new web space), then your email accounts will stop functioning until you move them also.** This consists of setting them up again in the new hosting space. After you do that, then you also need to set them up again in your email program – each server has different information that goes into the configuration area in your email program. If you are doing this for an entire organization, each person needs to be informed when the changes take place.

**It is worth setting these up though – they provide you with a permanent, highly credible email address which is not dependent upon your internet service provider.** You can change service providers any number of times, and still have a permanent business email address. A great advantage to a business or organization. It also lends credibility to your organization.

## Protecting Your Domain Reputation

**The manner in which you use your webspace has a great bearing on your domain name. Some of the things that affect it are not at all obvious, and may not be things that are caused by your own actions!**

If you put an email address on your web pages, you may first get spam, then you'll get bounced email notices as someone else pirates your email address and uses it as a return address for spam, and then your emails will start disappearing into the void as other people's spam blockers start eating them. **Through no fault of your own, your email address will be blacklisted.**

The solution is to use an email form. But not just ANY email form! The wrong one is WORSE than spam problems! We recommend using a third party form service (try MyContactForm.com for a free one that is good).

See, a form that is not coded right can allow a spammer to use the form to send spam from your website. Then you get blamed for sending spam from your hosting space, and your site gets shut down, and a nasty little notice informs your site visitors that your site was shut down for abuse – not a great marketing tactic!

By using a third party service, where they process the form on their server, the security headaches get put in their lap, not yours. You can relax and get good feedback email from your site, very little spam, and minimal risk of getting accused of abuse or getting blacklisted for spam.

This is another issue worth taking seriously. If your domain name is for keeps, you'll want to protect it from long term problems.





## *About the Author*

This book was entirely written by Laura Wheeler, owner of Firelight Web Studio. She is a busy Mom of Eight children, five of whom are still at home. She homeschools, and works her business in around the needs of her family. She puts in long hours, and manages to complete the equivalent of full time work most days. She subcontracts some services to trusted sources, and works personally with her clients.

Way back in 1982, she took a two week course in computer usage. She failed it utterly, and could not understand the command line interface used at the time. About 14 years later, the family was gifted a Mac Classic. After a little tentative exploration of the use of it, she found that she could actually understand how to use it quite well. She bought a copy of Macs for Dummies, and within 6 months had reformatted the hard drive just to see if she could.

Within two years they upgraded their computer to a new model, and Laura was hired in a small school as a computer instructional aide. Her business was started a few months later. At first it was just printing, word processing, and data entry. Not many people had home computers in the small town they lived in, so she got a bit of work doing that. She kept learning more about computers, and built her first computer system shortly after. She learned graphics processing, page layout, and copy writing in this time period also.

She saw her first website in 1999. Five months later she was awarded a contract with the Town of Medicine Bow to redesign and maintain the town website. She began building websites for herself and others, picking up contracts with the Wyoming Dental Association, and the Historic Virginian Hotel, and several others. She built many websites for a variety of purposes, including craft sales, electronic specialty services, non-profit organizations, and many more.

When Laura began business, she had no money to spare. Her business was build around the ownership of a computer, printer, scanner, and later an internet connection. She bought software when she could afford it, and learned to use free software when she could not afford it. She knew that if she did things the "recommended way", she'd be heavily in debt, and might never crawl out from under it. There had to be a way to start with nothing but work and determination, and that is what she did. Since she was in a small town, her business evolved into several lines of work in order to fill local need. Her website services encompassed everything a client needed, because her clients could not afford to hire a team. This need gave her a broad base of skills in all areas of website design, layout, and administration.

In 2003, her youngest son was diagnosed with cancer. She resigned as web administrator for the Town and for several other contracts. Her business was streamlined so that it could be flexible enough to accommodate sometimes unpredictable medical needs. Her websites were closed down, and new ones were established which would adapt themselves to a more flexible work schedule. Basically, she took her experience and equipment, and started over. Most of her business lines involving house calls, building or troubleshooting equipment, and anything else that was not portable, was shut down. She began putting more effort into her own website work and instructional writing. She began building shopping carts, exploring more web marketing strategies, and developed more expertise in the home business market. During this time she did not make a lot from her work, but spent a lot of time laying a good foundation. When the work began to pay, it did so whether her schedule was predictable or not.

Life interfered again with a difficult pregnancy. Near the end she was put on bedrest and bought a laptop. Her baby died a few minutes after birth, and after a month of heavy grief during which she could not bring herself to face the task of writing down the story, she began hard work on her websites again. She feels that work saved her sanity during this time. The worst part about losing a child is the emptiness and the purposelessness. Work kept her occupied and she made rapid progress with her sites. Within five months she build and established over a dozen sites. Her client base began to grow again, and her ability to offer more extensive services grew also. Her business is now fully portable, and she has gained the ability to work in spite of family crises (which have occurred with regular frequency), and in almost any location.

One reason Laura is good at working with shoestring startups, is because she has done it. Not once, but twice, and with multiple business lines. She knows how long it takes to get orders or traffic. She knows the inexpensive

ways to get that traffic, and she understands what makes a customer or visitor feel comfortable on a site so that they will purchase or come back. She is also skilled at teaching other people what she has learned, and knows how to explain it in terms that they can understand if they have no experience with it.

The Town of Medicine Bow has reissued the web contract to Laura. They contracted with her to redesign their site, and to write an extensive website administrative manual for the Town. After the completion of this special contract, they will resume a standard maintenance and improvement contract with her. They feel she is simply the best person to do the job for them, in producing a quality site for them, marketing it effectively without unnecessary or ineffective expenditure, and in making good design decisions that suit the resources and specific needs of their small businesses. The Town Council also trusts her to give them accurate information about what is genuinely needed, and to honorably fulfill the terms of the contract.

Her experience and expertise are unique. She knows the backroads that nobody else travels, which can save time and money. She understands which of the "experts" are telling the truth, and which ones are just trying to get you to buy their product. She knows that there is one truth for large corporations with healthy advertising budgets, and another nearly hidden truth for small startups that don't have money to waste. She understands how hard it is in these times for the little guy to get a foot in the door and make a place for himself in a world that is dominated by the mega-corporations. And she understands which back doors will actually get you inside, and which ones will get you mugged. And she is good at assessing individual needs so she can give good advice on what is a useful feature and what is a waste of time or money.

Her niche is one that almost nobody else wants to occupy. The expertise required in this area is difficult to acquire, and it shuts the door on many of the perceived "cash cows" in the web business world - but for Laura, it opens up possibilities for herself and her clients that provide very real opportunities. Not only is it a tough niche to occupy, but many pros do not want it because there is no profit in telling people that they DON'T need the nifty gadget you just learned how to install! Laura makes her profit from building cost efficient sites for shoestring startups (her overhead is low so she can offer quality at affordable rates), and from producing information on various home business topics.

Life has taken her in an unexpected direction. Some of that direction has hurt, and then benefited her in unlooked for ways. All of the happenstance, strategy, and research that she has done to learn and develop a high level of expertise in helping startup website and business owners in all aspects of developing a successful web presence, combine together to give her a combination of skills which sets her apart from virtually every other web designer in the nation.