

# SME DIGEST

ADVICE FOR SMALL & MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES

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Edited by  
Adam  
Bernstein

# MASTER OF YOUR OWN DOMAIN



*While there's a place in society for bricks and mortar businesses, if there's one lesson to be learnt from coronavirus, it's that online has grown in prominence and if a business doesn't exist online, like it or not, it's going to lose out. By Adam Bernstein.*

Some realised this a while ago and took steps to create an online presence. But a number made, and still make, the fundamental error of doing so on the cheap – they either use a generic free email address (such as joebloggs@gmail.com) or they use a free web page creator which is tagged in the same way (say joeblogsequipment.wixsite.com/siteaddress).

These sites work, but they don't look at all professional.

An altogether better solution is to buy a distinct domain and then use it as the backbone for email and a website. Money spent well here will repay itself many times over; business success rests on a decent domain name for it is how customers find a firm and further, it will portray the brand while driving online traffic.

## Choosing a domain name

Just as you'll have spent time agonising on what to call your business so time should be spent researching and thinking about the domain name you're to acquire. While it clearly needs to represent the business and what it stands for, there are a few golden rules to follow.

First off, keep it short and snappy for if no other reason you don't want to give web users an excuse to mistype it and find a rival instead. Next, see if there's a way of tweaking the domain name to make it distinct. For example, 'Garden Equipment Services' will return countless results on search engines which interpret the words, but 'GardenEquipmentServs' is very much different and is likely to shove the term to the top of search engine lists.

Alternatively – and check this online – make up a domain that is very unique. B&Q doesn't use B&Q.co.uk, it uses DIY.com.

## Domain types

There are a number of options when it comes to the domain extension you select – .co.uk, .com, net, .org, .biz and so on.

In simple terms, .net works best for internet related businesses, .com may be linked with global corporates and tends to be associated with the US, and .org is generally for charities or community bodies. UK based businesses may be best off using .co.uk, .uk or .biz. The .eu domain is now off limits to firms that don't have any physical location in the European Union.



While looking at domains, note that there's no limit to the number of domains that you can register so long as they're available. So, for example, look at registering GardenEquipmentServs.co.uk, GardenEquipmentServs.uk, GardenEquipmentServs.biz and maybe GardenEquipmentServs.com for belt and braces coverage. Failing to do this may help others directing searches for your site to theirs.

## Due diligence

When it comes to purchasing a domain it's possible to spend hours searching only to find nothing. However, there is a faster way of checking a domain and the various endings by using a domain name checker such as whois.com. These checkers advise on availability, but not who owns the name if it's taken – thank GDPR data legislation for that. It's helpful, though, that the checkers offer alternatives if a name is taken – sometimes with different spellings or extensions.

Prices for domains vary wildly. GardenEquipmentServs on GoDaddy is just 1p for the first two years (and £16.14 for subsequent years). But prices can be eye wateringly expensive - carinsurance.com cost the buyer \$49.7m.

Ultimately, the cost will depend very much on the provider used and the domain name extension chosen.

## Want but cannot have

Since the internet is very much mature there's a fair chance that your ideal domain name will have been taken by another. If still you keenly want GardenEquipmentServs.com and want nothing else, you can try to buy the domain from the owner; if it's in demand and the owner will entertain an offer it won't be cheap.

You'll need to find out who is using the domain, a task made harder by GDPR. However, some of the domain registrars – **GoDaddy** is one but there are others – offer to work as a broker to secure the name.

Alternatively, you can wait until the domain expires at the end of the one- or two-year registration period. If it's seen little use, there's a fair chance of your acquiring it. Procedurally, the owner will be notified when it's close to expiry and once it does, they will be given 30-45 days to renew it.

If owners actively don't want a domain, they can make it available for general registration or put it to auction. However, do exercise caution as some domain names can be troublesome either in spelling or in connotation which leads to the domain being pushed down the rankings. A good example was expertsexchange.com – a forum for IT professionals - which found, for good reason, that it had to rebrand as experts-exchange.com.

Watching for expiring domains is time intensive and it may pay to use a domain name brokering service from

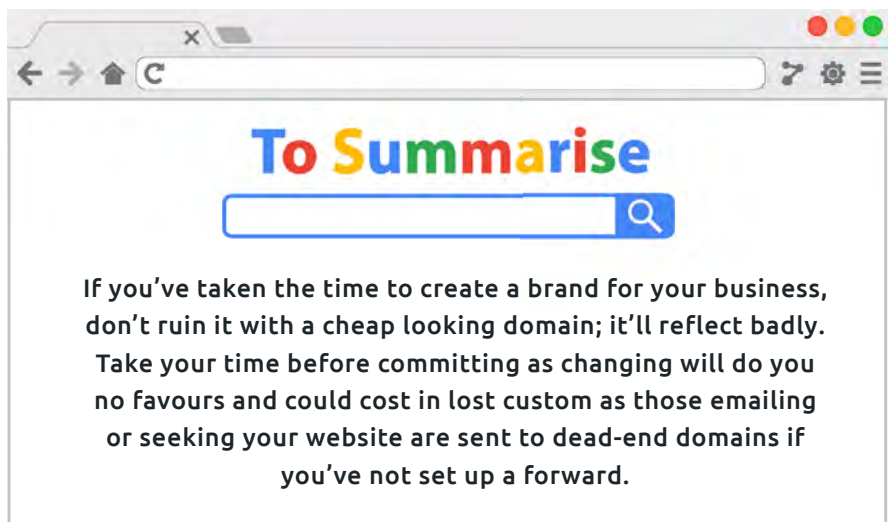
a registrar which will, on your behalf, track a domain and notify you the moment it becomes available.

## The buying process

Buying a domain at auction means following the processes set down by the platforms or registrars that run them. The same applies to the purchase of a new and unused domain – follow the process and pay the fee for the one- or two-year minimum period. Do look beyond the first-year teaser price. Consider also if the registrar loads other fees too before committing.

Buying a domain from a current owner is just a matter of privately agreeing the process and making payment.

Buying a domain name entails legal implications, the least of which involves contract law. There are defined processes for resolving domain name disputes – trademark abuse and the buying and selling of domains purely for profit (and not use) to name two. Nominet in the UK runs one such service but note that the costs can soon rack up to £4000+VAT or more.



**To Summarise**

**If you've taken the time to create a brand for your business, don't ruin it with a cheap looking domain; it'll reflect badly. Take your time before committing as changing will do you no favours and could cost in lost custom as those emailing or seeking your website are sent to dead-end domains if you've not set up a forward.**

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