

# Choosing a Domain Name

*What they are and why the choices are important*

An article by



October 2010

## Introduction

To host a website on the Internet, there are three basic steps:

- Choose and purchase a domain name. This is done online
- Design and build a website, which is then attached to your domain name allowing it to be found on the internet. This is known as *hosting* a website.
- Configure email addresses that flow through your hosted website.

In this article we focus on domain names, what they are, their history and how to choose the right type for your business. Information on Web hosting and email can be found [here](#) in further articles.

## What are domain names

A domain name is a *unique* alpha-numerical address that allows web visitors to identify and find your website\* on the Internet. [yahoo.com](#), [facebook.com](#) and [coles.com.au](#) are common examples of domain names. To host a website and have email flow to your business entity, you first must purchase and register a domain name. All domain names in Australia are registered with the national non-profit organisation [AUDA](#) - the Australian Domain Name Administrator. In turn all domain names worldwide are registered with [ICANN](#), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, again a not for profit organisation.

But AUDA does not actually handle domain registrations itself. Instead this is delegated to literally hundreds of private companies around Australia who are licensed as domain name *registrars* on behalf of AUDA. These companies typically offer other services such as website hosting, email and other Internet services. Registration pricing is not set by AUDA, with companies free to set their own prices on domain name registrations.

Currently a domain must be registered for two years, renewable every two years. If you fail to pay the renewal fee, the domain enters a remission period and eventually released back into the market place.

## Top Level Domains - TLD's

A typical domain name carries two recognisable parts; the identifying organisations name for example *amazon*, then a suffix to that name which defines what kind of organisation it is: *amazon.com*, a commercial enterprise.

This convention was formed back in the day when the Internet was first being put together. It was decided to define and group domain names in accordance with the type of organisations that would use them. Each group would carry the suffix known as a *domain name extension*, which would define the purpose of the domain. Here is the original bunch, which you will undoubtedly recognise:

- **.com** derives from *commercial*, for commercial activities and business.
- **.net** is derived from *network*, originally intended for organizations involved in networking technologies, such as Internet service providers. However it has evolved into a general class today often substituting **.com**
- **.org** for *organisation*, which was later redefined to mean non-profit organisations and charities
- **.gov** defines a government department.
- **.edu** denotes educational institutions such as universities and colleges

Collectively, these types of domain names are known as *Top Level Domains*, or **TLD's**. A TLD can be registered by anyone from anywhere in the world.

## Country Code Top Level Domains

Anyone can register a TLD (.com/net/org) without having to prove who they are, and there are millions of them out there. Check it out for yourself [here](#). You would be well lucky to find a TLD that matches your business name. As the Internet exploded this became a problem. ICANN quickly realised that it would be difficult to effectively police these extensions and their intended purpose. They also realised that business names would be duplicated the world over, which would make it extremely difficult to marry a domain name to your business name.

Enter **CCTLD's** - Country Code Top Level Domains – with an extra suffix that would further group domains into countries of origin. Every nation gained a further two letters tacked on the end of their domain names, making them unique from each other. In Australia, this extension **.au** and we now see most websites in Australia carrying this extension denoting an Australian hosted website. Other examples are Canada which would be *mybusiness.com.ca*; in Japan *mybusiness.com.jp*, and in Brazil *mybusiness.com.br*. The full list of the world's CCTLD's extensions can be found [here](#).

Following this was the creation of locally controlled domain name registration authorities such as AUDA. These local registrars could in turn operate within the local framework of commercial law. It also gave organisations a greater chance to find and to register a domain that is relative their organisational name. Now [jimspizzas.com.uk](#) in London can co-exist with [jimspizzas.com.au](#) in Australia.

Countries regulate CCTLD's in their own manner. In Australia, anyone with a credit card can still register a TLD, but for a CCTLD there are strict rules as defined by AUDA:

- You cannot register a domain name with the extension **.com.au** or **.net.au**, without having a registered ABN or business name
- A **.org.au** name must be a registered charity or non-profit organisation such as a political party.
- **.gov.au** can only be employed by government departments, Local, State and Federal
- **.edu.au** can only be used by credited educational institutions or carry a national focus on, for example research that satisfies AUDA criteria.

## TLD or CCTLD?

Today, informal convention is that TLD's are 'International', in that regardless of where head office maybe, this is an international operation. Multinational corporations of course, operate just such a structure. *toshiba.com* is Toshiba's international domain name. But they also have regional domain names such *toshiba.com.au* in Australia as with *toshiba.com.de* in Germany and many more.

But which should you choose, and what difference does it make? If you are registering a domain name in Australia for business that is local, then choose a CCTLD first to host your site, and manage your email. The two key reasons are:

- CCTLD's allow search engines such as Google and Bing to easily identify and list locally based goods and services. This is important to advertising your business online which is the whole point.
- As you must be a registered business to own a **.com.au**, it gives your organisation bona fides of which increasingly web savvy consumers look for and expect.

If you can get it, register the TLD as well as a bonus and have it pointed it to your website. The same applies if you are doing business both locally and overseas.

If you wish to use a TLD only, then consider the following when setting up. SPAM is the unsolicited sending of annoying email that is a growing problem for many people (See [here](#) for a detailed explanation). For spammers to send email they too must have a domain name the obvious choice a TLD, because there is no real registration trail. They register and operate from countries with little or no regulation. If you have ever had a SPAM problem you may have noticed that nearly all of them are from **.com** and **.net** addresses.

To combat SPAM, organisations are employing increasingly sophisticated anti-spam software that treats any TLD email with suspicion. You run the risk of your email being incorrectly identified as SPAM and rejected by foreign mail servers, which is irritating and often difficult to fix. In fact many organisations now warn customers and suppliers alike not to submit email via popular web mail services like Hotmail.com and Gmail.com etc. because of this very reason.

## Choosing a Domain Name

Ideally your domain name should match your business name, such as *myitsupport.com.au*, but this is not always possible. The loose rules for registration are that a domain name should closely represent your business name or its purpose. But this is difficult to define, and the reality is that anyone with an ABN can register a .au domain name and once they have it there's little you do about it. So, logically, choose your business name and then search for a closely related domain name right? Correct, but you must have a business name or an ABN first, and that takes time depending on which state you are in and time can mean missing out on your domain name. So which comes first?

- If you are starting out for the first time you are most likely a sole trader. You can apply and own an ABN in your own name, before you choose an actual business name.
- If you are a registered company, you will have an ABN or ACN. You can use this to purchase a domain name before or after you register the trading name
- Some domain registrars, but not all, offer the choice of entering a registered business number as an alternative to an ABN, which is legal.

Business names like domain names can already be taken, so whichever you do first, you should move *quickly* to register the other save someone else pinching your name first, which does happen. We can't resist taking a plug here; after all, we went to the trouble of writing this article! You can check availability and buy of domain names here at our hosted services page: [http://mis.secureapi.com.au/system/domain/check\\_domain/](http://mis.secureapi.com.au/system/domain/check_domain/)

## Tips on Naming Domains

Consider the following point when choosing your domain name.

- Irrespective of your business name, try to avoid long winded domain names like *billandbensflowershop.com.au*. They become difficult to read, prone to typos and you may find problems with stationary such as business cards when trying to fit such name in a confined area. With this in mind, domain names can be up to 63 characters in length.
- Remember that email addresses will prefix your domain name. Consider spelling an email address like *michelle.robinson@billandbensflowershop.com.au* over the phone - what a mouthful!
- To counter this, some would argue that the sentence string *bill-and-bens-flower-shop.com.au* is easy for the human brain to digest and remember. Could be true in this particular example. But consider *candyflossesicecreamparlour.com.au*. You would spend half of your life spelling this one out to any that dared ask. In the end it's for you to decide.
- Otherwise try to keep your domain name short and easy to remember. As demonstrated above, you will be spelling this name out over the phone and typing it out. Hewlett Packard are fortunate in that most people know them as *HP*. Hence, *www.hp.com* works well for them. Easy to remember, easy to relay orally and easy to type.
- For businesses, we recommend a **.com.au** suffix over a **.net.au** if you can get it. Com is the first extension that most people try when searching for a Website.
- Sometimes it isn't a bad idea to register several similar domain names. If you have *mybusiness.com.au*, register *mybusiness.net.au* to keep it out of your competitor's hands. It cost very little these days. Ideally the following is best if you can do it:
  - I. mybusiness.com.au
  - II. mybusiness.com
  - III. mybusiness.net.au
- You can register your full company name and a shorter, easier to remember versions. Some people even register common misspellings of their company's name. Check out [www.gogle.com](http://www.gogle.com). You can have each domain point to your preferred domain name which hosts the website. However don't get too silly about this. Buying up domains names can lead to owning a mindless portfolio of useless domain names requiring regular renewal that, when you look at them, don't really resemble your domain at all.
- Domain names can only use letters, numbers, and dashes. Spaces and symbols are not allowed. Also, domain names are not case sensitive.

## Conclusion

There is a whole lot more detail we could go into about Domain names and how they operate, but for the lay business person starting, this all you will need for the moment. To summarise the main points we think are most pertinent:

- Use CCTLD domain name if you are primarily business is in Australia
- Use a **.com.au** domain name if you can
- Be sensible about the domain name that you use, its meant to be easy for your customer to remember and use
- Quickly register your domain name as soon as you have a business name and vice versa

Good luck!

---

## \*A Little Tech Trivia

Domain names are most commonly associated with the Internet and websites. But their origin also extends to computer and network names. In computer networking, a domain name is the name of a network that is controlled by a server, even though that network may not be connected to the Internet. The reason is that the protocols known as TCP/IP, which are fundamental to how the Internet operates as a network itself, are also the same protocols used in server based networks. This was a natural evolution as in reality most networks are connected to the Internet in some form or another. This led to the international adoption of TCP/IP as a uniform standard in network systems.

Therefore when your computer guy talks in terms of domains and domain names, which is confusing you because your conversation is not about websites, he is most likely referring to your server and local network!

[Back](#)