



# Easy Guide to Registering a Domain Name

By Lee Penney

Registering a domain name is easy, surely? I can hear you all thinking it, and for the most part, you're right, but as with many things, registering your domain name has many hidden problems that may not occur until later down the line.

There are hundreds of companies out there, ready and willing to take your cash in exchange for your very own address in the web world. Before you get carried away, however, you need to consider a number of things. These things are primarily common sense, and as such, they'll make sense when you read them, but many people do not think about these things until well after the event, if at all. Many people don't have the first clue about what a domain is, what it does, and the benefits it brings, it's just a name, surely? It is just a name, but it can have massive repercussions, so read on for and I'll explain what you should do to register your own domain name.

The timing of when you register a domain name has some importance for example, it's all very well and good having everything ready to go, only to find that the domain name you want is already registered, to someone else. This may be another company or individual, it may be registered but nobody is using it or that some enterprising soul has registered it because hope to make money from selling it on later (they're known more commonly as cyber squatters).

In a situation such as this, you have several options: if the site has been registered and either no one is using it, or it's a cyber squatter, you can approach them and try and negotiate to buy it. To find out how to contact them if they have no contact details on the page, and no registration company page appears, you need to do a whois(9) search on the domain name. These can be done at different sites, see the resources section at Eight-Eight Template ([www.88template.co.uk](http://www.88template.co.uk)) for more information. Depending on the domain, and the people involved, this could be a slight increase in price on registering a domain from scratch, or they could be asking silly numbers. In the latter case, I'd walk away. Another option, if they're not using it legitimately, is to contact the relevant body that handles your domains (e.g. nominet) and ask them to take the domain away and reassign it to you. This has been done successfully on many occasions, but it could take some time, and may even include a court battle. Alternatively, a forcibly worded letter from you lawyer can sometimes achieve the same results.

If there is a legitimate company or individual using the domain, you have other choices to make: if they're not in any way to be confused with your business, you could register a variant of the domain (e.g. domain.net instead of domain.com). You could try adding a - (e.g. my-domain.com) in between words, or *the* at the front (e.g. thedomainname.com). If a competitor has got in first and registered your company name to stop you using it, contact the relevant body and they should be ordered to hand over the domain.

Again, you could get your lawyer to send them a formal letter demanding they turn over the domain name.

If someone has used it and is in the same industry as you, or worse, is operating a site you certainly don't want to be associated with, you could try legal action, or you could change your preferred choice to avoid any of your visitors running into it by mistake. For example, if you run a small store called Harry's Hardware, and found that, due to possible connotations, harryshardware.com was registered by, let's say, someone in the adult entertainment industry, you wouldn't want to register harryshardware.net for fear of someone running into the other site. Instead, it would be far better to steer well clear and go with something like diymad.com

**WARNING**

There are companies out there who specialise in looking at your domain name and, if variants are available, approach you to offer them for registration. These companies tend to be expensive, and won't let you take control of your domains should you want to move. You can always register them yourself, or just simply ignore them.

This is also a very compelling reason for checking what other sites appear with the same domain name but different types (i.e. check your domain plus .net, .org, .com, .co.uk), and makes a strong case for registering the major domain types for your domain name and not just a .com or .co.uk. This will stop someone else registering and using these later, for whatever purpose.

Something to bear in mind when registering your domain is price. Prices vary and will no doubt go up as everything else does, but you can pay considerably different amounts to register a domain name, and get considerably different service too. For starters, not all domains are equal, a top-level domain (TLD) is usually the sort you're most interested in, these are things like .com, .net. Other TLDs include .name and .info. There are then ccTLDs (country code top-level domains). These are domains such as .co.uk, .co.nz and .com.au. There are also lesser used domains such as .gb.com and .eu.com which people either associate with non-professional sites or simply aren't used to typing in. Don't forget that many people, when faced with trying to remember a company's web address, will usually try

something like `companyname.com` or `companyname.co.uk` (if they're a UK company for example). Therefore, I would suggest avoiding all but the more commonly used domains, at least until the others achieve more general acceptance. Domains such as `.com` are gTLDs or generic TLDs which means they apply to no country, but if your site has a particular bias, or if you're only local, stick with a ccTLD (e.g. `.co.uk`, `.co.nz`), they're much cheaper to register.

So, we now know which domain types to look for, and to double-check any previously registered versions of your desired domain name, but let's just think about what domain name you're trying to register. Obviously if you're registering a domain name for your company, the natural choice is the company name, but is it the best choice? If you work for a cheese producing company called Eversham and Brothers Finest Cheeses Ltd, is it best to register `evershamandbrothersfinestcheeses.com`? Well how would you like to type in an address longer than the Nile and with as much character as a soggy cracker? You could cut it down to `eversham.com`, but you tell nobody about your business, `finestcheeses.com` would be better, a little more descriptive at least. You need to take into account your customer base, if you're going for a mature, refined audience then `finestcheeses.com` (or `finestcheese.com`) would be great, but if you're aiming at a slightly wider audience, why not go for something that'll instantly stand out like `cheesechompers.com` or `cheekycheese.com`? Names like these instantly tell you about the site, are very recognisable and will not be forgotten. Of course, there's nothing stopping you registering more than one domain to reach multiple audiences, even if they all point to the same site. You also avoid the problem of overused domains if you go for something a little more bizarre.

Now armed with all of the above information you can look for a registrar, and again the choice is endless. You may be offered a free domain name with your hosting package or your host may offer to register a domain for you. I'm a little wary of these offers, as I know there are usually hidden penalties, not all financial.

When companies offer free domains, or offer to register one for you, they could be doing it for any number of reasons. They may make a little money on

the deal, they may think it'll sell the package as a whole, make them stand out, or just appeal to people wanting the easiest solution. And these solutions invariably are easy, until the time comes when you need to re-register or if you choose to take your hosting elsewhere. In this situation some companies, not all obviously, will try and charge you well over the odds. They're usually upfront about it, and you'll find it in your small print, right in the middle, surrounded by jargon, but it'll say words to the effect: if you want to move your domain away from us at any time, the charge will be £50. That was a random figure, I've heard them quoted from £30 all the way up to over a £100! To transfer a domain is a five-minute job, literally, just email the relevant body informing them and, usually, off you go, but some companies like to make money this way. Re-registering is again a simple enough job, and won't cost any more than registering a new domain, but again people like to overcharge. Be aware of this, ask questions BEFORE you commit to it.

Another trick that is pulled involves who your domain is registered to. Some companies have been known to register your domain, in their name. Which means when you want to move it, or do anything with it, you need to go through them, and you have no real way to call on the authorities to help you - it's not your domain. Companies can use this to tie you to them in some way and/or charge whatever they like to do the simplest of tasks.

The way to avoid all of this is to find a registrar who will register the domain in your name, and let you have complete control of it. Take a look at the registrars listed in the resources section on Eight-Eight Template ([www.88template.co.uk](http://www.88template.co.uk)) for some suggestions. Most of these will provide you with a secure login where you'll have access to a menu to control your domains and update you details.

Once you've registered your domain name with a registrar, you may need to set up your nameservers(10) for your host. Nameservers are the servers which, eventually, point [www.yourdomain.com](http://www.yourdomain.com) at your space on the relevant server. Usually you will have two nameserver addresses, something like [ns1.yourhost.com](http://ns1.yourhost.com). If you have bought a domain with your host, this will be taken care of for you, if you have registered with a company that lets you manage your domain yourself, there should be an option in the menu for each domain you registered to input or

change your nameservers. Simply ask your host for their nameserver addresses (usually this information will be given to you when you sign up). During the registration process your host will ask if you have a pre-registered domain name you wish to use with the account. Should you ever move hosts, it's simply a case of entering the registrar's menu and changing the nameservers to the addresses of your new host.

Registering domains is an easy process if you understand what decisions you should make prior to registration and you know what to look for in a registrar. Remember that most registrars are excellent and are out to do their job well. There are governing bodies that keep a tight check on the various types of domains and you can always go to them with complaints. The governing bodies wield full power in this environment and so registrars are not eager to get on their bad side and find their ability to register domains, and hence their business, taken away from them. It shouldn't cause you concern, and I believe I've covered the main problems people face, and often overlook, when registering a new domain. Good luck and happy hunting, just don't steal the ones I want.

## **About the Author**

Lee has been a keen web user since the mid-nineties and has always thought it a wonderful and exciting development with nearly unlimited potential. He started building web sites in 1996 and has continued to develop them for both himself and others. Like many designers and developers, Lee has been moving towards standards-based designs using CSS and XHTML and learning about how to make sites more accessible to everyone.

Lee believes website templates have great potential for designers, developers and anyone wanting to create professional sites on their own. Through the Eight-Eight Template ([www.88template.co.uk](http://www.88template.co.uk)) site he is trying to help open people's eyes by showing them that web templates can serve the web community in a number of roles and are a development for the future.

Lee mouths off on his personal site The Digerati Peninsula ([www.thedigeratipeninsula.org.uk](http://www.thedigeratipeninsula.org.uk)) and also runs a free web resource called Viewfinder Design ([www.viewfinderdesign.co.uk](http://www.viewfinderdesign.co.uk)). When he's not building or developing new sites, maintaining or improving old ones or learning new skills, he likes to watch movies, take photos and travel.