The Importance Of Domain Names For Businesses

By Terry Irwin

The Internet is more pervasive now than it ever has been before. In 1996 not a single advertiser listed their domain name on their television commercial during the Super Bowl. By 2001, every one of them had their web site on their commercials. Fifteen years ago, almost no one knew what the Internet was. Now, it's hard to imagine how inconvenient daily life would be without it. On-line banking, on-line shopping, on-line auctions, on-line maps and directions, e-mail, instant messaging, downloading updates for your computer, sharing family photos with distant relatives, it's everywhere and always now. This means that your customers (in general) are more tech savvy than they ever have been before.

There are lots of reasons why some small businesses don't have their own domain name, web site, and email at their domain, but most of those reasons are actually myths that need to be dispelled. Allow me to shed some light on a few of them.

Myth 1. www.mydomain.com would require me to have a server and a whole bunch of expensive hardware and software.

Truth: There are literally thousands of web hosting companies that will be happy to host your web site on their servers. Some of them will even give you the tools to build your own web site for free if you sign up.

Myth 2. It costs a fortune every month for a web site.

Truth: You can register a domain name for as little as $7.00 per year. Some reputable web hosting companies charge as little as $3.00 per month to host your web site, they'll cover the cost of registering the domain if you agree to at least 3 months of hosting, and they may provide up to 500 email addresses at that price. How can you afford *NOT* to?

Myth 3. Web sites cost thousands of dollars to develop.

Truth: Some do. Most do not. The more complex your site, the higher the cost will be. If you simply want a clean, professional web presence that remains fairly static, it can be very inexpensive to develop. Some professional developers charge between $300 and $600 to develop an entire site specifically for your business. Some charge a lot more. Your best bet is to find a developer who can do an excellent job without charging you an arm and a leg. This is probably the most difficult part of your company's web presence, but it's a one-time charge. If you ever want a complete redesign, that will be an additional charge.

A common mistake that I still see on a lot of business cards is somebody@yahoo.com. To me (and probably a lot of other potential customers) this says that your business is not serious about staying in business. If they thought they were going to be around for several years, they probably would have at least gotten their own domain name. Besides that, free email accounts like hotmail.com and yahoo.com are usually associated with SPAM and are blocked by some Internet Service Providers. That means that you could send an email from your business@hotmail.com to my business@hi-tech-kc.com and I'd never receive it. My ISP may block all email from hotmail.com to cut down on the millions of SPAM messages that clog their email servers every month.

Using mail@yourdomain.com has another distinct advantage. It is portable. Since you own the domain, you can point it to whatever email server hosts your web site. If they go out of business, you get another host and point your domain to the new host and your email is back up and running without you having to print new business cards.

Also, hosting your web site on a free host like Geocities.com can negatively impact your business. 81% of all web traffic to commercial sites comes from search engines like google.com. Having your site hosted at Geocities.com actually may keep you from ever showing up in a search engine at all.

So, I've convinced you that your company needs its own domain name. What now? I'll tell you. Put a lot of thought into what domain name you want. Here are the guidelines I recommend for success:

1. Keep it short. You want it to be easy to type and remember, and you don't want to cause a lot of headaches when people misspell it.
2. Select an appropriate domain, i.e. ".com" or ".net"
3. You can't have one that's already taken, unless you're willing to buy it from them, which can be expensive, so have some good alternatives in mind.
4. Register more than one domain name. Try yourbusiness.com and yourbusiness.net at the very least. If you have a word in your domain name that is frequently misspelled, register the misspelled version of your domain also. The idea is for your customers to find your site, even if they can't spell it exactly right.
5. Before you register a domain name, ask family, friends, consultants, pretty much anybody for some feedback on it. See if they like it and find it easy to remember. See if they can spell it correctly.
6. Once you've got the perfect domain name chosen, and it's not already taken by someone else, register it immediately before someone else does. Paying $35.00 is not necessary. GoDaddy.com can register it just as quickly for $6.95 as someone else can for $35.00.

And remember, if you have any questions, ask me. I'm happy to help.