

## Checklist or Guidelines in Choosing a Domain Name and a Business Name

When you are starting a business, it may be prudent to do so with the Internet in mind, even if the business is not intended to be web-based. The World Wide Web can serve as the best advertising medium for your products or services and has the potential to reach more consumers than any other medium. The following guidelines can help you to choose a business name with an Internet presence in mind.

- Businesses on the web have the potential to reach consumers not just in your neighborhood, but all over the world, so you will need to compare business names in a much greater geographic area to avoid the potential for confusion and trademark infringement.
- When you come up with a few ideas for business names, consider what your domain name (that part of your Internet address that follows "www") could be. The closer it is to the actual name of your business, products, or services, the more likely your customers will find you.
- Although using your actual business name or some variation thereof will attract existing customers or potential customers who have already heard about your business, using a product or service descriptor, like dog-walker.com, may more effectively attract new or potential customers.
- Domain names must be registered using an accredited registration service, which can itself be found on-line using the Internet.
- Domain names cannot be issued to more than one person or business, so if someone else has already registered your idea, you will have to come up with a new one.
- If possible, consider registering both your business name and a product or service type designation to attract as many people as possible to the site.
- Consider possible mistakes that potential customers could make when typing in your web address. If mistakes are likely, consider simplifying the name, or perhaps registering multiple names so that even if a common mistake is made, the user will get to your site.
- Although domain names are available with a variety of suffixes (i.e., the letters that follow the period after your chosen name), the one that most people are used to using is **.com**, so it may be best to use those letters, rather than an alternative like **.net**, to attract as many visitors as possible.
- The **.com** suffix can be used for commercial and personal sites; **.net** is recommended for companies involved in Internet infrastructure; and **.org** is recommended for non-profit companies.
- For all of those suffixes, only letters, numbers, and hyphens can be part of the domain name, but the name cannot begin or end with a hyphen.
- Using any of those three suffixes, the name is limited to sixty-three characters not including the suffix, but some web browsers, e-mail programs, and other applications may not support anything over twenty-six characters in length, so it may be best to keep the name short.
- Domain names should follow the same general rules as choosing your business name.

### Tip on Choosing a Business Name

The following tips may help narrow your choices of names and make your choice a little easier. These tips will also help ensure that the name you choose meets applicable legal requirements.

### The Do's

- **DO** consider making the name descriptive, so that potential customers are immediately informed of the purpose of the business. Research has shown that businesses with names that identify their products or services are more successful than non-descriptively named businesses.
- **DO** keep the description general enough so that you can, if desired, expand into related products or services in the future.
- **DO** consider the oral impact of the name -- how it will sound when spoken. Try writing down a list of words that could describe your business, then mixing them up into different combinations and saying them out loud to see how they sound.
- **DO** consider the visual impact of the name -- how it will look on signs, advertisements, business cards, etc. As with the sound of the words, try playing around with various looks by writing them down on paper or typing them into your computer.
- **DO** choose a name that is easy to understand, pronounce, and remember.
- **DO** make the name unique enough to distinguish your business from others in the field.
- **DO** choose a name that will not be easily imitated by competitors.
- **DO** consider how the business name could be shortened by the public. The wrong abbreviation could prove to be embarrassing for a business.
- **DO** come up with a list of several potential names, and then try them out on close friends and family members to get their reactions.
- **DO** see how your choices sound and feel with the passage of time.
- **DO** keep alternatives in mind, in the event that further research reveals that the name you would like to use is not available.
- **DO** consider the meaning of your chosen name in other languages if there is a possibility you could expand into foreign markets. When Chevrolet introduced its Nova car in Mexico, for instance, it discovered that in Spanish "nova" means "no go."

### The Don'ts

- **DON'T** select a name that is too long or confusing.
- **DON'T** use your own first or last name as part of the business name if the venture is very risky. If the business fails, that failure will be more closely related with you personally if your name and the business name are the same.

- **DON'T** choose a trendy name, since trends and fads pass quickly, and you don't want your business to appear outdated.
- **DON'T** include a geographic designation, like the city or state where the business is located, in the name of your business if you're thinking of expanding into other markets in the future.
- **DON'T** include unacceptable terms in the name, like profanity or obscenities.
- **DON'T** imply by the name that your business is somehow affiliated with or approved by a branch of the government.
- **DON'T** consider names that are very similar to those belonging to other businesses in your area. Not only would such similarity confuse consumers, it may make it impossible to register your business's name or, worse yet, subject you to legal claims by the owners of the other businesses.
- **DON'T** use:
  - names identifying a particular living individual other than yourself,
  - the name of a deceased president with a living widow,
  - names that merely describe your business or that describes your business incorrectly,
  - geographic descriptions (primarily), or
  - names that are primarily your last name if you are considering registering your business name.