The Secrets of Better Rankings: SEO and Domains

Contents

You know that old SEO joke: **IF YOU WANT TO HIDE A DEAD BODY, PUT IT ON THE SECOND PAGE OF GOOGLE'S SEARCH RESULTS** - no one ever goes there. Yes, we live in an age where information travels fast, where we are used to easily accessible answers; time has become a precious resource nobody's willing to waste; and our attention span has significantly shortened. Search engines ensure users get the most pleasant web surfing experience and receive instant gratification, with relevant answers provided on the first page of results. Why should you care about any of this, you may ask?

No matter what kind of online presence you are trying to build (be it e-commerce, an online business or start-up, a web presentation of your company, a personal virtual portfolio, or a blog) - in order for people to discover your awesome work, you have to let them know you're out there.

This means you have to keep your eyes on Google's ranking factors and try your best to implement effective SEO techniques. You probably already know the basics: from the smart usage of keywords and savvy linking, to providing indexable content and SEO-friendly URLs - there are quite a few things to bear in mind.

BUT WHAT ABOUT YOUR CHOICE OF DOMAIN?

When choosing a domain name, an extension, and managing a website - most people unconsciously make mistakes that can harm their website's ranking or even result in a Google penalty. Too often, they are lead by either a lack of knowledge or faulty advice. Information related to domains (in this SEO context, and in general) can be confusing to those who are less tech-savvy, but it can also be simplified and explained in an understandable manner - our goal exactly!

This eBook will help you map out potential setbacks in your SEO strategy and broaden your knowledge of domain ranking factors and online safety.

We've designed it as a comprehensive guide for both those who are already website owners and those who are just plunging into the world of building their personal or business identities online. It's packed with practical advice and insider tips by some of the most renowned digital marketing and SEO experts, such as Neil Patel, Dan Shure, Radomir Basta, and Sean Si.

Let's dive in...

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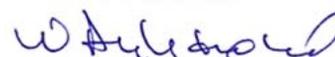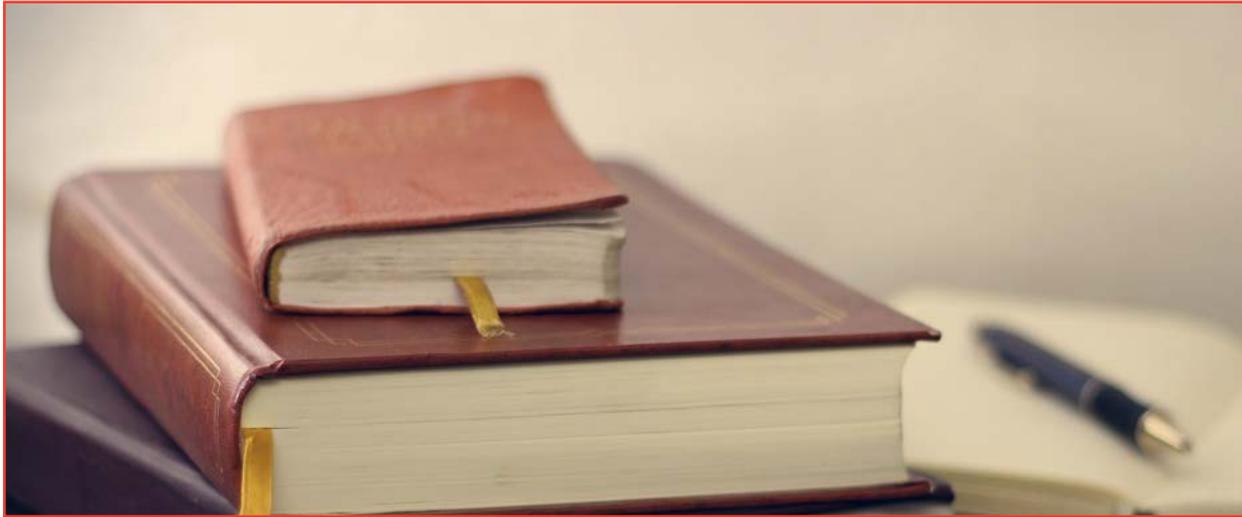
Glossary of relevant terms

Before we get to the real stuff, let's ensure we're on the same page. Take a look at our glossary of relevant terms, to make sure your navigation through the book is easier, and your reading experience more pleasant. In addition, never again will you have to nod your head, squint your eyes, and pretend to understand what your IT friends are talking about: *Yes, domain authority and top-level domains, quite interesting…*

BLACK HAT SEO: also known as "unethical SEO", black hat SEO refers to aggressive practices that tend to violate Google's (or other search engine's) guidelines. People using black hat SEO tactics are mainly focused on optimizing websites for search engines, instead of minding user experience (i.e. human audiences). See **SEO** and **white hat SEO**.

CLICK-THROUGH-RATE (CTR): the ratio of visitors who follow a specific link to a certain webpage and the number of total visitors who view the same page. There has been quite a debate on whether or not CTR can directly affect one's SEO. However, since there are numerous benefits of a higher CTR (e.g. increased traffic from

the same ranking), you should make an effort to increase organic visits.

COUNTRY CODE TOP-LEVEL DOMAIN (CCTLD): linked to specific geographical areas. Some examples of ccTLDs are: .eu, .uk, .us, .me.

COUNTRY CODE SECOND-LEVEL DOMAINS (CCSLD): a specific domain name class that many country code top-level (ccTLD) domains have. For instance, in .co.me, the ccSLD is .co.

DOMAIN AGE: there are different ways to define domain age. Some see it as the length of time a certain domain

has been registered and active for. But the SEO-relevant definition we're using is the following: domain age is the length of time that's passed since the first moment a domain has been indexed by search engines.

DOMAIN AUTHORITY (DA): the measure of a domain's overall power. It's a metric that includes over 40 ranking signals. Different tools have different names for it (i.e. Domain Authority, Domain Rating), and use different signals to calculate it. It aims to give a prediction on how well a certain website will rank in Google's search results.

DOMAIN EXTENSIONS: categories of Internet domain names. They are a part of your domain name, located right after the dot (for example, .com, .net, .me). There are dozens to choose from: different types of extensions offer different kinds of opportunities for building your online presence. See **top-level domains**.

DOMAIN MIGRATION: shifting (migrating) data from one domain to another in a safe manner, without losing any data.

DOMAIN NAME: the first online point of contact of your brand with your customers. It is the online address of your website, connected to a specific IP address.

DOMAIN NAME SERVER (DNS): they basically function as internet phone books. While humans can easily understand and read domain names, machines can access websites only through IP addresses. That is where DNS steps in, sort of like a dispatcher: it gives directions and translates your domain name into a machine-friendly language, i.e. IP addresses.

DOMAIN STATUS CODES: an indicator of your domain's current status, displayed in the domain record and the WHOIS database.

EXACT-MATCH DOMAINS (EMD): a domain highly relevant for your business, product, or service which matches exactly the keyword or keyword phrase users typically type in their search queries.

GENERIC TOP-LEVEL DOMAIN (GTLD): one category of top-level domains. Initially, they were called generic to stress the difference between them and ccTLDs. See **top-level domain** and **country code top-level domain**.

ICANN (INTERNET CORPORATION FOR ASSIGNED NAMES AND NUMBERS): a private, non-profit organiza-

tion responsible for IP address allocation, domain name system management, coordinating and maintaining databases related to namespaces, etc. In short, ICANN aims to keep the internet secure and stable.

IP ADDRESS: a unique series of numbers separated by full stops that identifies each computer using the Internet Protocol for network communication.

PAGE AUTHORITY (PA): a metric developed by Moz that predicts how well a specific web page is ranked in Google and other search engines.

PAGERANK: Provided by Google, it indicates the authority of a website based on the number and quality of links pointing to a certain domain name.

Premium domain names: high quality, memorable, traffic-generating domains that have been registered and can be purchased for a premium price. Some sell for millions of dollars: yep, that's how much people value a good name.

RESELLERS: as defined by ICANN, a reseller is a *third-party company that offers domain name registration services*.

REGISTRANT: the one who registers a domain name.

REGISTRAR: an accredited organization that sells domain names (e.g. GoDaddy, NameCheap, Name.com, Domain.com).

REGISTRY: an organization that manages top-level domains. It sets all the rules related to the domain name it's selling and cooperates with registrars (so they too sell their domain to the public). For example, we do that for .ME top level domain.

ROOT DOMAIN: the highest hierarchical level of a site. It is separated from the top-level domain by a dot. See **second-level domain**.

SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO): a set of techniques implemented with the goal to achieve better ranking in the search results page in order to maximize the number of website visitors.

SEARCH ENGINE RESULTS PAGE (SERP): a result page displayed by search engines as a response to a user's query.

SECOND-LEVEL DOMAIN (SLD): what most people call a "domain name", although it is only one part of a domain name. It is located left of the dot. For instance, in example.com, example is the second-level domain. See **country code second level domains**.

SECURE SOCKET LAYER (SSL): a standard encryption technology that's used to safely transfer data from a user's browser to a web server. It's a transfer protocol developed for the purpose of safe online transactions. Secured websites that own SSL digital certificate have a "https://" in front of the website URL.

SERVERS: computer programs or devices that provide functionality for clients. See **web hosting**.

SHARED HOSTING: a type of web hosting where numerous websites reside on a single web server connected to the internet. Typically cheaper than a virtual private server. See **virtual private server.**

SUBDOMAIN: an extension of your domain name with a special URL that is needed for access. Subdomains are used for the better organization of your website or managing different mail addresses. For instance, subdomains can be used for different language versions of your site. If your site is called example.me, a German version would be de.example.me.

SUBFOLDER (OR SUBDIRECTORY): a new folder that has been added to your domain or subdomain. It's typically used for better navigation through the website. For instance, if you want a blog section on your website, the subfolder URL would look like this: example.me/blog.

TOP-LEVEL DOMAIN (TLD): part of a domain name located right of the dot. That's us - .ME! Other examples are .com, .org, .photography, .uk and more. See **generic top-level domain** and **country code top-level domain**.

VIRTUAL PRIVATE SERVER (VPS): a web hosting service. It's a virtual machine with its own operating system and typically implies superuser-access, meaning you can manage system administration on your own if you want to.

WEB HOSTING (OR - HOSTING) SERVICE: a service that enables you to post a website online. Websites are hosted on special computers called servers. See **shared hosting** and **virtual private server**.

WHITE HAT SEO: also known as "ethical SEO", white hat SEO implies using optimization strategies that have human audience in mind and play by Google's rules. What we will employ in this ebook. :)

WHOIS: a query and response protocol. WHOIS databases provide detailed information about domains, mainly in terms of domain ownership (e.g. name, address, contact information) and the party responsible for the domain

Choosing the Perfect Domain

So, you've finally decided to invest your time and effort into building your own website. Sure, some programming and designer work will be involved, and you probably want to hire experts to handle the technical work.

However, you're in charge of all the other fun stuff: deciding on the visual structure of your website and the general business direction you're aiming for. After your website goes live, you're responsible for getting your idea out in the open, interacting with your target audience, providing unique and valuable content, and making yourself stand out from the competition, while finding ways to generate revenue (e.g. if you're a part of the e-commerce industry). Hm, did we forget something?

Right: YOUR DOMAIN NAME! Choosing the perfect name comes *way* before launching your website. This implies a solid amount of brainstorming, but here's what you need to know.

Identifying Your Needs and Using a Domain as a Branding Tool

Your name is everything: it's the first thing your customers and followers will see, and it should sum up your identity, and make you recognizable on the market.

The first step to coming up with the perfect domain name is to be clear on what you will use the website for. This pre-phase can be summed up in a three-step process:

DETERMINE YOUR GOALS AND SEE WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE: Will you be using the website just for a blogging hobby, that could potentially be monetized? Is it a web presentation of your previous accomplishments, that serves as an online portfolio and makes you more visible on the job market? Or maybe you plan on developing an e-commerce website, and need to build credibility?

CHECK THE COMPETITION: Most people turn to name generators in order to find inspiration, but you should also snoop around the competition and try to analyze for yourself what names seem to be more memorable and what makes them stand out.

THINK BRANDABLE AND OUTSIDE THE BOX: Sometimes it's not about using existing words, but coming up with a name that's catchy and building a brand around it (just think about Google or Yahoo). Single word domains are mostly taken and generic, so you should be creative

about it: blend two words and create a new name (e.g. YouTube or Kissmetrics) or make it memorable by adding a prefix or suffix (e.g. Shopify). If you manage to build a creative and memorable brand, it's likely to bring you more links and shares on social media - all of which search engines will rate positively.

* BONUS: INSIDER TIP!

We've asked Neil Patel, a renowned, award-winning digital marketing expert, to share his thoughts and reveal what that one big mistake everyone makes when choosing a domain name is. Turns out it's in the spelling:

They pick a hard domain to spell. When you have a hard domain, people are more likely to make mistakes when linking to you, which can cause you to lose potential links, which then impacts your rankings.

You've heard the man: **keep the name simple and spellable!**

A Checklist for Coming up with the Optimal Domain Name

Search engines value user experience, which is why there are constant updates to the Google algorithm. When optimizing your website, you should always have your human audience in mind, and follow SEO trends wisely. Before you proudly conclude you've finally come up with the perfect domain name, go through the following checklist to see if it is SEO-friendly:

☐ **FOLLOW THE SHORT-AND-SWEET RULE** Although the length of a domain name is not an SEO factor, avoid names that are too long or confusing. Aim at one that's easy to remember and natural to type in the search box. Set a limit to 15 characters.

☐ **AVOID HYPHENS** If your domain name consists of two words, you may want to separate them with a hyphen. However, you should know that hyphens are associated with spammy websites, so it's not recommended to use more than one.

☐ **DON'T USE NUMBERS** When someone hears the name of your website, it might be confusing if they are supposed to type in numbers or words (e.g. 2 or two). You should shorten and simplify the road between the user and your website as much as possible: using numbers adds unnecessary complications. Of course, this is not a universal rule: for instance, 8.2% of the top performing 1000 .me domains contain a number, so sometimes it can be of use.

☐ **DO A DOMAIN NAME RADIO TEST** Imagine your domain name gets pronounced on the radio. Will the listeners know what exactly to type just by hearing the name? Will they easily find your website? In addition to avoiding numbers in domain names, it is advisable to avoid similar sounds (e.g. "C" sounds both like "sea" and "sea"; "U" sounds like "you"), underscores and dashes (they cause confusion and a surprising number of people don't know how to spell them), and other words that are difficult to spell.

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UNDERSTAND KEYWORDS IN DO-MAINS There has been a bit of debate on whether or not one should include keywords in domain names. On the one hand, keywords in domain names can influence rankings. It's perfectly logical: the domain name is actually the text Internet users use as an anchor text when linking out (you can read more about exact match domains in the next section). On the other hand, Google hates black hat SEO tricks and using keyword-rich domains can backfire. This can happen if your domain fails to fulfill other requirements in order to be considered high-quality.

If you're puzzled about what to do, take advice from former Google employee Matt Cutts: he believes brandable domain names are better in the long run, and has also underlined Google will not assign as much weight to keywords in domains in the future.

According to our research, personalized domain names are gaining momentum: 72% of those surveyed stated they find it very important for professional success. If you can manage to incorporate keywords along with your brand - that's great. But don't insist on keywords at the expense of your brand: it's simply not worth it.

Understanding Different Extensions

Do you have a clearer idea on a name now? Great!

The next step is understanding different domain extensions. While most people think of .com first (as it is the most widely used one across the web), you have hundreds of options. Keep in mind not all extensions are equally appreciated by search engines, nor can all of them address your needs. Let's go through some of them:

.COM: A frequent choice of businesses and companies, .com has built a solid reputation as the oldest one among other extensions. It's also easy to recall and– adds credibility to your website..

.NET: Typically used by Internet service providers or networks, also by online businesses.

.ORG: The most common extension used by non-profit organizations.

.EDU: This extension is not accessible to everyone. It is reserved for academic institutions.

.TRAVEL: Pretty obviously, .travel is customer-oriented and suitable for the travel industry. Similar are .photography, .bike, .ski and other domains that are centered about a service or a community you are part of.

COUNTRY BASED EXTENSIONS (such as .us, .au, .uk): If you're focusing on a specific country, it might not be a bad idea to choose an extension accordingly.

.ME: is all about you. Along with other ccTLDs (such as .co and .tv), .me acts as a hybrid domain: webmasters saw great creative potential in these ccTLDs when it comes to branding possibilities and coming up with unique domain names. They've started using them as generic web addresses. Google adapted to this practice, treating them both as ccTLDs and general top-level domains. You can use .me to build your personal brand online, make it a part of your business name or come up with a call-to-action. It also gives a different feeling to your brand. Take a look at join.me, for instance: it would just not be the same with any other domain name.

> It's important to understand how each of domain extensions is used and respect existing norms, while bearing in mind the expectations of Internet users.

There are a lot of extensions you can use, this is just a tiny part of the possibilities.

Extensions indicate what kind of work you're doing. Before deciding on a certain extension, make sure to ask around, to find out what reputation it has and whether or not it's SEO-friendly.

Registering a Domain Name and Choosing the Right Hosting

Figured out what your domain name will be? Decided on the extension? Awesome. Then you're all set to seal the deal and register your domain name.

With most domain services, you don't need any technical knowledge, as they will get you through the entire process, step by step. Of course, it's always useful to know what you can expect. We've got you covered.

Step **1**

CHECK IF YOUR DESIRED DOMAIN NAME IS AVAILABLE.

So, you've come up with a perfect name and a matching extension and it turns out somebody's beat you to it? Now that's a bummer. But don't give up. Keep on searching for a combination that makes sense.

Most registrars have a domain availability checker box on their websites. Some registries, like yours truly, have as well. If not, you can also use checkers such as Instant Domain Search. Some domain registrars even offer a domain purchase service: they reach out to the owner of your desired domain and explore if it's for sale.

Step **3**

CHOOSE A REGISTRAR.

The registrar confirms your chosen domain is available and then creates a WHOIS record with the personal information you have provided. Make sure you choose an accredited registrar or an authorized reseller.

Step **2**

REGISTRATION TIME!

In most cases, you can apply online for the desired domain name and it's a pretty simple process. There are certain terms and conditions you're bound with, so don't be lazy - read what you're signing up for. Usually, with the support of customer service, you can customize your request for a domain purchase, so it fits your needs perfectly.

Step 4

FIND HOSTING!

Some registrars offer hosting services, others don't, which means you're responsible for finding hosting elsewhere. It's really not rocket science, and it's good to solve both things simultaneously. Alternatively, you can ask your registrar to park your domain name on a temporary website, until you figure it out: it's actually a common practice, unless you explicitly say you've already found a hosting service. Parking a domain basically means safekeeping it, and during that time, search engines don't rank it.

As you've probably guessed - you should start by assessing your website's needs. You're likely to encounter various web hosting packages, and it's advisable to thoroughly read through what's offered. Here are three things to keep in mind:

Check the sign-up prices, the prices of renewal, upgrading options, supporting features and hosting features, etc. Know what you're paying for.

Look through the customer review section and more importantly - don't be shy to ask questions. For example, it's easy to get seduced by plans that are deemed "unlimited": many don't want to invest an effort into exploring what this actually means. Instead, they choose to purchase this plan, as they believe everything gets covered by it. Chances are, there are limitations (they're just not stated) or you'll pay for services you obviously don't need.

If you're a beginner, the option of a shared hosting account might work just fine, and you can upgrade to a virtual private server at any time.

* BONUS: SAFETY TIP!

IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT PURCHASING A NEW DOMAIN, MAKE SURE TO CHECK ITS HISTORY. AS FAR AS YOU KNOW, SOMEONE MIGHT HAVE USED IT IN AN ILL MANNER IN THE PAST AND GOTTEN IN TROUBLE WITH GOOGLE. THIS CAN CAUSE DIFFICULTIES IN FUTURE WEBSITE MANAGEMENT. MORE ON THAT IN THE SECTION ABOUT DOMAIN HISTORY AND PREVIOUS OWNERSHIP.
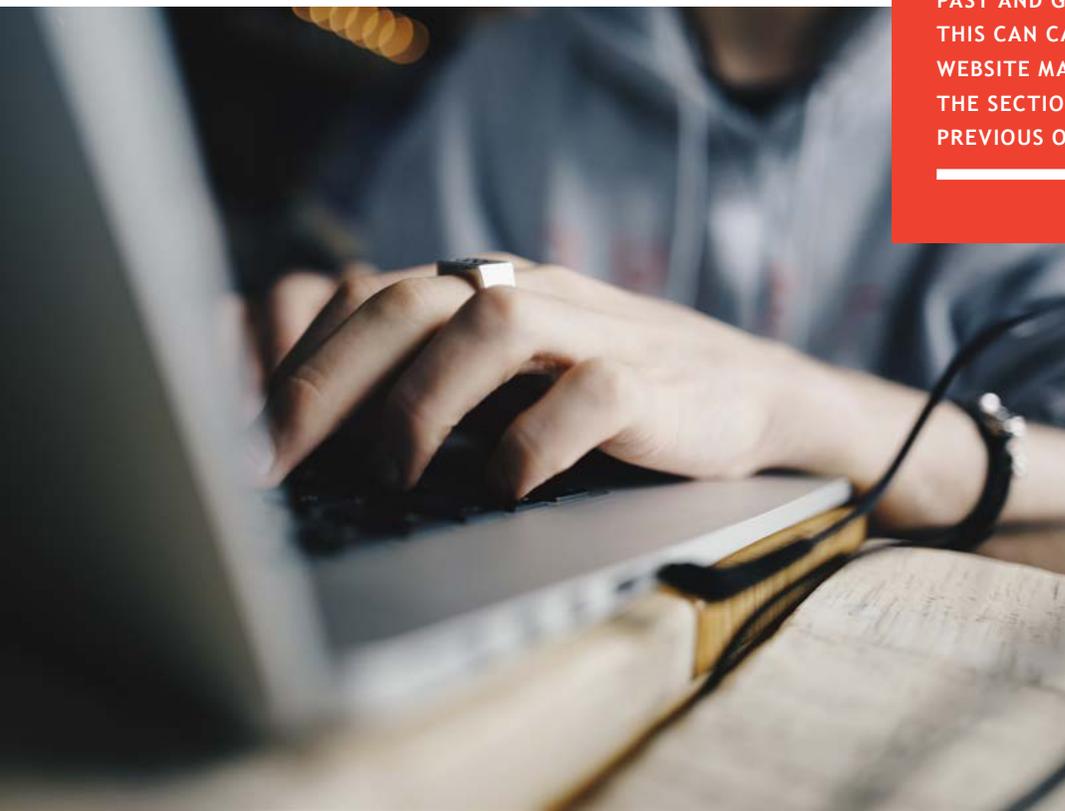
Understanding Domain Factors in Google Ranking

And now the fun part: debunking SEO myths and discussing the domain factors of Google ranking!

Domain factors are just one fragment of around 200 different ranking factors SEO experts believe deserve your attention. There have been several case studies, that on the one hand manage to prove what SEO tactics actually work, and on the other - they remain partially based on common sense speculations.

As Brian Dean from Backlinko has mentioned in the comment section of their impressive case study - there are numerous possible contributors to ranking. And, if we may add - it's often hard to be exact when determining the way different factors affect rankings, as you can not study these correlations isolated from other factors: it's more of an SEO party mix. But hey, that's what makes it exciting and challenging, right? The trial and error mindset is typical for SEO enthusiasts, and so we have gathered all the relevant domain-associated data for you.

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What Is Domain Age and Should You Care?

Although it might sound self-explanatory, it's useful to clarify:

When it comes to the importance of domain age for ranking, some give it more, some less weight. Those who advocate the SEO impact domain age can make, usually underline the connection between age and trustworthiness. It's pretty much like fine wine: domains get more appreciation the older they get. The conclusion by most is that, if a certain domain has been there for a while - it implies it's not a spam website, but one that offers a certain value to its visitors.

The fact is, you cannot influence your domain's age directly. It is considered to be a ranking factor, but it plays a small role among hundreds of others. According to Matt Cutts, domain age is not something you should obsess about. What you should focus on is providing quality content and getting relevant links - something Google sees as far more important.

However, we've got three useful tips: the first one comes from Matt directly, the other two are from us:

1 It's good to register a domain and put up a placeholder page, so as to notify your visitors about what's coming. By the time you actually publish your website, a couple of months will pass, and you'll already be around for a while. It's a nice way to kickstart your SEO, right?

2 Do be careful when buying existing domains. Google does give weight to previous ownership as a ranking factor, so you need to look into the history of a pre-used domain name before deciding to make a purchase. More on that later.

3 Take your time to figure out the best domain name: switching to a different domain means starting from scratch when it comes to domain age. There are ways domain migration can be SEO-friendly, but we'll discuss it a bit later.

So, to wrap it up: domain age can influence your ranking, but it's only a small piece of the puzzle. Plus, there's not much you can do about it. Rather focus on your on-page optimization and backlinking.

Domain Authority: What Is It and Can It Be Influenced?

Your website's domain authority (DA) is an indicator of how relevant your site is for a specific area or industry. Just like in real life: it takes time to build a reputation and establish oneself as a go-to expert on a certain topic.

Unlike some other domain factors, the relevance of which stays debatable, **DA is considered an important ranking factor.**

This website metric was developed by Moz and it includes over 40 ranking signals (e.g. number of links pointing to your website). In layman's terms, it is the overall score (on a 100-point scale) your domain has among the competition. It includes numerous factors, some of which are:

THE PRESTIGE OF YOUR WEBSITE AND THE AUTHORS WHO CONTRIBUTE

THE QUALITY OF YOUR CONTENT (of course)

WEBSITE CENTRALITY (i.e. how and with whom you choose to collaborate online - be it guest posting or something else)

THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE SUBJECT (if you focus on a subject that hasn't been widely covered on the world-wide-web, you'll get a better ranking in SERP simply because there are no other relevant results)

It's clear that the higher DA you manage to obtain, the better. The big question is:

HOW DO YOU ACTUALLY DO THAT?

Prepare to get disappointed: **there is no fast shortcut to scoring a better DA.** Domain authority is like a tasty cake you can enjoy only after you spend hours in the kitchen, mixing and preparing all the ingredients. You have to invest your time and effort into improving your overall SEO and earn Google's trust this way. For starters, this means:

PRODUCING HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT

IMPROVING YOUR BACKLINK PORTFOLIO (Google appreciates diversity and quality, so try to get authority domains to link to your website)

ACING YOUR INTERLINKING (focus on users, link only to relevant previous posts and ensure a pleasant navigation through your website)

GETTING RID OF SPAMMY BACKLINKS

Don't sweat if you're new on the Internet: instead of looking for ways to rank fast and play the system, focus on providing valuable content. Patience is gold, young grasshopper.

How Do Keywords in Domain Names (and Subdomains) Affect Ranking?

We have already mentioned keywords in domains, but let's plunge into that topic a bit more. By keywords we mean those relevant to your business, service, or product. In theory, it gives you a bit of an SEO boost. But like most ranking factors, keyword domains have been in the center of fiery discussion.

In 2014, Google's John Mueller gave his opinion about the issue on the Webmaster Central Help Forum, which didn't actually convince all the SEO doubting Thomases. In fact, it only inspired new case studies and theories. So, here's what Mueller had to say:

> " *You don't need your keywords in your domain name. Websites without them in there rank just fine. Instead of focusing on that specific keyword, I'd recommend spending the time to make your site the absolute best of its kind.*
>
> *If you're looking for a specific domain name, don't forget that all kinds of new TLDs are now available, so you might have more luck there. You definitely don't need to get a .com domain for being able to show up in Google's search.*

The fact is, keywords in domains can help your SEO, but only to a certain degree, and they can increase your click-through-rate. Think about it: when you type your search query into Google, you're looking for a fast answer. Most users are likely to click on keyword domains, as they clearly indicate what the website is about.

However, with featured snippets around, keyword domains might not be that important in SERP, as answers displayed in a snippet box are more relevant and user-friendly.

Of course, you can still use keywords in your domain name, but do it wisely:

BY ALL MEANS, AVOID KEYWORD STUFFING (it's too spammy)

ENSURE THE KEYWORDS ARE LOGICAL, CONNECTED TO YOUR BUSINESS, AND THAT THEY FORM A MEMORABLE NAME

INCORPORATE YOUR BRAND'S NAME IF POSSIBLE

And so we've come to the endless subdomain vs. subfolder debate in SEO.

According to Moz, if you want to provide visitors with valuable (i.e. linkable) content, like educational blog posts, you should place them in subfolders instead of subdomains. Search engines treat subdomains differently than domains, so this is considered an SEO-friendly practice worth noting.

However, if you take a look at this Google+ hangout (2016) and take some wisdom from John Mueller - you shouldn't really be bothered by this:

In the past, Google would only allow two results from each subdomain to appear. This is why website owners saw the opportunity to outsmart the algorithm, and so they've simply accumulated content on numerous subdomains to get more results on the page. Since Google doesn't like this type of mischief, the algorithm was updated.

What about keywords in subdomains?

If you're mindful about inserting keywords in subdomains, it surely won't hurt. Subdomain URLs are suitable for squeezing in a keyword or two, especially because the main URL usually isn't.

Other potential SEO benefits when talking about subdomains:

> Google is capable of determining how you treat subdomains and subfolders, and your choice won't affect your rankings, as the search engine sees them more or less as equivalent.

THEY CAN HELP YOU BUILD DOMAIN AUTHORITY

YOU CAN ENSURE A MORE PLEASANT USER EXPERIENCE (and make Google love you)

USING SUBDOMAINS CAN BOOST YOUR LOCAL SEO (subdomains can be replaced with locations and you can position yourself as relevant in a specific geographical area)

If used wisely, subdomains can increase traffic and in the end - help you generate revenue. It's not advisable to force subdomains just for the sake of possible ranking benefits. We've said it once and we'll say it again: **valuable content must be your priority.** If you think organizing subdomains will help you to distribute it better, no reason to shy away from them.

Exact-Match Domains: Advisable or Not?

In the past, exact-match domains have been a quick way to rank higher. As people start searching for that specific keyword phrase, your ranking gets better and your website becomes more relevant. Then you open a bottle of champagne and congratulate yourself on being so sneaky and clever.

But Google favors fair play and doesn't like sneaky and clever folks. And so, in September 2012, it happened: the algorithm has been improved with the EMD update and SERPs were purged and thoroughly filtered. No low-quality

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> You can turn your exact-match domain into a brand: as Elliot Silver has pointed out, it's crucial to provide value to users and Google will reward your efforts, no matter what domain you choose.

exact-match domains would keep their ranking positions after this update. Because of this shady history of using EMDs, they have earned a bad reputation and are typically connected to spammy websites.

This doesn't necessarily mean you'll get an instant low ranking if you decide to use EMD: it's more complex than that, and there are other factors included.

Even though anchor text has declined in relevance as the years have gone by, it will remain significant, and you can expect a slight SEO boost with an exact-match domain (if you follow the rules of the game). The obvious advantages include higher click-through-rates and better matching anchor text.

If you do decide on purchasing an exact-match domain, here's a basic checklist to ensure it's not disregarded as spammy from the start:

Stick with reputable TLD extensions

When it comes to the number of words in the domain name, stick to 2-3

Remember what we said about hyphens? Avoid them in EMDs too. If you must use a dash, use it only once.

Basically, when it comes to EMDs, your domain authority score plays a huge role. It's not like we haven't brainwashed you with this already, but high-quality content is the key to better ranking.

* BONUS: INSIDER TIP!

We asked <u>Dan Shure</u>, founder of Evolving SEO and Moz associate, to share his thoughts about exact-match domains and give some tips to today's EMD owners. In 2013, Dan wrote about the so-called PropWords and explained why a website needs to have "Proprietary Keywords" to help it look unique, branded, and valuable in the eyes of both users and Google. Check out his piece of advice:

Propwords, in my mind, were also to combat another issue of the time: the Penguin Algorithm.

I saw dozens of sites with an "exact match keyword" for a domain name get hit, because this was looked at as over-optimization by Google.

Fast forward to today? There are now infinite more of these EMDs (exact match domains) available because of expanded TLDs. Is it dangerous to sell shoes and call your site shoes.store?

*The punchline: **it doesn't matter. IF... you build a brand around your business.***

I'll explain.

Was Google's Penguin Algorithm heavy handed? Sure, I think it was initially too strong. But I think they have things more ironed out now. This means that as long as you run a site with other strong signals that indicate you are a true 'brand' - a site consumers enjoy to use and look for on their own - you should not get punished.

This means - people may start to search for "shoes.store" on their own to find your site. They convert well. They follow and engage with your social accounts. You do important things that get mentioned in the news. You have helpful content like articles that also is visible in Google search. Maybe you run paid ads.

You do all the other things normal companies do and you should be safe to use any TLD you want!

You've heard the man: keep the name simple and spellable!

Amazing insights brought to you by Dan! A great lesson about what you should focus on: provide value, build a reputable brand, and rest assured your exact-match domain won't negatively affect your ranking if you do everything else right.

" keep the
name **simple**
and **spellable**!

Domain History: How Does Google Rank Previous Ownership?

When you start the journey of building your online presence, there are two paths you can take:

YOU CAN START FROM SCRATCH, WITH A SHINY NEW DOMAIN NAME

YOU CAN BUY A PREVIOUSLY OWNED DOMAIN NAME

The second option is tempting because in most cases - it means grabbing the perfect domain name, while enjoying the SEO benefits that come with it (e.g. domain authority). If you decide to take that road, there are things you need to know. It's like buying a used car: you need to check under the hood before making a purchase.

Long story short, when you buy a pre-used domain, you also buy all of its baggage, good or bad. This might include spammy behavior or even connections to malware and cyber crimes.

Here are some precautionary measures you

can take in order not to get tricked by businesses:

INVESTIGATE A DOMAIN'S REPUTATION: The simplest Google search query will do, and you can also use the "site:" operator if you want to explore how many pages have been indexed by Google. If you're buying an active website and no content gets displayed after this command, it is likely a bad sign.

CHECK GOOGLE CACHE: Type "cache:yourwebsite.me" in the Google search box to see which version of the site is in its index.

DO YOUR RESEARCH: Go to archive.org and type in the domain name you want to look into. You'll get to see what the previous versions of that site looked like. If you notice spammy content, it's a clear sign you should stay away from that domain.

CHECK BACKLINKS: There are tools (e.g. Ahrefs) that help you

> Domain history is a relevant ranking factor, and Google does not take into consideration the fact the domain may have a new owner. Google relies on trustworthiness and malicious actions the previous owner might have undertaken won't easily be erased.

analyze the backlink profile of a certain web-site. The main thing you should keep an eye on is the velocity, diversity, and quality of links.

CHECK PAGE AND DOMAIN AUTHORITY: You can use Open Site Explorer by Moz to ana-lyze PA and DA.

DON'T FORGET WHOIS: Snoop around to find out more about the previous ownership. If the domain has switched owners too often in a short period of time, there's something fishy about it and you should see it as a red flag.

But what if you *do* purchase a domain that's been penalized by Google or associated with spammy behavior in the past?

Maybe you don't have to give up on it. There is the option of sending a ban reconsideration request to Google. You just have to weigh out if it's truly worth it: if the previous owner has demolished your domain's reputation to the ground, it will take a significant amount of ef-fort just to bring it back to ground zero, so you can start with positive SEO.

When it comes to your own future website man-agement, keep in mind that Google respects consistency in your online identity - that's how you build trust.
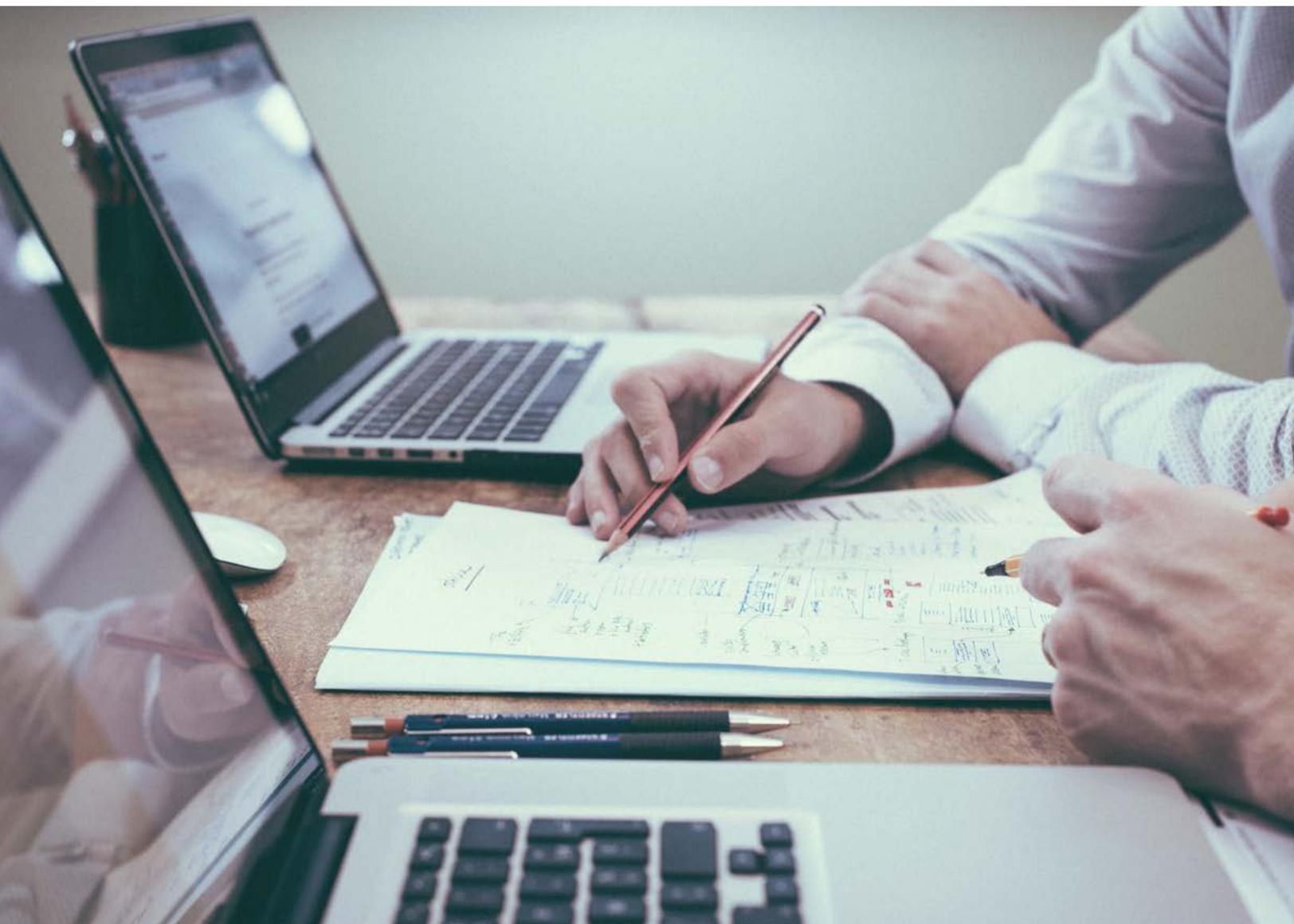
What Are Private WHOIS and Can They Do Harm to Your SEO?

You have the option of adjusting your WHOIS privacy settings as you wish, since most registrars offer privacy or proxy services, protecting your personal information and making it inaccessible to the public.

As you probably know, WHOIS queries provide specific owner-domain related information with one main goal: identifying the party who is responsible for a domain name and an IP address. You, as a registrant, are obligated to provide accurate information and provide an update when needed. Otherwise, your domain might get suspended.

Although this type of information is not typically considered vulnerable, many people choose to accept the privacy services offered, in order to avoid the possibility of being bothered by telemarketers or any type of spam. However, registrars are bound by law to release your WHOIS if the law orders them to do so.

But is keeping your WHOIS private considered to be an SEO-friendly practice? According to Matt Cutts - not so much.

WHOIS data is commonly used to track down domain holders who are suspected of posting illegal content, spammy behavior, or organizing online scams. When you choose to keep your WHOIS private, Google might interpret it as a signal that you have something to hide. This won't give you an instant bad ranking, but if you make other SEO mistakes unintentionally - you might earn a bad guy label. However, if that is something you wish to do to protect your privacy and you believe is important, feel free. Just be mindful of your SEO practice.

* BONUS TIP!

WHEN IT COMES TO OWNING A WEBSITE, YOU HAVE TO BE CAREFUL OF THE WAY YOU BEHAVE ONLINE. IF GOOGLE IDENTIFIES YOU AS A SPAMMER, YOUR WEBSITE WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES AND CAN GET PENALIZED, TOO.

Top-Level Domains vs. Second-Level Domains: Which Are More SEO-Relevant?

There has been a lot of discussion about how different top-level domains (i.e. domain extensions) influence SEO, especially the new ones approved by ICANN.

If you surf the web a bit, you'll see many take the better-safe-than-sorry SEO approach and advocate using only old fashioned top level domains. In 2015, Google denied having preferences towards any type of top-level domains - but there has been quite a bit of scepticism. And not without reason.

The Internet is a dynamic place and the way website owners behave online leaves consequences, especially regarding the reputation certain top-level domains acquire. This is how some well-known top-level domains have become notorious as spam indicators. In most cases, today's top-level domains considered spammy were once really cheap - which is exactly why they were an easy target for spammers.

Yep, they've ruined it.

To be clear, it's not like it's impossible to achieve a good ranking position with these top-level domains, but frankly speaking - why would you want to risk it?

Once a certain top-level domain earns a spammy reputation, it's extremely hard to bounce back. This is why here at Domain.ME, we have established a strict no spam policy, to prevent every possible abusive practice: from spam behavior, phishing, pharming to cyber crimes and posting inappropriate content. In addition to that, our research showed most .me domains can carry a rank above 100.000, and we're looking forward to see how these numbers will change through time.

The general opinion is that top-level domains (analyzed isolated) have a low impact on SEO, and logically - they will never be more important than the overall quality of one's website. However, if you look at the broader picture, country code TLDs (for example, .de, .uk, .me) have awesome SEO benefits worth bearing in mind:

IT'S PERFECT FOR LOCAL TARGETING: ccTLDs are the clearest signals to search engines in terms of local ranking.

IT GIVES YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE USER-EXPERIENCE: Again, with a local audience in mind - you're more likely to gain a great reputation. People will feel comfortable coming to your website because they won't see it as a "foreign address".

COUNTRY CODE TLDS GIVE YOU MORE SPACE TO BE CREATIVE: You can make the domain extension an integral part of your name. For instance, .me is perfect for coming up with a call-to-action (for example, buy.me, ask.me, need.me). By creating a catchy and intriguing name, you can drive more traffic to your website.

It's also worth mentioning that certain ccTLDs (for example, .co, .me and .tv) have earned a status of general country code top-level domains. Because of their brandability and great business potential, many webmasters have started using them across the globe as generic web addresses, so Google has started treating them appropriately.

And what about second-level domains?

A second-level domain is actually what most people call a domain name (e.g. in "google.com", the second-level domain is "google"). Given the fact we have already thoroughly discussed all the things you should keep in mind when choosing an SEO-friendly name, no need to repeat ourselves.

When it comes to pronouncing a verdict on which of the two is more relevant, it all depends. If you choose a great domain name, but unfortunately pick a domain extension that Google doesn't trust - it can be more difficult to earn a solid ranking position, and vice versa.

You know how people will believe anything if you say scientists have proven it?

Lovers of psychology, here's a treat for you: the domain bias phenomenon! Back in 2012, Microsoft published a [study](#) explaining this notion.

What Is The "Domain Bias" Phenomenon and Can You Take Advantage of It?

You know how people will believe anything if you say scientists have proven it?

Lovers of psychology, here's a treat for you: the domain bias phenomenon! Back in 2012, Microsoft published a study explaining this notion.

Domain bias is a user's tendency to believe a certain page is more relevant just because it comes from a particular domain.

There are three key takeaways from this comprehensive research that are good to know:

USERS WILL PRIMARILY CLICK ON THE DOMAIN OF A BRAND THEY ARE FAMILIAR WITH AND SEE AS TRUSTWORTHY.

IF USERS DON'T RECOGNIZE ANY DOMAIN OF THIS TYPE, THEY ARE LIKELY TO CLICK ON A DOMAIN THAT CONTAINS KEYWORDS.

USERS REPORTED HIGHER LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WHEN CLICKING ON EXACT-MATCH DOMAINS.

So, users tend to evaluate search results based on where they come from. This implies building brand reputation (i.e. aligning online and offline marketing strategies) may be equally important as providing valuable content via your website.

Tips for Preventing False Penalization by Google (Domain Level Spam)

Google is like an all-seeing eye: in addition to indexing your content and finding a place for you on the SERP, it also goes through your web pages, subdomains, and root domains, to check if everything's in order, i.e. if there are things it needs to mark as spam.

More often than one would assume, people make unintentional SEO mistakes that can get them in trouble. Here are a few things to keep in mind to prevent Google from labeling you as spam.

Be Cautious When Linking

Link building is important, but you should never try to outsmart Google or use any sort of manipulative technique. Sure, sometimes you might notice suspicious behavior among your competition. Even though it might seem like they are getting away with it, it's just a matter of time before they get caught. An honest approach is the best, so do follow Google's guidelines. This means you **won't** try any black hat SEO hoaxes when linkbuilding:

THE ONE-HAND-WASHES-THE-OTHER SCAM: Some people try helping one another by exchanging links that point to each other's websites. Google certainly won't appreciate this practice, as the wholesome idea of its PageRank was to let users filter what's relevant by linking to valuable content.

PAID LINKS: You cough up the cash and you get the links. There is a whole market of buyers and sellers, but keep in mind it's a violation of Google's guidelines and can backfire.

BUILDING LINK FARMS: This scheme implies establishing low-quality websites that are used only as link sources in order to increase a desired website's popularity.

In addition to all of this, you should also evaluate the links pointing to your website: chances are there are some spammy or low-quality ones you should remove. If there are too many of them to remove manually, you can disavow backlinks.

Mind the Value of Your Content

Imagine yourself back in elementary school: if Google is your teacher that requires discipline, what better way to becoming the teacher's pet than obeying the classroom rules? Taking care of SEO is a constant process, and you have to prove yourself as trustworthy over and over again.

As if we haven't stressed it enough, unique and valuable content should be your top priority. It helps you earn a prestigious status: every honest effort counts and improves your domain authority. Google appreciates your contribution in this sense: if you earn its trust and build a strong reputation, it might even turn a blind eye if you mess something up sometimes.

* BONUS TIP!

IF YOU HAVE PUBLISHED SOME CONTENT THAT'S IRRELEVANT OR YOU EVEN ESTIMATE IT MIGHT HARM YOUR SEO, YOU CAN USE THE ROBOTS.TXT FILE AND PREVENT CRAWLERS FROM INDEXING CERTAIN PARTS OF YOUR WEBSITE.

Eliminate Site Errors and Duplicate Content

Website owners (especially marketers) tend to freak out about duplicate content and rumors regarding Google penalization. The truth is, in most cases, duplicate content happens unintentionally, and Google is not that cold-hearted about it. Of course, things change if you have deliberately tried to deceive search engines.

As it has been stated on Google's Webmaster blog:

> 66 *Duplicate content on a site is not grounds for action on that site unless it appears that the intent of the duplicate content is to be deceptive and manipulate search engine results.*

There are no penalizations *per se*, although in rare cases Google will adjust the ranking. Mostly, the worst thing that can happen is Google indexing the less desired version of your page. Luckily, addressing duplicate content is completely under your control.

In addition, it's useful to check if the site has errors, as they prevent crawlers from doing their job. These can include:

SERVER CONNECTIVITY ISSUES

DNS RESOLUTION FAILURES

PROBLEMS INVOLVING FETCHING YOUR ROBOTS.TXT FILE

Handle Penalties Wisely
(If They Do Occur)

Getting penalized can be a heavy blow. However, you need to pull yourself together and react right away, in order to rehabilitate your domain authority and continue working on your SEO.

Step 1

BUILD TRUST

Register your site with the Google's Webmaster Tools service and restore the bond between your site and the search engine team. In addition to this, Google will be your friend and give you a heads up if it notices some sort of spam-related problems on your website.

Step 3

FIX WHAT YOU CAN

If you've been consciously breaking the rules, you know it's redemption time: remove all the bad links, stuffed keywords, and other wrongdoings.

Step 4

SEND A RECONSIDERATION REQUEST

Remember: you're in no position to negotiate if you've tried to manipulate the algorithm. It's important to get everything out in the open - this honest approach increases your chances of Google lifting the penalties.

Step 2

BE PATIENT AND HUMBLE

It can take a while until you get a response - it can take weeks or months.
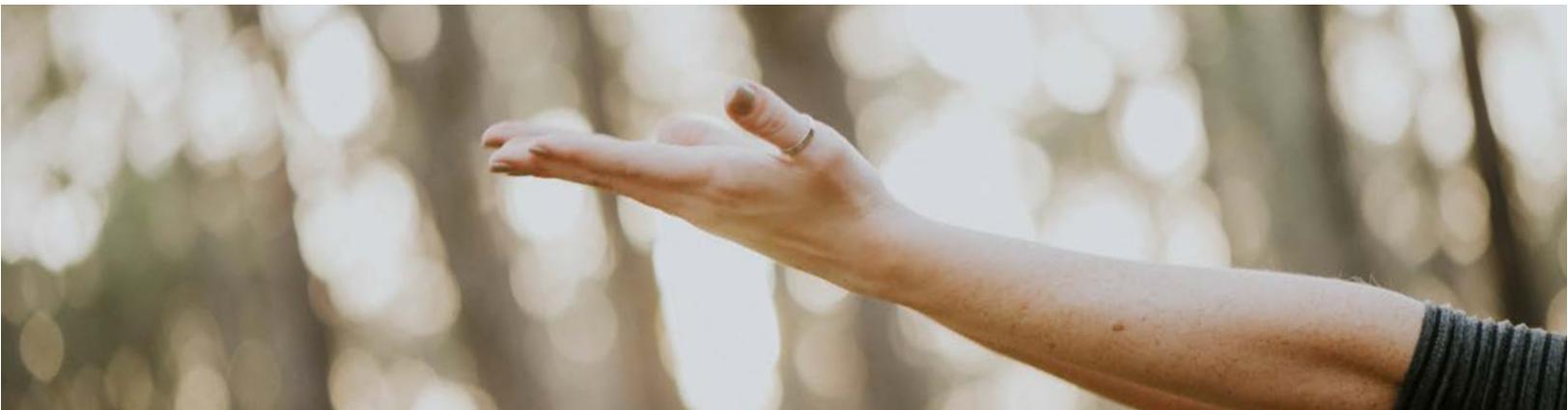
* BONUS: INSIDER TIP!

We asked Radomir Basta, CEO and lead SEO strategist at Four Dots, to give us a domain SEO checklist one should have in mind in order to avoid Google's disfavor. Radomir was kind enough to share his insights regarding the right domain choice and smart and cautious backlinking in this context:

There are a number of red flags that you can get just from the domain itself – numbers in the domain name, too many characters, obvious commercial exact matches, certain extensions, etc. These are just the red flags that you can see at a glance.

But for a more informed assessment, you need to take a closer look. Checking out the hosting neighborhood, the site's Domain Rating (or other, similar metrics) and domain age will usually require a bit more effort and access to specialized tools, but will give you a much better idea of whether you want a link from a particular site.

By connecting influencers with businesses, and businesses with other resources on the web, we've literally examined hundreds and thousands of domains by hand, with only one question in mind – could a backlink coming from this asset provide any value to our clients. You wouldn't believe the number of spammy websites I've stumbled across throughout the past decade! This is why we've invested in Dibz, (a tool for link prospecting, which uses a .ME extension, just so you know).

Our custom-built algorithm monitors 17 factors at the moment, in order to filter out link farms, paid link building opportunities, and all other black hat resources on the web when we are looking for backlink opportunities. But bear in mind - apart from the headwear, not much in SEO is black and white, which is why we talk about tendencies much more frequently than we dare to call them rules.

Still, we have managed to identify a number of other, non-domain specific signals usually characteristic to websites you might want to stay away from.
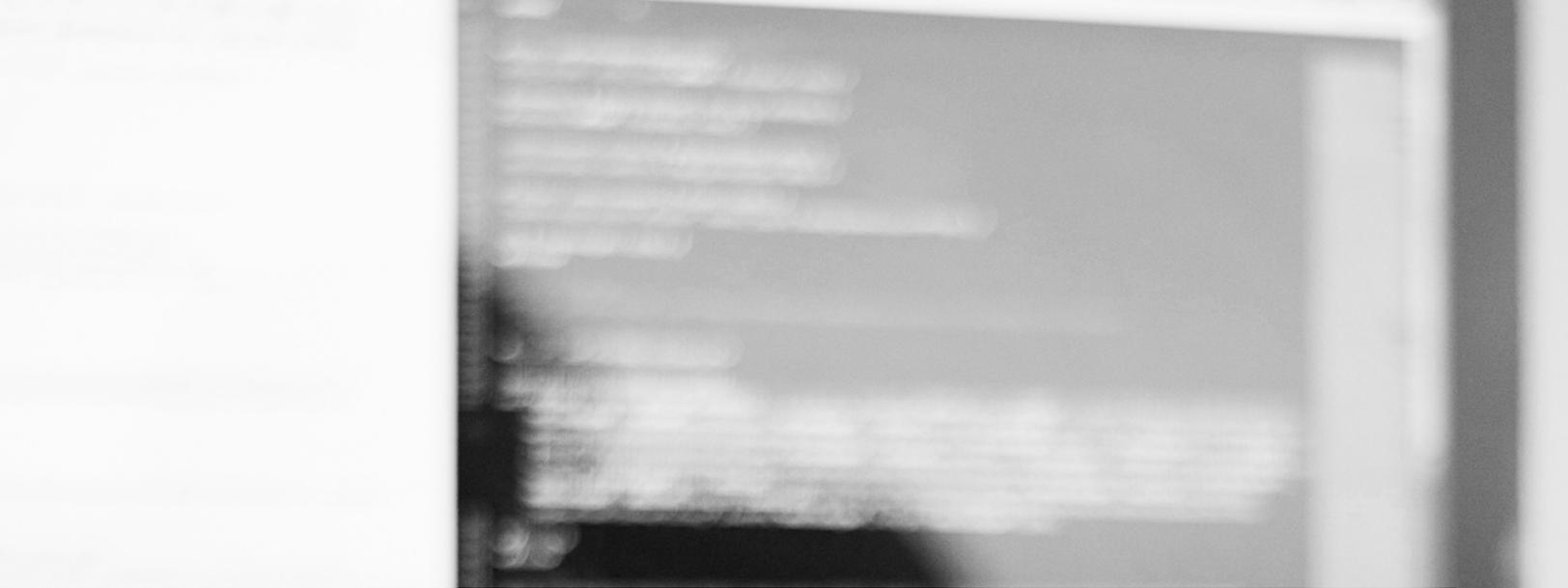
Taking Precautionary Measures for Greater Safety Online

You know the saying: who fails to plan, plans to fail. When it comes to domain safety, there are several things you should bear in mind: from knowing the answers to pre-purchasing domain questions and being prepared for the worst, to handling times of crises and understanding the technicalities you probably haven't given much thought to.

Ensuring a Safe Domain IP Neighbourhood

Hosting services often host several different websites on one server. When search engines try to identify your website, they firstly look at your IP address and then your domain: it's like searching for a certain street and then navigating through it to find the exact house number. If you're in a bad neighbourhood, it can harm your ranking, just like a shady domain history can.

Did you know your domain could be in a bad neighbourhood?

In 2013, the University of Twente's Centre for Telematics and Information Technology did a research in order to clarify how bad IP neighbourhoods function and what the responsibility of internet hosting services is in this context. The leading researcher, Giovane Moura, pointed out there should be a distinction between individual IP addresses that are associated with spammy behaviour, and entire bad neighbourhoods that continuously organize spam attacks.

Also, it's good to know that if your server is within the same IP range as another spammy server, you're at risk of getting your server and your domain name blacklisted. Talk about having neighbours from hell, huh?

Prevention is key here: use tools that help you investigate IP neighbourhoods (e.g. the Domain neighbourhood checker by Majestic SEO or "Who Else is Hosted on My IP Address?" by Moz) and ensure you're in good company.
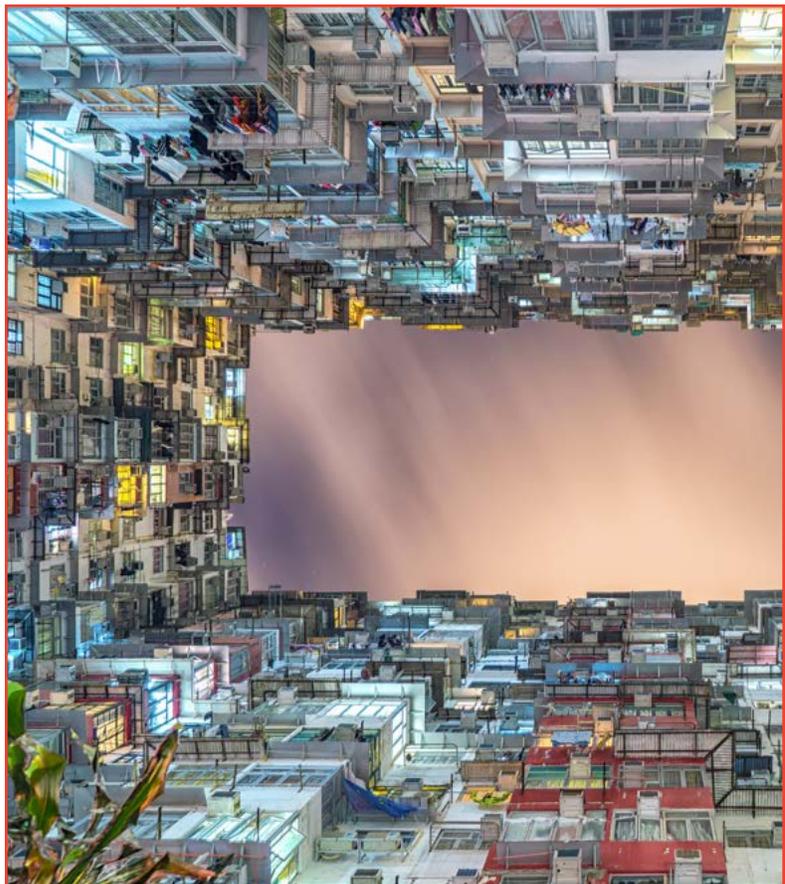
Safely Changing Your Domain's Name (without Damaging Your SEO)

Domain migration can actually bring SEO benefits to your website, especially if you're aiming at a domain that's more relevant or already has authority, so Google will be fond of you.

Changing your domain's name is a risky event that can potentially ruin your website's visibility and make it harder to recover your previous ranking position. However, it's perfectly natural to notice a temporary change in traffic as search engines need a bit of time to adapt to the new situation - so don't panic!

Here's a checklist for you in order to ensure safe, SEO-friendly domain migration:

☐ **UNDERSTAND REDIRECTIONS:** Before changing your domain, you need to set up your 301 redirects. It is a permanent redirect that passes up to 99% of ranking power to the redirected page. This ensures search engines are directed to your new domain while visitors won't encounter the notorious *404 page not found*. It's pretty simple to implement the 301 redirects: it usually implies only a few lines of code.

☐ **TAKE CARE OF INTERNAL LINKS:** Make sure you avoid broken links. All the links need to be updated in order to reflect the new domain

☐ **MONITOR THE TRANSITION:** Switching to another domain name should be a smooth process. You can use tools such as the Google Search Console to measure the analytics and ensure traffic gets transferred correctly. Naturally, as the organic impressions decrease on your old domain - they will increase at the same rate on your new domain.

☐ **CHANGE THE ADDRESS IN THE WEBMASTER TOOL ACCOUNT** (e.g. Google Search Console): After you do so, resubmit your sitemap. A sitemap is a file in which you list your website's pages so you can indicate Google the exact structure of your site, i.e. the way you've organized your content.

Keep in mind that it takes an average of six weeks for rankings to assimilate so be patient.

Moz has some additional useful advice regarding safe domain migration:

☐ **AVOID CERTAIN PARALLEL CHANGES:** If you choose to change several elements simultaneously, you might add unwanted complexity to the migration process and it could mask potential issues. It's not advisable to make changes in URL structures, design, and content all at once: do it gradually.

☐ If it's not absolutely necessary, **DON'T CHANGE YOUR HOSTING SERVICE**.

☐ **SAFETY FIRST:** Check the history of your new domain and explore if it's linked to some shady behavior in the past. See the section about Google rankings and previous ownership.

We asked Sean Si, a start-up, data analysis and urgency junkie who's also the founder of Seo Hacker, to provide insider tips on how to pull off a domain migration without damaging your SEO. Sean has already kindly shared his insights on the topic through a case study, where he explained the rocky path of recovering the rankings of a client's site. Here's what Sean had to say:

❝ *To make things short, the client went with another web development company for their website's revamp. That's okay. Another developer is not a problem for us so long as they keep the URLs the same as the pre-revamp phase.*

We did advise the client, who in turn, advised the web developer. However, for some unknown celestial reason, it was not followed.

All the URLs went haywire. Consequently, our rankings dropped - to Not in Top 500. That almost gave me a heart attack. And it all happened when we were about to renew the contract with the client.

It was extremely difficult for us to revive the old URLs and get our rankings back on the first page - which we were able to do after 3 excruciating months.

Lessons learned:

1. If your company can do the revamp for the client, do it. We lost the bid because our client did not appreciate our expertise in SEO that tied in to our web development processes. I should have communicated this better.

2. Google is willing to swing you back but will not give you your previous rankings after 4 months of AWOL. Unfortunately, we aren't able to get our exact rankings back. That's a lot of extra work for me and my team but we're happy to be able to jump back after 4 months of disastrous SEO.

3. Retaining URL structure is extremely important. This isn't a new lesson but I have been reminded by this – rather painfully so.

4. Take the extra mile to explain what happened to your clients and what it will take to get back on track. Clients have lots of things in mind and like us, you may be put on the sidelines for a while – until they feel the consequences of that. Communication is a huge way to keep your rankings straight.

5. Pray. Hard.

A big shout-out to Sean for sharing his trial and error path with us! Now you know what to be cautious about if you ever end up in a similar situation.

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A Few Words about Safety-Related Domain Status Codes

Status codes are easily readable pieces of information about the level of domain safety (i.e. is your domain protected from unauthorized transfers or updates), any pending actions that need to be resolved, possible reasons your domain has stopped working, its expiration date, and whether or not it is protected from domain hijacking.

EPP status codes (or simply – domain name status codes) tell you the exact state of your domain name registration. It's somewhat like your domain's health diagnosis, only a bit more techy.

Status codes can be seen within the WHOIS database. Some settings can be changed independently by the registrant (i.e. the domain holder) while others demand you send a request to your registrar. Here are a few safety-related status codes you should be familiar with:

LOCKED STATUS CODE: There are certain prohibitions in effect and a domain cannot be deleted, renewed, or transferred. It's a matter of safety and in most cases, you as a domain holder have full authorization to change this status as you wish: unlock, make settings adjustments, and lock it back again.

CLIENTTRANSFERPROHIBITED, CLIENTDELETEPROHIBITED, AND CLIENTUPDATEPROHIBITED: These status codes can be set only by the registrar and they prevent domain theft and any other unauthorized actions.

AUTORENEWPERIOD: This is a status code that indicates a grace period, provided by the registry after the domain expires, is in effect (i.e. the domain gets automatically extended by the registry). How is this safety-related, you may ask? We can all get forgetful and distracted: autoRenewPeriod helps you keep your domain ownership even if you forget to extend your domain.

Most people don't pay much attention to status codes, even though there are benefits of some worth noting. There are dozens of different ones, which is why we try to explain them to our users, so they get the most of their websites.

Preventing Domain Hijacking and Cybersquatting

Domain hijacking or domain theft is a cyber crime that implies the unauthorized change of the registration of a certain domain name, with the intention of using it for abusive actions.

Whoever is stealing your domain can use it for phishing, spam, or even malware distribution. As an owner, you can also suffer financially, as cyber criminals can deplete your website's commercial income.

How does this happen? Well, most hackers hack into your e-mail account, or you might become a victim of social engineering. In the most common scenario, hijackers use your confidential personal information and perform an act of identity theft: they impersonate you and convince your registrar to change status codes or other settings.

If you're wondering how to protect your domain from being hijacked, here's a quick checklist:

PROTECT YOUR E-MAIL ACCOUNT: Ensure your password is of solid strength, and you may even want to change it once in awhile.

CHECK SECURITY PROTECTION OPTIONS before registering your domain (e.g. call-back authentication, placing various domain locks).

KEEP YOUR EYES ON YOUR TRAFFIC: If you notice any highly suspicious traffic, reach out to your registrar to see what's up.

CONSIDER GETTING AN SSL CERTIFICATE: Alongside the obvious safety reasons, securing your website will bring you SEO benefits: Google wants to promote Internet safety, which is why https websites will be rewarded with a slight SEO boost.

If you do become a victim of domain hijacking, take a deep breath and start by contacting the ICANN Security Team for guidance. Alert your registrar immediately, hire a lawyer, and let your customers and followers know what has happened. If you have registered a trademark of your domain previously, it could help in speeding up the recovery process.

In 2015, cybersquatting reached new heights and this increase has happened due to new gTLDs.

Cybersquatting is an act of registering or using a domain name with the malicious intentions of profiting from the goodwill of someone else's trademark. Most commonly, it is a practice of buying domain names that use the names of existing renowned businesses, and cashing in on somebody else's success.

Depending on what corner of the planet you live in, there are two ways to fight cybersquatting (if you, God forbid, become a victim of it):

FOR U.S. CITIZENS: There is a federal law known as the Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act (ACPA) that enables you to file a lawsuit.

FOR NON U.S. CITIZENS: You can use the international arbitration system of ICANN. This procedure is typically shorter and you won't be needing an attorney.

* BONUS TIPS!

HERE ARE SOME ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS YOU CAN CONSIDER:

NURTURE YOUR WEBSITE: YOU SHOULD TREAT YOUR WEBSITE LIKE YOUR BABY AND DO REGULAR CHECK UPS IN ORDER TO ENSURE EVERYTHING'S OK. DAILY SECURITY SCANS ARE ADVISABLE.

REGULARLY UPDATE YOUR SOFTWARE: SOMETIMES, ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS YOUR SITE STAYS VULNERABLE TO HACKERS IS SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU HAVE OUTDATED SOFTWARE.

CHOOSE YOUR HOSTING SERVICES WISELY: IN ADDITION TO MINDING THE IP NEIGHBOURHOOD, CHOOSE A HOSTING SERVICE THAT'S CLEAR ON WHAT TYPE OF PROTECTION AND LEVEL OF SECURITY THEY OFFER.

DON'T BE RECKLESS WITH PASSWORDS: COME ON, 1234 IS NOT A SECURE PASSWORD!

FOLLOW THE LATEST SECURITY TRENDS AND ALWAYS ASK FOR ADDITIONAL HELP IF YOU FEEL YOU CAN USE SOME. CYBER CRIMES HAVE BECOME INCREDIBLY CREATIVE AND IT'S DEBATABLE IF YOU CAN BE OVERLY CAUTIOUS.

Congratulations - You've Made It to the End!

We hope *The Secrets of Better Rankings: SEO and Domains* has been a delightful read!

You are now armed with useful tips and you've certainly gained a fuller understanding of relevant domain topics and domain ranking factors.

This eBook can be your go-to guide whenever you have dilemmas about SEO and domains. We also invite you to check out [Domain. ME blog](#) and [FAQ](#) to find out more and join the discussion.

Now, are you ready to build your own website?

[Get your .ME domain](#) now and join a million strong .ME community - because .ME is about you!

Contributors

We would like to express our appreciation to the amazing SEO and digital marketing experts who took the time to share their insights with us:

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