

YOUR DOMAIN NAME IS YOUR INTERNET BRAND

by Duncan McAdams

In today's marketplace, it's a given: if you're in business, whether you own a company or simply work in one, you need an internet domain name that effectively represents your business on the web.

A few years ago, a scandal that could only happen in the information age hit the news headlines. The famous singer Madonna sought to register the domain name Madonna.com and discovered, much to her dismay, that it had already been registered by someone else. Dan Parisi was an astute opportunist who bought the Madonna.com domain in 1998 for \$20 and refused to sell it to her. Instead, he cunningly used this domain name to host a pornographic site, which, as you would expect, infuriated the pop star.

Of course, Madonna and her well-paid legal team eventually recovered her domain name as part of the legal trade mark which already belonged to her, but it cost her a bundle. And while this is an extreme example from the life of a celebrity, it is a situation that could happen to any business or trademark, regardless of its fame, fortune, or lack thereof. Imagine if you were trading as a well-known business, say, Pump Ltd, and someone else started a business online using the domain name pump.co.nz and began selling the same range of products using your good reputation. How would you feel about that lost business?

It is common practice today, that when deciding on a name for your company you should at the same time ensure the domain name is also available. In New Zealand, the best place to go for this is www.domainz.net.nz

KEEP IT SHORT!

This is not to say that your domain name must be equivalent to your company name. For example, if you trade under the name, First Electrical Company, it would probably be a good idea to register a domain name like fec.co.nz (abbreviation), or firstelectric.co.nz, to make it less cumbersome for users typing in your web address. Also, you'll be using your domain name on all of your marketing materials, so you want to make sure it's easy to say, easy to read, easy to write, and easy to remember! **So when in doubt, keep it short.**

Sometimes it is better to register a domain name that's sounds completely different from your company name. In the case of First Electrical Company, a fresh alternative could be the domain name goelectrical.co.nz. In this case, the domain name could be used as an opportunity to rebrand your business or establish a unique selling proposition. In any case, if you are planning to use your web-site as an E-commerce tool, you would do well to think long and hard about what your domain name will be. Remember, it should be short, catchy, and memorable.

If your business is entirely Internet-based, choosing a domain name is so important, it could make or break your company! Your domain is more than just an inherent part of your brand, it IS your brand. Think about it, the most successful brands on the Internet (xtra.co.nz, trademe.co.nz, amazon.com) were built entirely on the web, for the web, and using the domain as the brand.

GO INTERNATIONAL!

Finally, if you are trading outside of New Zealand, it's a good idea to register a .com domain, because the .co.nz tag identifies your company as New Zealand-based. This is fine if you focus exclusively on the New Zealand market, but

overseas customers will want to know that you operate a global organisation with a global presence.

One barrier you might encounter when trying to register a .com domain (one place to go is www.whois.net) is that you will soon realize that many domain names are already taken. It makes sense if you consider that New Zealand alone generates more than 100 commercial web-sites every single day. Just imagine what that means for the whole world! So, be selective and specific. Use less common words, be creative and innovative. Remember that the most popular Internet brands look strange (Yahoo.com, eBay.com, google.com) but work well!