I'VE GOT A DOMAIN NAME

Now What???

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"I've Got a Domain Name—Now What???"
Book Excerpt

A Practical Guide to Building a Website and Your Web Presence

**By
Jean Bedord**

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WHITE PAPER Table of Contents (included here)

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C o n t e n t s

NOTE:	This is the Table of Contents (TOC) from the book for your reference. The eBook TOC (below) differs in page count from the tradebook TOC.

1 Understanding the Domain Name System

Why are Domain Names Needed?

The world wide web has changed our lives in many ways. Searching the web and sending email are now part of our day-to-day lives. Organizations are expected to have websites. Professionals put their portfolios out on the web to attract new clients. Businesses use web technologies to sell products and provide customer service. Students learn to build websites in school.

Building and having a web presence is now part of everyday conversation. We used to ask for phone number and address—now we ask for email and website. Our children assume all information is on the web, and is immediately available. They don't look up information in the white pages or yellow pages or other traditional sources; instead they go to known sites or use search engines.

The Domain Name System (DNS) provides the architecture that allows computers to communicate with each other, and is the very foundation of the web. The concept is straightforward. Inter-

connected computers have numeric IP (Internet Protocol) addresses, but these are not easy for people to remember. DNS solves this problem.

Established in the 1980s, DNS is essentially a master registry of human-readable addresses assigned to the numeric IP codes that computers understand. DNS is like a phone book. Your listing in the phone book displays your name and your telephone number. People look you up by name to find your telephone number. Just as your name in the phone book is matched with a number, your phone number, similarly the domain name (sometimes simply called domain) is matched with the numeric IP address of an associated computer.

Every time you type in a web address or send an email, you are using domains controlled by some person or organization. Domains are deceptively simple. You recognize them as the characters that follow the @ in an email address. The structure is more complex than appears on the surface, and is used in different ways:

- Registered domain with a registrar[*]: example.com

- Email: yourname@example.com

- Domain name for a website: www.example.com

- URL (Uniform Resource Locator)
  http://www.example.com/index.html

The domain you use is your address on the web. It functions in ways similar to snail mail delivered to a mailbox at your physical address. You have multiple lives, so you can have multiple addresses:

- A work address which depends on your staying employed with that organization

- A home address which changes when you move to another residence

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[*] A registrar, in this case, is a company that is authorized to register internet domain names.

- An virtual office service in a desirable location for your at-home business

- A post office box since you live in an apartment complex

- An address with a non-profit organization to which you belong

The physical location carries an implicit message. Notice how you react differently to these addresses:

- 1234 Park Avenue, New York, New York

- Rural Route 1, Boulder, Colorado

- Number 65, Chawan Road, Chengdu, Sichuan, Peoples' Republic of China

Likewise, a P.O. box address is sufficient for an independent writer, but doesn't convey substance for a business.

The same principles apply to the web world. The domain you use in the digital world carries a message like a street address in the physical world. Let's look at some common domain addresses and the implicit message:

- yourname@comcast.net is the equivalent of renting a P.O. box. This domain name says you have broadband access. This address, however, goes away with no automatic forwarding when you change your internet service provider, or ISP.

- yourname@aol.com is another common address. This was the format of my first email address. It worked for my family, since we could have up to six different email addresses, while paying for only one dial-up account. Now that AOL mail is free and I use a broadband service provider, I continue to keep those email addresses for my family and for testing purposes. There is also the "keeping in touch" factor—some of my former colleagues and relatives have never switched to my newer email accounts. Sometimes an AOL email can carry a mixed message depending on the context. For example, AOL email may indicate a senior executive with longevity in the online world, who prefers to maintain a personal account separate from her business account.

- Your.Name@youremployer.com is the format of your current business address. All business conveyed on behalf of your employer goes to this address. Personal mail sent to your business address is risky. Employers can choose to block incoming email from certain domains. Liability issues for employers are now a concern, since all email is archived, and may be subjected to legal e-discovery. Using a company email carries an additional down-side—it goes away if you are no longer working for that employer. And employers don't forward email to their ex-employees. Unexpectedly losing your job can mean losing contact with references and colleagues, and having to recreate those email contacts.

- Your.Name@university.edu is typical for college students and faculty. As a part-time faculty member in a distance education program, I use the university domain name to send email to my students, rather than using my other identities, so students will recognize the communication. Students usually lose this email address after leaving school, though sometimes alumni are encouraged to keep their university related email addresses. Stanford University continues its relationship and brand with alumni by providing emails of the form yourname@stanfordalumni.edu, which carries more cachet than other email domains.

- Your.ID@hotmail.com is an email account with Hotmail, a popular web mail service. Hotmail was the one of the earliest free email services and includes advertising. It screams "free," is often used for questionable activities, and not a legitimate business address. Deliverability can be an issue since some domains automatically screen out all Hotmail users.

Notice that all of these domains belong to someone else. They control the address where you receive your virtual mail. The corresponding website carries *their* brand identity, not yours.

The alternative is to own your own domain. Technically, this means you purchase the right to use a particular domain name for an annual fee. Owning a domain name now runs around $10 a year for basic registration, down from the initial $35+ annual fees. So the cost of building your own web presence is minimal.

What are the Advantages of Your Own Domain?

Owning your domain name gives you control of your email and your presence on the web. A domain provides a permanent address that is easy to remember and doesn't change with physical relocations and job changes. You can then use this address to develop your website property. Your electronic mail is delivered to the mailbox set up for that (virtual) location.

Let's examine how this works. You get a domain name from a domain name registrar who manages the domain for you in the master registry (similar to your phone listing in the white pages of the phone book) and handles the billing. I purchased the domain name "econtentstrategies.com" for my consulting business.

The first step in establishing my web presence was setting up emails to use my domain name. I created several emails, each for different purposes:

- JB@econtentstrategies.com for my business cards

- Pat@econtentstrategies.com for an advisor

- info@econtentstrategies.com to use for information queries

- whitepaper@econtentestrategies.com for a special offer

- accounting@econtentstrategies.com for a more professional image in sending and receiving invoices

Each of these email addresses that I created was an alias, or virtual address. This means that, behind the scenes, I control the forwarding of these addresses to other physical addresses which can be jbedord@aol.com or myaccount@comcast.net or myname@yahoo.com or any other physical email address. This worked well for me in the dotcom era when my ISP, @home.com, went out of business. The replacement was myname@attbi.com but this email didn't work smoothly the first week. Even worse, emails sent to myname@home.com did not get forwarded to

myname@attbi.com—they bounced back to the sender as a bad email address. (Fortunately, when @attbi.com became @comcast.net, email addresses were migrated to the new domain.)

By using my domain, I was able to redirect all the incoming email to my AOL account until the email services stabilized. No lost communication with colleagues and clients. No new business cards. No need to notify everyone about a change of address.

They continued to see JB@econtentstrategies.com, not the invisible ISP redirects behind the scenes.

My second step in establishing a web presence was to use URL forwarding to a starter web page that could be used while I developed a more extensive website. Social media profiles didn't exist ten years ago, so I used AOL Hometown, available to me as a paying AOL subscriber. I could have used geocities.com or one of several other one-page services.

Then I printed up business cards with my email and website, and start marketing my services. My cost was only the registration fee, about $20 at that point. Low cost yet high value, the business logic of having your own domain is indisputable.

Choosing a Domain Name

Start by registering a personal domain that you can live with indefinitely, regardless of relocations and job changes. Variations of names work well, since this means aunts, uncles and cousins as well as friends and colleagues are likely to remember how to spell it. I registered jeanbedord.com, and since my name is commonly misspelled, also registered jeanbedford.com. So I have three domain registrations, which can forward mail to a single email inbox:

- Jean@Bedord.com as my family surname

- Jean@jeanbedord.com for my professional portfolio

- Jean@jeanbedford.com the misspelling to be redirected to my correct name

Registering a general family domain allows everyone in the family to have their own email address with the same domain. You can choose a domain like SmithEnterprises.com or SmithFamily.com. You can use this domain name for business cards for personal use, e.g. social gatherings and fishbowls for restaurant drawings.

Then register additional domains as you need to for different purposes. I use econtentstrategies.com strictly for business. My family uses bedord.com to stay in touch.

Branding is the major issue for choosing a domain name for a business, since it is used for both the website and email. Typically, it is the business name or its variation.

On the web, a one-person business can look as professional as a large company. The domain name is part of the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) used by search engines, so your business website can be found in a web search. The domain name gets incorporated into offline and online marketing, as well as day-to-day email communication. Therefore, your choice of domain name requires the same careful consideration as any other business decision.

Professionals and businesses carefully consider their street addresses, and the same principle applies to selecting domain names. A dentist can use something like smithdentistry.com, which can appear in print as SmithDentistry.com. A real estate agent could choose jonesrealestate.com which can become JonesRealEstate.com on a business card. (Search engines and web browsers ignore capitalization.) You need to look at the representation with and without capitals. It's hard for me to see the "v" in "mindyvhillman.com." Abbreviations can be problematic—"corp" or "corporation" or "Inc." are irrelevant to your brand, so I can't remember them as part of a domain name. Look carefully to see if a different capitalization changes the meaning, for example, the deceptively innocuous PenIsland.com.

You also need a domain name that's easy to say to another person without spelling it out. I had originally registered several "wrangler" domain names, but realized the spelling was not intuitively obvious outside the western U.S. Same problem with "cache" which is easily confused with "cash." This becomes particularly important for radio and television interviews and marketing.

Multiple Domain Scenarios

Chances are you will register more than one domain. I registered four when I first started; one for my business and three that were variations of my name. This happens all the time. If you had more than one property or more than one business, these would have different addresses. Some domains will be used for primary websites, but others are used for special purposes. So you, too, will probably need multiple domains. Let's look at some common scenarios for registering multiple domains:

- A bride and groom planning a wedding in San Francisco want to share their plans with family and friends, by creating a website with links to their gift registry, Flickr pictures, lodging information and local activities for those flying into the Bay Area.

- A weekend entrepreneur wants to test new business names by buying Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising on Google and measuring click-through rates.

- A mom has an interest in yoga and gardening. She develops two different part-time businesses, each with their own domain names.

- A volunteer for a youth soccer team gets a domain name for the league to send email to the players and their parents, and to develop an informational website.

- A school obtains a domain name to put up a website tracking progress on its annual fund-raising efforts.

- A real estate management company has several properties. Each property has its own website with location, pictures and tenant application procedures.

- An internet marketer is promoting a product and purchases a value-based domain name to use in advertising.

- A publisher has several publications, so each publication has its own domain name and mini-website, in addition to the main domain name for the company itself.

- An annual conference frequently has its own website with the name of the conference, which is then linked to the organizing company.

- A marketing department is offering a free report. Postcards will be mailed out with a report specific landing page with an easy-to-read domain name, not the company domain name.

Domains, as you see, can be useful for a number of purposes, and they can easily proliferate, much like the number of computers in our lives. There are the all-purpose computers and the *oh-so-specialized* versions to control our houses and vehicles. Now let's get started on staking out new properties….

About the Author

Jean Bedord left her corporate job nearly ten years ago to gain flexibility for her family life. Configuring personal technology for her consulting work proved challenging, even though she had spent nearly twenty years working in technology and online information product development. As more of her friends and colleagues become solo professionals and entrepreneurs, they need guides to help navigate the same maze. As Jean found, they expect the same functionality provided within the corporate infrastructure, but that requires selecting technology for their new environment.

Jean has multiple lives and multiple domains. Her corporate consulting practice can be found at http://www.econtentstrategies.com. She is also a workshop instructor and part-time faculty at San Jose State University graduate School of Library and Information Science. Her website http://www.CorporateNoMore.com is designed to empower individuals so they can effectively utilize technologies outside the corporate environment.

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