# Choosing a domain name
## A Guide for SMEs

2021 EDITION

# Your domain name is a crucial part of your online business.

A good domain name could be the difference between becoming a known brand online or being lost in the vast ocean of websites on the internet. Not only is it your online address, but it also reflects who you are as a business and your brand.

This guide takes you through the process of choosing your domain name. We outline why it is important to secure the domain name that best fits and describes your business. At the end, you should have all the tools to brainstorm domain names and know how to register one.

You are running a professional business – with the right domain name for your website and email addresses, the world will know that too.

**.ie**
We are
Ireland online

# 1. What is a domain name?

A domain name is your address on the internet. You own that space on the internet and, as a business, use it to promote and sell your services and products to people. Your domain name tells people where to find you online, so they can search for your goods and services.

## Example

ABC Flowers is based at 25 Main Street, Ashford, Co. Wicklow.

On the **world wide web** (www), every business with a website also has an address. This is known as an **IP address** – an Internet Protocol address made up of a string of numbers like 190.1.23.456.

Because that's hard to remember the **Domain Name System** (DNS) was devised. This system translates the IP address into a unique domain name that is easy to remember.

So, when you buy the domain name, **abcflowers.ie**, your address online becomes **www.abcflowers.ie**. In the same way that your shop has different sections – flowers, bulbs, plants – each page that you put on your website will have a different name – a **Uniform Resource Locator (URL)** – such as **www.abcflowers.ie/bulbs**, **www.abcflowers.ie/plants**.

The good thing about being online is that it doesn't matter if you move from Co. Wicklow to Co. Westmeath. Your website address stays the same.

**85%** of SMEs with a website say their website is important in generating awareness of their business[1]

# 2. Why is a domain name important?

## Ownership

Your website is your space online – you own it and you control what happens in that space. You can build a shop (by adding e-commerce), you can increase the number of sections in your shop (website pages), you can allow customers to book an appointment or a seat in a cinema. You have control.

With social media, you are living rent-free in space owned by the social media platform, be that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest or others. The owner can change the rules at any time. Regardless of the impact on your marketing or on your sales leads from social media, you have no control over when and how many rule changes will be made.

This is not to say that you should ignore social media, just that a website should be at the centre of what you do online.

> 'Every business owner should begin by creating a website to serve as their permanent home on the internet, under their control forever.'
>
> Allister Frost,
> Digital Marketing Expert

## Branding

When thinking about which domain name to choose, keep your brand values in mind. The name you choose should reflect your brand, be that a serious, professional website, or a youth oriented e-commerce site.

▶ Start-ups have the advantage of a clean slate and can build the online and offline aspects of their business in tandem.

▶ Existing businesses moving into online have legacy business names, which may not transfer seamlessly. This can present a great opportunity to do a brand refresh and modernise the overall approach of the business.

Another factor worth thinking about is future plans. Does your business intend to grow, perhaps acquire other companies, or diversify into different business areas? If so, take time to really think through the domain name so it is future-proofed.

Your domain name will be used in your email address and across many other marketing collaterals; from your website to your business cards, packaging and letterhead. Matching your business name, your domain name, and your email address shows the public – including customers, suppliers, and competitors - that you mean business.

First impressions count and a matching email and website address **builds trust in your brand** and shows that you are **in business for the long haul.**[2]

The challenge is to come up with **a name that stands out from the crowd**, is easy to remember and reflects what your business is about.

## 2. Why is a domain name important? (continued)

### Trust

People buy from people, and from businesses that they trust. Having a domain name consistent with your business name is central to that trust. It denotes stability and authenticity, core elements when attracting customers to buy from you online.

**FACTS:**

▶ 84% of consumers trust businesses that have their own website.

▶ Only 20% of consumers trust businesses that do not have a website.[2]

Alongside an authentic space online, having a business email address – and not one from a free email provider (Gmail, Hotmail, Yahoo) – is crucial. Customers will feel more confident dealing with **peter@abcflowers.ie** than **abcflowers@hotmail.com** because they will associate **@abcflowers.ie** with a business that has more substance. A free email address will convey the impression that your business is unprofessional and amateur.[3]

▶ 74% of consumers trust businesses that use professional email addresses, such as a .ie address.

### Getting found online

Choosing a good domain name is crucial to being found online. A simple straightforward domain name – for example, lego.com – is easy to remember but, crucially, it ties in with the brand name and the company's products. And so, when people search for these products online, they will be directed towards the Lego site, because the domain name matches the business name and product names.

It is important to tailor your domain name to the market in which you are selling. In Ireland, Google prioritises domain names with a .ie extension – this shows that the business has a connection with Ireland, so your website, let's say www.abcflowers.ie, will be found faster by browsers in Ireland.[5] If you are selling products in other countries, Germany for example, your website will be found faster if you also buy www.abcflowers.de. (see Section 3. What's in a name for more on this subject).

## Just 36%
of consumers trust businesses that are only on social media.

## 68%
of Irish consumers said they spent more online in 2020 than they did in 2019.[1]

**The reality is that more people now browse online than ever before – and they expect you to be online too.**

The Irish e-commerce market is worth €8.6 billion[4], and your business can grab a chunk of that spend by having a good online presence.
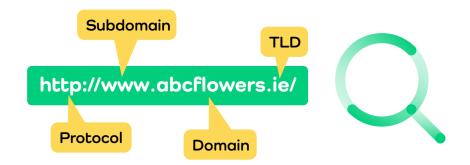
[3] Register 365

[4] J.P. Morgan 2020 E-commerce Payments Trend Report: Ireland

[5] LetsHost.ie

# 3. What's in a name?

The way domain names are marketed has changed over the years. We were accustomed to an address that looked like **http://www.abcflowers.ie** or **www.abcflowers.ie**, but now that we're more used to e-commerce we see alternatives like **abcflowers.ie**.

Each domain name corresponds to a string of numbers, IP addresses (**Internet Protocols**). These names can be further broken down by the type of domain name and the country.

## www vs. non-www

There was a time when almost all websites started with 'www', since this was an easy way to let people know they were being pointed to a website. This is no longer the case, and we're familiar enough with how the internet works that we can leave out 'www' if we want. The difference is mainly a technical one. WWW stands for World Wide Web and has been the standard prefix to identify URLs as websites. If you type www into a search bar and the website you want to go to doesn't have www in its URL, you may still be brought to the website, if the owner has set up a redirect for this purpose.

Choosing a domain name with or without the 'www' can have an impact on how people find your website. If you decide not to use it for your primary site, you will still need to:

▶ Create a subdomain with 'www' and set up a redirect so that users entering it are brought to your main website.

▶ Make sure these are both set up correctly so that search engines do not treat them as separate websites in search results.

Your web designer can help you with this.

## Breaking down a domain name

Your domain name is made up of several parts that make up the URL. Parts of the domain name include the protocol, top-level domain (**TLD**), second-level domain (**SLD**) which is also referred to as the primary domain, and third-level domains that are also referred to as subdomains.

## URLs

URLs are made up of the protocol, sub-domain, domain name and the TLD. These make up internet addresses.

## Protocols

▶ http:// Hypertext transfer protocol – allows for communication between computers and servers.

▶ https:// Hypertext transfer protocol secure – allows for a **secure** connection between computers and servers through an SSL (secure socket layers).

● **SSL:** SSLs are small pieces of software that create encrypted connections between a computer's browser and a website. These connections are most often found on sites that sell goods or take payment information such as credit card details or any site that communicates confidential or financial information.

## 3. What's in a name? (continued)

### A few words about SSLs

SSLs are increasingly important, especially to Google. In July 2018, Google announced that it will identify non-secure sites - such as http:// sites - in the Google Chrome browser.

This means that if you do not have an SSL for your website, visitors to your site through the Google Chrome browser will see a "Not Secure" message in the website address bar.

▶ This is their way of ensuring that all websites are secure for visitors. According to Google, the change has been very successful. Google's ultimate goal is to make HTTPS the default protocol and wants users to understand that HTTP sites are not secure.

SSLs were once very expensive and complicated to add to your website. In recent years, they have fallen considerably in price and are much easier to manage. In fact, many hosting companies provide SSLs as an additional service.

## 100,576
.ie websites have a security certificate.[6]

## ⌃20%
YoY

## 97 of the top 100 sites
on the web use HTTPS by default.[7]

[6] .IE Domain Profile Report

[7] The Register

# 4. Types of domain names

**There are several types of domain names that cover a wide range of different types of organisations.**

## Top-level domains (TLD)

Top-level domains are at the highest level of the Domain Name System (DNS) and sit at the end of the URL such as the .ie in www.abcflowers.ie. There are several different types of top-level domains as listed below:

**Country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs):**
These extensions are reserved for country codes. Each country code is two letters long. For Ireland it is .ie; for France it is .fr.

Each country's code is assigned by IANA, the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority which is a function of ICANN.

**Generic top-level domains (gTLDs):**
These domains represent more generic organisations. Some are restricted in who can use them - and some are not.

For instance, the .com gTLD is not restricted – anyone can buy a .com domain name.

However, only United States government-related websites can use the .gov gTLD (for instance www.fbi.gov). This means that these domains require proof of eligibility in order to obtain them. Each restricted domain will have different requirements that need to be met before purchase. The table below is a sample of generic top-level domains.

| Domain | Typical use |
|--------|-------------|
| .com | Commercial use; unrestricted |
| .net | Generic; unrestricted |
| .org | Once used for non-profit organisations; now unrestricted |
| .gov | Used for the United States government |

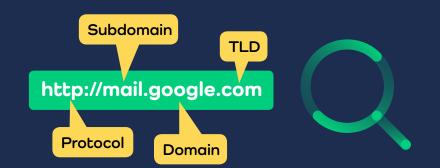**Sponsored top-level domains (sTLDs):**
These domains are specialised top-level domains that have a sponsor which represents a specific community served by the domain extension. An example of this is .edu which you may have come across when looking at university websites outside Ireland. Below are a few examples of sTLDs:

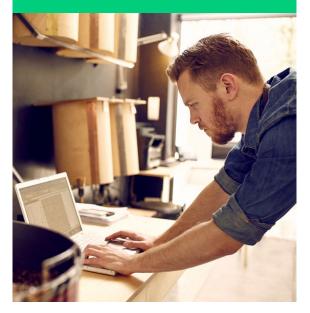| Domain | Sponsoring Organisation |
|--------|-------------------------|
| .aero | Reserved for members of the air-transport industry. Example: www.sita.aero |
| .coop | Reserved for cooperative associations. Example: www.peoplesenergy.coop |
| .museum | Reserved for museums. Example: www.vmfa.museum |

## Subdomains

Subdomains are part of the higher-level domain name. They are created so visitors can access different parts of a website, such as a store or a membership site. An example of this is Google mail. The URL for accessing Gmail is:



Subdomain

TLD

**http://mail.google.com**

Protocol

Domain

# 5. The domain name for you

Choosing your domain name is a big decision – it's your branding identity online. It can be a hassle to change it later if you change your mind or the domain name no longer represents your business.

Not only that, but your offline marketing will also be based on your domain name. If ABC Flowers is the name of your business, then that is the ideal domain name – not www.abcflowersandplants.ie. Think about your market, your products or services, your customers, and make sure ABC Flowers is not already used by a competitor.

## Some useful tips

▶ Keep your domain name short, simple, and easy to remember. The longer it is, the more likely people are to make spelling errors when typing it in.

▶ Make sure your domain name is easy to say and that you do not have to explain any part of it. For instance, if you chose ABC 1 Flowers as the name of your business and **www.abc1flowers.ie** as your domain name, you would always have to explain that your domain name contains the numeral 1 and not the spelling 'one'. Confused? So will your customers and browsers on the internet!

▶ Using keywords in your domain name tells Google and your customers exactly what your website is about. There is no confusion what the website **www.abcflowers.ie** is about. Make sure that the content on your website matches your domain name – that will show customers and, importantly, Google, your expertise in flowers. Match that up with a site that is easy to navigate and these elements can help your website get a higher Google ranking.

▶ Research your proposed name – there are many domain name generators on the internet that can help you brainstorm. PS, you can now also register a domain name with a fada, particularly useful if that is central to your brand![8]

▶ Make sure your domain name is available and not in use by anyone else. You can check **weare.ie** to see if the name you want is available. It will suggest some alternatives if your preferred name is not available. It is also a good idea to check that the domain name you choose is not already patented or trademarked. You can check this information at the Patents Office.

▶ If your domain name is not available, you still have options. You may be able to abbreviate your business name or add your location – **www.wexfordflowers.ie**. Another option is to see if your preferred domain name is for sale. The WHOIS tool will allow you to see who the domain is hosted with and you may be able to contact the hosting company to see if the owner is willing to sell.

Alternatively, you could see if your domain name is for sale on domain marketplaces such as Premiumdomains.ie or Sedo, an international domain marketplace. Finally, you can use a Domain Monitoring Tool to see when your preferred domain name becomes available. When ownership expires, you may be able to pick up the domain name for the going rate, rather than a private seller's rate.

# 6. Registering your domain name

Registering your domain name is a quick and easy process. Once you have made your choice, there are a number of companies you can register the name with – see a list on our website at: **www.weare.ie/accredited-registrar-list**.

► Domain names can be registered for a minimum of one year and a maximum of 10 years.

► It's a good idea to set your domain name to auto renew so you don't lose the name.

► If your domain name is not renewed, it goes into a 75-day grace period during which you can renew it. After that, the domain will enter a 5-day 'pending delete' period. During this time the domain can no longer be renewed. The domain will be deleted after the 5-day 'pending delete' period and available to anyone with a proven connection to Ireland to purchase it. Note that for the last 30 days of this grace period the domain is suspended and your website and emails will stop working.

## .ie domain name

It is easy and fast to register your .ie domain name. Simply prove your connection to Ireland, for example by using your passport or a registered business name. Find all the information you need on our website at: **www.weare.ie/how-to-register-a-domain**.

# 7. Multiple domain names

Having multiple domain extensions helps to keep your competition from creating a business similar to yours. If your website is called **www.abcflowers.ie**, you may also want to buy similar domain names such as **abcflowers.com**, **abcflowers.net** or **abcflowers.co.uk**.

Buying these different domain extensions does not mean you need different websites. Instead, ask your website developer to point these domains to your main site.

If you have the budget, it is also a good idea to buy any domains that sound similar to yours. Say your domain name is '**derek.ie**' – if someone mis-spells your domain name as '**derrek.ie**', they may not find your site immediately. You can ask your web developer to point any similar domains that you have bought and own to your '**derek.ie**' website.

Domain names can be registered for **a minimum of one year** and a **maximum of 10 years**. It's a good idea to set your domain name to **auto renew** so you don't lose it.

It is easy and fast to register a .ie

# 8. Growing your business

If you have a large international company or hope to become one, adding domain names will help you grow your business and create a presence in other parts of the world. Take Harvey Norman, for instance. It is a large international company and has domain names registered in many different countries such as the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand.

Keep in mind that when people search the Internet, they will see the local search results first because Google considers them the most relevant. So if you live in Ireland and search for Harvey Norman, the first search result you will see is harveynorman.ie.

You can register additional names as you need them. If you plan to register names in other countries, check the requirements to do so. Each country will have their own requirements. In Canada[9], for instance, in order to buy a domain name with the country extension .ca, you must be a registered business in Canada, a citizen or have permanent residency in Canada, or hold a Canadian trademark.

9    CIRA

# 9. As Irish as you

An Irish country code top level domain – in other words, a .ie domain name – makes you and your business stand out as either being based in Ireland or having a connection with Ireland.

## Irishness

Worldwide, 70 million people claim Irish descent[10] – and a certain number of them may be predisposed to buying online from Ireland. In addition, 11.3 million people visited Ireland in 2019, which generated €5.9 billion.[11] Many of these visitors research places to eat, stay, shop, and visit before they arrive – and a **.ie** website address will show your Irish connection.

Your **.ie** website will also help you to be found in online searches being conducted in Ireland. This visibility will help you to stand out from the crowd and increase your chances of being chosen by potential customers.

Where an Irish presence is an important factor in building trust and credibility with your target customer, then having a '.ie' TLD is important.
ThinkBusiness.ie

## Availability

As of June 2021, there were over 320,000 **.ie** domain names registered – compared to over 168 million .com and .net domain names.[12] So, you have a greater chance of your preferred domain name being available as a **.ie** top-level domain.

'Why would I have anything else apart from a .ie address since I make my product here (in Ireland).'

Christina Sanne, designer and founder of Red Rufus handmade sock toys, www.redrufus.ie

## Trust and security

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. This means that consumers can have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. In addition, securing your **.ie** domain name protects your brand and your brand's identity online – a huge reassurance to both you and your customers.

Finally, country code TLDs such as **.ie** remain more popular than newer generic TLDs (gTLDs). A wide range of new gTLDs were introduced from 2013, but they have not gained traction with businesses since. Examples might be **abcflowers.irish**, **abcflowers.xyz**, **abcflowers. tech**, or **abcflowers.shop**. The reality is that most businesses still use the tried and tested TLDs and this means that consumers will follow that trend – buying and trusting sites with TLDs.

For more advice on choosing or managing your **.ie** domain name, contact one of our accredited .ie Registrars at: **www.weare.ie/accredited-registrar-list.**

Our .IE Consumer Trust research reveals there is an overwhelming consumer preference (77%) to shop on .ie websites over a .com or other domains.

[10] Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

[11] Tourism Ireland

[12] Versign Blog

# Unlock the power of the internet with a trusted Irish .ie online identity

## It's uniquely Irish

The official Internet country code for Ireland is **.ie** and is the only online address that is Irish. A **.ie** tells the global community that you are Irish and tells the Irish community that you are local. You can even register an Irish language name if required, fadas and all.

## It's more likely to be available

There is a wider choice of available **.ie** domain names compared to .com, as significantly more of those names are already registered.

## It lets your customers find you online

**.ie** addresses rank higher than .com addresses on Irish based search engines like Google.ie. Irish consumers are more likely to click on local website addresses.

## It's trusted

Every **.ie** applicant's identity is checked and validated at the point of registration. Consumers will have confidence in your business as **.ie** is a well-established and trusted domain. 77% of Irish consumers prefer a **.ie** website when buying online, instead of a .com.[2]

## It's the preferred online address for business in Ireland

91% of Irish consumers associate **.ie** websites with Irish businesses over other websites like .com.[2] The **.ie** domain accounts for the majority of hosted domains in Ireland.[6]

## It protects your brand

Securing your **.ie** online address strengthens your brand and protects your online identity. All **.ie** domains are registered on a first-come, first-served basis.

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**Email** marketing@weare.ie
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**www.weare.ie**

.ie We are Ireland online