



How to Choose a Nonprofit Domain Name

Make it easy for people to find you on the Internet.

By Ian Robert Anderson

Your domain name is what people use to find your nonprofit on the Internet. If you choose a bad name, you're making it extremely difficult for people to remember and find you. Re-evaluate your domain name with these tips.

What Makes a Good Domain Name?

Determining your domain name is a crucial decision. Good domain names all have a few things in common:

Short Is Best

As a rule of thumb, a good charity domain name shouldn't be more than 30 characters. A domain name like www.chicagocatshelter.org is a perfect size. As always, the shorter the name, the easier it is to remember.

Describe Your Organization

A perfect domain name should describe what you do and where you do it. Here are a few examples of domain names that do just that (fake nonprofits):

Imagine someone is seeing your domain name on a billboard while driving 60 miles per hour.

www.utahbirds.org
www.savejonesbay.net
www.floridamanateerescue.org
www.helptallmanpark.net

Pick a Domain Name Extension

The .org domain name extension is used primarily for nonprofits. Another acceptable extension for nonprofits is .net. The .com extension is used mainly by for-profit organizations but can be used if the .org or .net extensions aren't available. There are no laws that say you have to use a certain extension for your nonprofit Web site.¹

Make It Memorable

Your domain name should be easy and memorable. Something like www.chicagocatshelter.org is simple to remember and instantly communicates where you are and what you do.

When choosing your domain name, imagine someone is seeing it on a billboard while driving 60 miles per hour. You have only a couple of seconds, so make it count. Also, when people are talking about your charity, your domain name should not need explanation. Someone should be able to tell your name to someone else without having to repeat it.

Here's a test. Which domain name is easier to remember?:

www.tampacares.org

OR

www.100best-free-web-space.com/FL-Users/TampaNonprofit%09.html

The answer is easy; www.tampacares.org is a lot easier to remember and communicate to people.

You have only a couple of seconds, so make it count.

Is the Name Available?

No matter how good the domain name is, you can't use it if someone else owns it. To find out if the domain name you want is available, you can visit www.godaddy.com, type your desired domain name in the search box, and hit the "GO!" button. This will query the domain name and let you know if it's available or not. You can also buy your nonprofit domain name at GoDaddy.

BONUS TIP: If you have brainstormed a lot of domain names and want to see which ones are available, you can use the "Bulk Register" feature in GoDaddy to query

Stay away from negative words such as dying, death, murder, or toxic in your domain name.

them all at the same time. You can query up to 500 domain name choices at once.

What Makes a Good Web Site?

Now that you have a great domain name, be sure your Web site is equally memorable. Your Web site should educate the public about who you are and what you do.

Your site should also be able to accept donations to your organization, process online ticket sales to your charitable events, and allow people to join and renew their memberships. A memorable Web site, along with a good domain

Bad to Good 501(c)(3) Domain Names

Below are a few fake charity domain names with better domain name alternatives. Use these examples to help evaluate your (good and bad) domain name choices:

www.protectthetexasblackspotredhawk.org

Much too long. People will have a hard time remembering all of that. Use something like this instead: www.texashawkprotection.org

www.blackmanateesaredying.org

Stay away from negative words such as dying, death, murder, or toxic in your domain name. Instead, give it a positive spin: www.perfectmanatees.org

www.donatetothetoxicchildren.net

Don't beg for funds in your domain name, and don't use ambiguous words like "sick," which mean different things to different people. "Sick" could mean "brain cancer" to some people and "runny nose" to others. Also, it might help if the location of these sick children were in the domain name. Here's a better choice:

www.helpbostonsfuture.org

Don't beg for funds in your domain name, and don't use ambiguous words like "sick."

name, can be one of your organization's most effective tools.² ■

Footnotes

¹Although your domain name doesn't need to end in .org, people are more likely to trust your organization if it does. So if you're able to obtain a dot.org site, take care not to let it expire. See "Protect Your Dot-Org Name" in "First Alert," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (www.snpo.org).

²For more on building a memorable Web site, see these *Nonprofit World* articles at www.snpo.org: "Charity Begins on the Web: Tips to Enhance Online Fundraising" (Vol. 23, No. 4), "Fundraising on the Internet: Three Easy Strategies" (Vol. 17, No. 4), "Six Ways to Make Your Web Site Donor-Friendly" (Vol. 23, No. 6).

Ian Robert Anderson (info@clickitz.com is founder of Clickitz (www.clickitz.com), which offers a simple way for nonprofits to raise funds using the Internet. Clickitz gives nonprofits a complete Web store with thousands of digitally downloadable products (no packaging, no shipping, no credit card processing.) All nonprofits need do is direct traffic to their Clickitz Web store; with every sale, they receive a commission.

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