

2 MINUTE BRIEFING: CHOOSING THE BEST DOMAIN NAME

Often overlooked in Search Engine Optimisation is the value in choosing a good domain name. We go to the trouble of choosing the best keywords and writing copy suitable for search engines search but forget that everything starts with the domain name.

The basic principle is that in an ideal world the domain name and the keyword should be one and the same. Thus 'Marketing Assistance Ltd' readily becomes marketing-assistance.co.uk giving us a better chance of achieving the number one position in Google. This is known as an Exact Match Domain or EMD. With luck, a fair wind and, more importantly, a consistent performance over time this will qualify your site for the accolade of site links (see box) which is Google's way of patting you on the head.

The downside of EMD is that this can box you in to a single keyword when you want to sell a wider range of products/services. But there are ways around this. For example you can use landing pages or microsites with different EMDs to expand you site's visibility beyond an overly restrictive domain name. There are now plenty of alternative domain extensions available for purchase beyond .com and .co.uk. and these can be directed to your main site through web forwarding or used as a micro site to direct traffic to your main site.

A second option is to think about adding a word to your domain name to differentiate your site from a similar domain name without losing the strength of the EMD. If we were not able to purchase marketing-assistance.co.uk back in the days when fewer extensions were available then we might have achieved almost the same success by using marketing-assistance-essex.co.uk. It's more of a mouthful but the search engines wouldn't mind. It is important as with all

things search engine related to put the keyword first: marketing-assistance-essex.co.uk is much more powerful than essex-marketing-assistance.co.uk.

Is the hyphen important? The short answer is no. The hyphen is ignored by the search engine but it does make it easier for us poor human beings to type in the exact URL.

Another way of getting around problems with acquiring the precise domain name that you lust after is to use single versions of plurals and plural versions of single. Google now uses a process called "stemming" that understands among other things plurality and "ing". If you add plurality to your domain name, you will rank almost as effectively as for the non-plural version. These same principles can be applied to your title tags, header tags, and meta tags.

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