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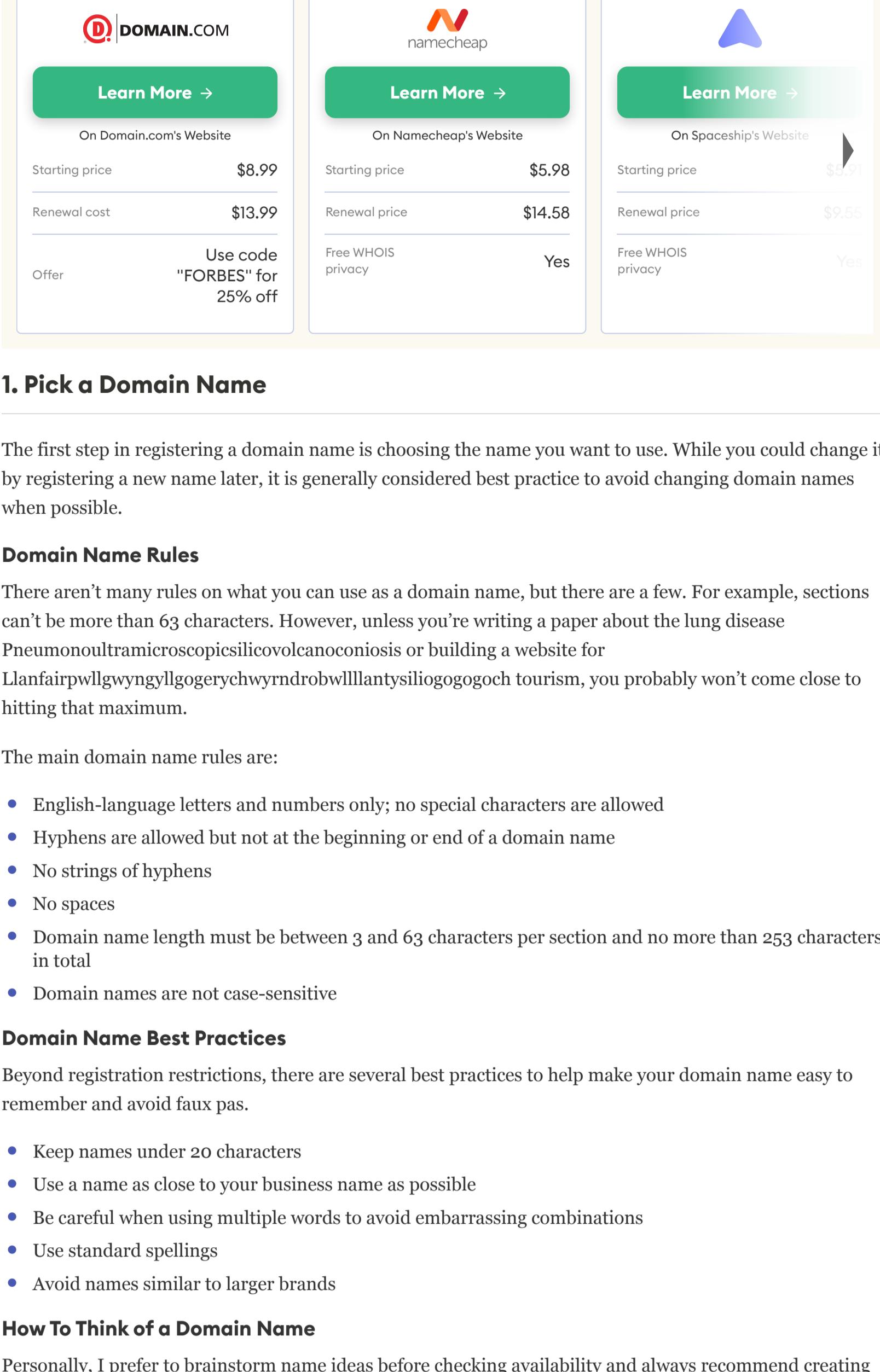
ADVISOR > BUSINESS

How To Register A Domain Name (2025 Guide)

Updated: Jan 31, 2025, 9:56am

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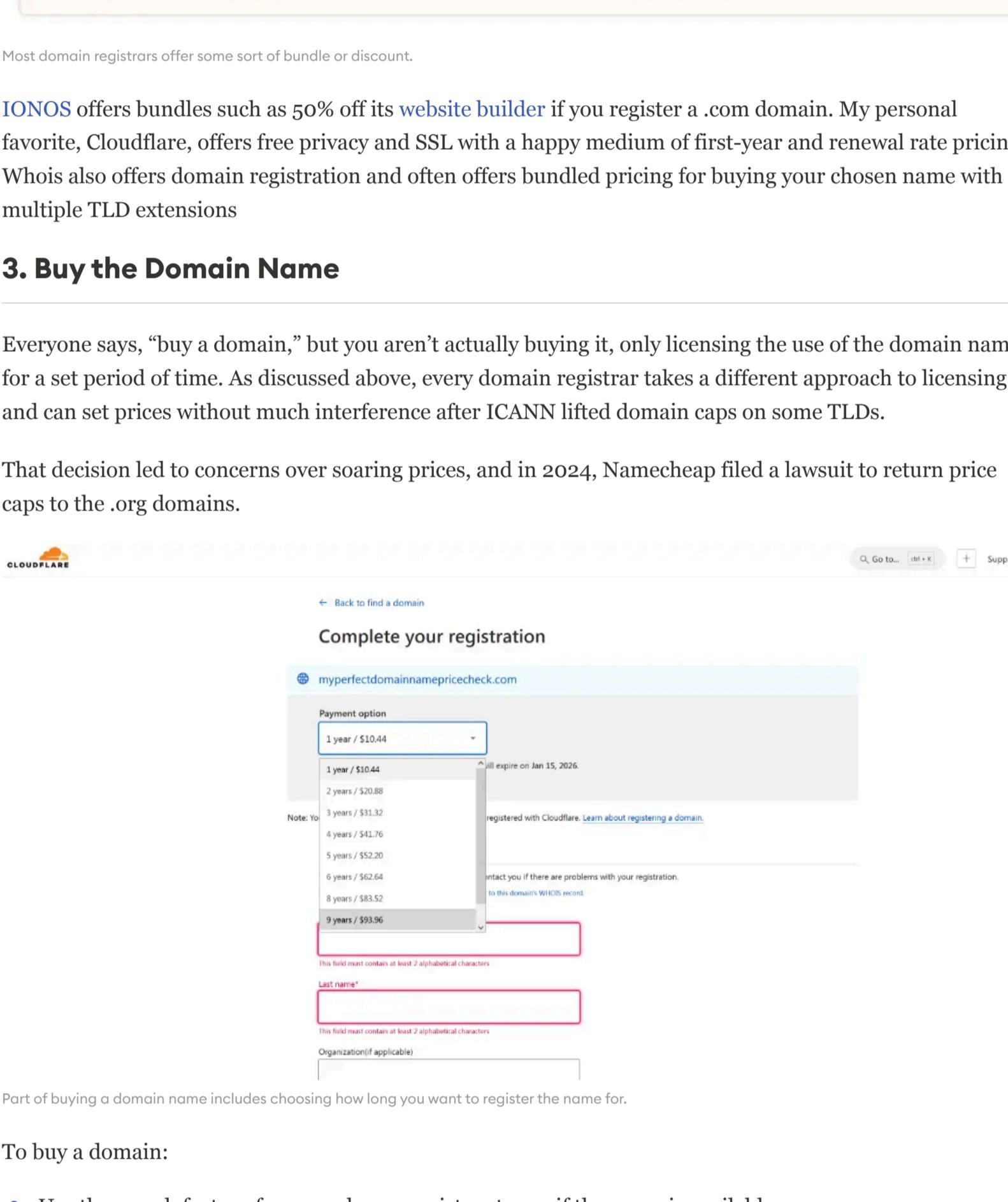
- 1. Pick a Domain Name
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- What To Do After Getting a Domain Name

A custom domain name is your address on the internet. It makes up part of the URL shown at the top of your browser window and lets visitors and customers find your website and contact you via email. It also gives you control over your online presence.

A lot of businesses opt to use social media instead of creating a business website. While social media profiles are free and don't require a domain name, they can leave your business at risk of being deactivated, being hidden by algorithms and tied to the content rules of the platform.

In some cases, businesses have lost millions of viewers through no fault of their own by only trusting social media accounts. Registering a custom domain to use as a permanent point of contact online protects your business and builds credibility. How to register a domain name is a straightforward process requiring minimal time and monetary investment.

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1. Pick a Domain Name

The first step in registering a domain name is choosing the name you want to use. While you could change it by registering a new name later, it is generally considered best practice to avoid changing domain names when possible.

Domain Name Rules

There aren't many rules on what you can use as a domain name, but there are a few. For example, sections can't be more than 63 characters. However, unless you're writing a paper about the lung disease Pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis or building a website for Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgerychwyrndrobwllantysiliogogoch tourism, you probably won't come close to hitting that maximum.

The main domain name rules are:

- English-language letters and numbers only; no special characters are allowed
- Hyphens are allowed but not at the beginning or end of a domain name
- No strings of hyphens
- No spaces
- Domain name length must be between 3 and 63 characters per section and no more than 253 characters in total
- Domain names are not case-sensitive

Domain Name Best Practices

Beyond registration restrictions, there are several best practices to help make your domain name easy to remember and avoid faux pas.

- Keep names under 20 characters
- Use a name as close to your business name as possible
- Be careful when using multiple words to avoid embarrassing combinations
- Use standard spellings
- Avoid names similar to larger brands

How To Think of a Domain Name

Personally, I prefer to brainstorm name ideas before checking availability and always recommend creating at least 5 or 6 possible names. That's because it's easy to get frustrated if your preferred name isn't available, and without that list of alternatives ready, that frustration often leads to creating a low-quality domain name just to get something live.

If you need help brainstorming names, most registrars have domain name generators available to help out. However, many of those check availability at the same time and can start that spiral of trying to find anything available instead of really picking names that are a good fit for your business.

To avoid that, I prefer to use a stand-alone system, such as Perplexity.ai, to ask for name suggestions. While many are copied from domain name idea articles, they often give me ideas of where to start.

When picking your list of name alternatives, remember that some terms usually cost more if they are part of the name such as SaaS or tech.

What Is the Best Domain Extension?

A domain extension is the part after the dot. For example, .com and .org are domain extensions. Domain extensions are also called top-level domains (TLDs). There are hundreds of TLDs available, but most domain registrars only carry a fraction of that number.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) manages what TLDs are available (outside of country code TLDs .uk) and then turns over the management of different domains to other organizations. Registrars then buy the rights to sell use of TLDs to others.

Some TLDs are restricted from public use. For example, you can't register a domain name ending in .mil, .gov or .arpa. Some TLDs are restricted by organizations as well, such as .realtor only being available to licensed realtors.

The best domain extension will depend on your business. More widely known TLDs, such as .com, .info and .net, are trusted by the general public, but niche TLDs, such as .tech for technical businesses, .shop for e-commerce, .music for bands and .art for creative businesses, are gaining popularity quickly.

Some domains cost more than others as well. For example, .tech TLDs generally cost more than .com domains.

2. Pick a Domain Name Registrar

Where you buy your domain matters. For example, if you already have a web host in mind, your hosting package might offer a first-year free domain name. However, depending on the host, it might register the domain in its name, not yours, so you must check the terms and conditions carefully.

Likewise, you need to look for an ICANN-accredited registrar to ensure you are really buying the domain name.

When choosing a registrar, I like to price-check several to see what is included in the registration, what the renewal fees are and what the transfer fees are in case I ever move the domain to a new registrar.

Be aware that not all registrars offer all TLDs, and some charge extra for SSLs or domain privacy with Whois.

Who Is the Best Domain Name Registrar?

The best domain registrars have a great reputation and often include extras like SSLs and domain privacy with Whois at no extra cost, but each has a different pricing philosophy. Namecheap has a strong reputation for low-cost domains but charges extra for SSLs and "premium" DNS. Dynadot offers a great introductory rate with free domain privacy but often has inflated renewal rates.

together.

Most domain registrars offer some sort of bundle or discount.

IONOS offers bundles such as 50% off its website builder if you register a .com domain. My personal favorite, Cloudflare, offers free privacy and SSL with a happy medium of first-year and renewal rate pricing. Whois also offers domain registration and often offers bundled pricing for buying your chosen name with multiple TLD extensions.

3. Buy the Domain Name

Everyone says, "buy a domain," but you aren't actually buying it, only licensing the use of the domain name for a set period of time. As discussed above, every domain registrar takes a different approach to licensing and can set prices without much interference after ICANN lifted domain caps on some TLDs.

That decision led to concerns over soaring prices, and in 2024, Namecheap filed a lawsuit to return price caps to the .org domains.

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Uses of Custom Domain Names

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Custom domain name helps you create a unified contact point across all media.

If you want a business email, you'll also need to adjust your mail settings by changing the MX, SPF and DKIM settings. Again, while that sounds really technical, most email hosts will complete the process for you automatically.

Finally, add your new domain URL to all of your business media such as letterhead, email signatures and social media profiles, including your Google Business profile. Once all that is done, you'll have a unified brand point of contact across media.

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