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RULER OF YOUR DOMAIN

HOW TO FIND A URL WHEN ALL THE GOOD ONES ARE TAKEN

by Judy Artunian

Betsy Green and her colleagues spent three frustrating months trying to come up with a domain name for their new business, which matches advertising sellers with buyers. The stakes were especially high for the Culver City, Calif.-based start-up because as a Web-based enterprise, its domain name had to do double duty as the company name. "It was a bear," recalls Green, the company's CEO. "We were very worried about it."

How could something as basic as choosing a URL cause a small-business owner so much stress? Because with more than 50 million dot-com names already registered, many word and letter combinations are already taken. Green herself finally came up with a winner while scratching out ideas at her kitchen table: Mediamatchmaker.com.

Media Matchmaker's naming headache is becoming commonplace. The search for the right domain name has given rise to names with creative spellings such as Flickr.com and new words like Technorati.com. But according to Bill Lozito, president of Strategic Name Development, odd names won't work for everyone. "These businesses reach consumers directly and build their market via word of mouth so they can take chances with their names," Lozito says.

If you can't make your company's name work as the URL, then stick to one that's easy to remember and spell. Short names are best, but don't get too hung up on length. Your URL should describe your product or service in some way, without being too similar to other domain names. To find out which domain names are already registered, search on a domain-name registration company's Web site, such as GoDaddy.com.

There are, of course, alternatives to ".com." Some companies go with ".net," which has more available word and letter combinations. But others complain that .net isn't as memorable and it doesn't have the prestige of .com. As Lozito says, "It tends to suggest you're late to the party."

Yet another option is to purchase a dot-com domain name that has already been registered by someone else. But buying a pre-owned name can be pricey. On GreatDomains.com, for example, some dot-com names start at \$10,000. Green says she

found some appealing domain names for sale during her search, but she didn't contact the owners.

"We were a start-up at the time," she says. "No matter what they charged, we couldn't have afforded it."

Mediamatchmaker.com wasn't the short, snappy domain name that Green and her co-workers had been aiming for, but it describes the company. And perhaps just as important, it was available.

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