

## **Why startups should watch out when registering a domain name**

*Hong Kong Internet Registration Corporation Limited*

Startup has been a major global trend as well as one of the key drivers to diversify Hong Kong's economy. According to the figures released by InvestHK in 2015, a total of 1,558 startups were registered in Hong Kong, representing a Y-o-Y increase of 46% and creating approximately 3,700 job opportunities.

Apart from a sound and innovative idea as well as a sustainable business model, it is crucial for startups to register unique and easy-to-remember company names and domain names. A domain name represents a company's online brand, placing a direct influence on customer's impression of its brand identity. Thus, registering a proper and easy-to-remember domain name is as important as getting business registration or launching the right products and services to target audiences. Whilst massive information about available domain names can be found online, startups might be overwhelmed and ignore the following facts on domain name registration, resulting in an unavoidable business loss.

It is recommended that startups should refer to the tips below to register, manage and protect their domain names:

### **(1) Get a domain name with keyword or location that can represent your brand identity**

Domain name is commonly known as a company's name online. Making your domain name short and catchy would leave your customers a good impression on your brand. As such startups should also consider specifying the designated area in domain names, e.g. "diamondcab.com.hk", to remind the geographic location of your business operation in Hong Kong or local based customers. Furthermore, using keywords to relate your business or nature of service to your domain name, e.g. "hko.gov.hk", can increase the visibility of your website and its search engine ranking.

### **(2) Register yourself as the owner of the domain name**

Website is a company's valuable asset. Business owners should register themselves as the owners of domain names to ensure they have the right to administer the website under their own names and ownership. Needless to say, businesses need to provide real and accurate information when registering a domain name, such as valid company names and business registration as well as the correct email addresses, in order to facilitate ongoing effective communications with your domain name registered. As in the case for all passwords, the admin password for your domain name should be kept securely to prevent illegal and unauthorized use by illegitimate third parties.

### **(3) Timely renewal of your domain name**

Timely renewal of your company's domain name should never be a miss. If you do not renew your domain name in a timely manner, you will not only lose the administration rights but also customer contacts as they are no longer able to contact you via your website. In order to retain your domain name for a longer period, perhaps you should consider registering your domain names for multiple years, or set up domain auto-renewal alert, to help minimize risks on late renewal and related business loss.

**(4) Avoid using dashes, abbreviations or numbers in your domain names**

Domain names play a key role in your company image and brand identity. Startups are encouraged to use catchy words for your domain names, which should be relevant to your businesses and easy-to-remember from users' point of views, e.g. "gogovan.com.hk". Meanwhile, businesses should avoid using dashes, abbreviations or numbers in domain names as users will find it hard to remember and might get confused with other similar domains.

**(5) Focus on .hk domain name**

When companies search for available domain name options, they may be inundated with offers to purchase other non .hk domain names. However, the best choice for startups targeting the Hong Kong market is to get ".com.hk/.公司.香港" (.com.hk Chinese suffix) or ".hk/.香港" (.hk Chinese suffix), as they are commonly known as domains for Hong Kong companies. According to the registration statistics published by HKIRC in August 2016, the total number of registration has reached 299,532 for .hk/.香港 and 128,526 for .com.hk/.公司.香港, accounting for 68% and 29% of the total domain name registrations respectively. Most importantly, .hk is supported by a 24-hour service hotline for the local community.

**(6) Learn more about legal risks related to domain names before registration**

Even when a desired domain name is available for registration, businesses may have to face potential risks if it is too similar to another company's domain name or trademark. Startups should always check thoroughly before registering a domain name or seek legal advice when in doubt to avoid unnecessary legal risks.