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Domain Names

A Field Manual

Find, value, and acquire great domain names. Naming frameworks, a valuation method, the acquisition map, a negotiation playbook, and Web3 naming.

7	14	50+	28
Naming frameworks	Parts total	Tools listed	Glossary terms

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START HERE

Your domain is the first thing they forget, or the first thing they remember.

A domain is not an address. It is the first second of every interaction with your brand. It decides whether someone types you in from memory, whether an investor trusts the link, and whether your name survives a conversation. Most founders spend weeks on a logo and five minutes on the name. This manual inverts that.

The goal is not to find a clever name. It is to find a name that is short, spellable, ownable, and available, or acquirable at a price that makes sense. Everything in here is a system for getting there without burning months or overpaying.

75%
of users judge credibility by the domain

12
characters or fewer is the sweet spot

3x
recall gap between great and average names

0
hyphens, ideally ever

How to use this manual

- Skim Parts 1 to 3 to learn how names work and how to generate good ones.
- Use Part 4 (valuation) before you negotiate, so you never overpay.
- Follow Part 5 (acquisition) to pick the right path for your situation.
- Use Part 6 (negotiation playbook) to actually close the deal.
- Check Part 10 (legal) before you buy, and Part 11 (setup) right after.
- Keep the scorecard criteria and glossary open while you work.

TIP

Stop falling in love with a single name. Build a shortlist of five to eight candidates across different naming styles. Attachment to one name is how people overpay.

MISTAKES THAT KILL A NAME

- Adding a hyphen to dodge availability.
- Suffixing with "app" or "hq" out of laziness.
- Falling for a TLD that signals spam.
- Ignoring the radio test.
- Picking a name you cannot trademark.

MOVES THAT WIN

- Generate 30 raw names, cull to 8.
- Score every candidate on the 10-point card.
- Value before you ever email an owner.
- Run outreach as a sequence, not one email.
- Close with escrow, every time.

PART 1

The anatomy of a great domain

Great names share a small set of traits. The scorecard in Part 8 scores against these. Understand the principle behind each before you brainstorm, and your shortlist will be twice as strong.

The eight traits

1. Short. Under 12 characters, ideally under 8. Every extra character is friction in typing and recall.
2. Spellable when heard. If you have to spell it out at a dinner, it is broken. The "radio test" is real.
3. Memorable after one hearing. If it does not stick, neither will your brand.
4. Pronounceable. If your mouth trips, so will your users. Say it out loud, ten times fast.
5. Relevant without being descriptive. It should feel on-category without boxing you in.
6. No hyphens or numbers. They read as spam, kill recall, and bleed traffic to the un-hyphenated version.
7. Brandable, not generic. "bestcryptowallets.com" is SEO bait, not a brand. You want a name you can own.
8. Defensible. Ownable as a trademark, available as handles, and ideally acquirable as the .com.

> **The radio test**
> Read your candidate name aloud to someone, once. Wait an hour. Ask them to type it. If they cannot, kill it. This single test eliminates 80% of bad names.

Good vs bad, side by side

Name	Verdict	Why
Stripe.com	Great	Short, brandable, spellable, ownable, no meaning clash.
get-best-crypto-wallets.com	Bad	Hyphens, generic, descriptive, unownable, spammy.
Notion.so	Good	Two syllables, memorable, TLD used as a domain hack.
Xyzzlio.io	Weak	Hard to spell, hard to say, only memorable because it is strange.
midnight.com	Great	Real word, evocative, brandable, premium but acquirable.
midnight-labs-llc.com	Bad	Cluttered, legal-sounding, forgettable.
OpenSea.com	Great	Compound of two common words, vivid, category-defining.
buy-cheap-nfts-now.com	Bad	Keyword spam, no brand, zero recall, blacklist risk.

INSTANT KILL-FLAGS

- Contains a hyphen or numeral.
- Misspells a real word on purpose (kwik, xpress).
- Longer than 15 characters.
- Uses a TLD clients will not click (.click, .bid).
- Matches a live trademark you do not own.

GREEN FLAGS

- Passes the radio test first try.
- Available as @handle on X and GitHub.
- Has a clean .com or strong alt TLD.
- Evokes the category without naming it.
- Short enough to fit on an app icon.

PART 2

Six naming frameworks

Most bad names come from brainstorming without a frame. Use these six frameworks as lenses. Generate two or three candidates per frame, then pick the strongest across all of them.

1. The compound (two-part rule)

Two recognizable words joined. The most reliable frame for startups and Web3 projects. Keep both words concrete and easy to spell.

Examples: Snap+Chat, Bit+Trex, Chain+Link, Open+Sea, Block+base (compound the category verb).

2. The evocative / brandable

A real or invented word that evokes a feeling, not a function. Hardest to find, highest brand value, best for trademarking.

Examples: Stripe, Apple, Monzo, Aave, Uniswap. Often short, abstract, ownable.

3. The descriptive

Says exactly what you do. Easy to find via search, hard to own as a brand. Use only if SEO traffic is the strategy.

Examples: thedomainbook.com, cheapflightstoken.com. Cheap, available, weak brand equity.

4. The metaphor

A word from another domain that maps to your value. Memorable because it borrows existing meaning.

Examples: Amazon (vastness), Oracle (prophecy), SushiSwap (fun, food), Lido (a place to stake, leisurely).

5. The foreign / classical root

Latin, Greek, or another language root that sounds clean and has no negative meaning in English. Premium feel, often available.

Examples: Novo (new), Lux (light), Vera (true), Koi (a play on koi fish / Kyber).

6. The domain hack

Use the TLD as part of the word. Memorable and cheap, but harder to type and weaker for email.

Examples: notio.so, da.block, frame.it, brightlo.ok. Pair with the .com if you can.

7. The real-word tweak

A deliberate, minimal misspelling or truncation of a real word. Risky (spellability), but it can build a brandable, trademarkable, available name from a taken root.

Examples: Google (googol), Digg (dig), Tumblr (tumbler), Flickr (flicker), Lyft (lift). Use sparingly; the radio test must still pass.

Framework picker

If your priority is...	Use framework	Tradeoff
Maximum brand value	2 Evocative	Hard to find, costs more.
Speed + availability	1 Compound	Common, less distinctive.
SEO / category traffic	3 Descriptive	Weak brand, hard to own.
Memorability + story	4 Metaphor	Needs strong marketing.
Premium feel + available	5 Foreign root	Check meaning in English.
Cheap + clever	6 Domain hack	Harder to say + type.

Ownable twist on a taken word

7 Real-word tweak

Fails radio test if too far.

Web3 naming note

For protocols, DAOs, and token projects, the compound (1) and metaphor (4) win because they read as credible to investors and survive a category shift. Avoid numeric or token-ticker names (pay420, eth99), they age badly and look like scams.

PART 3

Brainstorming methods that actually produce names

Do not stare at a blank page. Run two or three of these methods in sequence and you will have a shortlist in under an hour.

Method A: Keyword matrix

List your category keywords down the left, modifier words across the top. Cross-pollinate every cell.

	get	go	my	lab	base
chain	getchain	gochain	mychain	chainlab	chainbase
node	getnode	gonode	mynode	nodelab	nodebase
mint	getmint	gomint	mymint	mintlab	mintbase

Method B: Affixes

Take a root word and ap

Suffixes: -ify, -ly, -io, -able, -h

Examples: Notion, Linear, Ve

Method C: Blend / portma nteau

Fuse two words into one

Examples: Instagram (instan

Method D: Trans late

Run your keyword throug clean, and positive in En

The master affix list

Keep this open while you

PREFIXES (FRONT)

- get, go, use, my, hello, on, in, to, try, now, be, hi, the

SUFFIXES (END)

- ly, ify, lab, hub, base, stack, flow, os, x, io, able, fy, ping, deck, kit

> **TIP**
> Cap each session at 45 minutes. Set a target of 30 raw candidates, then cull ruthlessly to 8 using the scorecard in Part 8.

Worked example: brainstorming a Web3 analytics name

Say you are naming a platform that tracks DeFi portfolios across chains. Each method produces different candidates:

Method	Input	Candidates
Keyword matrix	chain, node, mint, yield, vault × get, go, lab, base	GetChain, NodeLab, YieldBase, MintVault
Affix blend	track + ify, ly, hub	Trackify, Trackly, TrackHub
Portmanteau	portfolio + intelligence	Portelligence, FolioGen
Foreign root	Latin: specula, nexus	Specula, Nexus
Metaphor	compass, radar, beacon, prism	ChainPrism, YieldBeacon

Each row is a complete naming method applied to the same bri

PART 4

Choose the right TLD

The extension changes trust, cost, and perception. The .com is still the default for anything brand-led. Alternatives win when the .com is out of budget or when the TLD is part of the name (a hack).

TLD	Type	Cost / yr	Perception	Best for
.com	gTLD	$9-12	Highest trust	Default for brands
.io	ccTLD	$30-50	Tech, modern	Startups, dev tools
.co	ccTLD	$10-30	Clean .com alt	Companies, short names
.ai	ccTLD	$50-100	Premium, AI	AI products
.app / .dev	gTLD	$10-20	Software	Apps, developer tools
.so	ccTLD	$20-40	Tech, indie	Small SaaS, indie
.gg	ccTLD	$20-40	Gaming	Web3 games, guilds
.xyz	gTLD	$1-10	Generic, cheap	Web3, experiments
.network	gTLD	$15-25	Descriptive	Networks, infra
.dao	gTLD	$30-60	Web3 native	DAOs, governance
.money	gTLD	$20-40	Descriptive	Fintech, DeFi
.studio	gTLD	$20-40	Creative	Agencies, creators
.org	gTLD	$8-12	Mission	Foundations, communities
.eth (ENS)	Web3	$5+/yr	On-chain identity	Web3 wallets, profiles

How to decide

1. If the .com is acquirable under budget, take it. Always.
2. If not, use a clean ccTLD (.io, .co, .so) that matches your vibe.
3. If the TLD is part of the word (domain hack), it can outperform a forgettable .com.
4. For Web3 native products, an ENS (.eth) name alongside the web2 domain is now expected.

TLDS THAT SIGNAL SPAM (AVOID FOR BRANDS)

- .click, .bid, .icu, .cam
- .rest, .date, .quest
- Anything on heavy discount buckets
- ccTLDs repurposed for scams
- New gTLDs with low adoption

TLDS THAT READ AS CREDIBLE

- .com (always)
- .io, .co, .so (tech)
- .ai (premium, if it fits)
- .app, .dev (software)
- .org (mission / community)

ENS / Web3 naming, briefly

An ENS name (yourname.eth) resolves to a wallet instead of a website. For Web3 projects, grab the matching .eth early so on-chain identity and the web2 brand line up. Register at app.ens.domains; keep the registration years funded or the name expires and someone else takes it.

PART 5

Value a domain before you negotiate

Domains have no intrinsic price. Their value is a function of length, TLD, comparables, brandability, and how badly you want it. Use this method to set a ceiling before you ever email an owner.

The five value drivers

1. Length. Shorter is exponentially more valuable. Two-letter .coms sell for seven figures; 15-character names rarely sell at all.
2. TLD. A .com is worth roughly 5 to 20x the same name on .io or .co.
3. Comparables. Real sales of similar names (use NameBio) are the only objective anchor.
4. Brandability. A real word or clean compound beats a generic phrase by 10x.
5. Commercial intent. Names containing high-value keywords (pay, money, trade) command more.

Pricing tiers (rough market ranges)

Tier	Typical name	Price range
Hand-reg	Long / obscure .com or alt TLD	$10 - $50
Budget	Decent alt TLD, weak .com	$50 - $500
Fair	Clean .io/.co, decent compound .com	$500 - $3,000
Premium	Short, brandable .com, real word	$3,000 - $25,000
Tier 1	One-word / two-letter .com	$25,000 - $500,000+

TIP

Set a max budget before you reach out. Write it down. If the negotiation crosses it, walk. The most expensive mistakes come from falling in love mid-negotiation.

Worked example: valuing a name

Say you want brightnode.com. On NameBio, similar two-word compounds with "node" sold at $1,800, $2,400, $3,100, and $1,200 over the past year. Median around $2,000. It is a clean .com, brandable, category-relevant. Reasonable value range: $1,500 to $3,000. Set your walk-away ceiling at $2,500 (the top of fair, under your max). Open outreach at $1,200, anchor to comps, settle near $1,800 to $2,200.

SIGNS YOU SHOULD WALK AWAY

- Owner wants 5x+ your comparable ceiling.
- No comparable sales exist anywhere.
- It fails two or more scorecard criteria.
- A live trademark blocks it.
- You are negotiating against yourself.

SIGNS THE PRICE IS FAIR

- It sits inside your comps median.
- Clean .com, real-word or strong compound.
- Owner paid to hold it for years.
- It scores 42+ on the scorecard.
- You can monetize it within a quarter.

PART 6

Five ways to acquire a domain

Once you know what you want and what it is worth, pick the path. Each has a different cost, speed, and effort profile.

Path	Cost	Speed	When to use
Register	$10-50	Instant	The name is available unregistered.
Marketplace	$1K-50K+	Days	Listed on Sedo / Afternic / Atom. Buy now.
Backorder	$0-100	Weeks	Domain is expiring. Bet on the catch.
Reach out	$500-10K	Weeks-months	Taken but parked. Most cost-effective for premiums.
Broker	$2K+ fee	Weeks	High value, anonymous, or you want a pro negotiator.

The decision flow

- Available to register? Register now. Done.
- Listed on a marketplace? Buy or make an offer via the platform, use escrow.
- Expiring soon? Backorder on multiple catchers.
- Parked / unused? Reach out to the owner directly (Part 7).
- Owner is unreachable or asking huge money? Use a broker for anonymity and leverage.

TACTICS PER PATH

- Register: bulk-search variants to snag a free one.
- Marketplace: make an offer at 60% of ask, escrow.
- Backorder: place on 2-3 catchers, pay only on win.
- Reach out: be a human, keep it to 2 short emails.
- Broker: let them hide your identity + budget.

RISKS TO AVOID

- Wiring money outside escrow, ever.
- Revealing your startup name or funding.
- Bidding against yourself in auctions.
- Forgetting to renew a backorder bet.
- Buying a name encumbered by a trademark.

Backorder strategy

When a name is expiring, place backorders on two or three catchers (SnapNames, GoDaddy Auctions, Park.io). You only pay the one that catches it. The drop happens on a predictable schedule, usually 75 days after expiry.

Auction strategy

Expired domain auctions are where most premium names under $5,000 change hands. The goal is not to win every auction — it is to win the ones where the final price stays inside your ceiling.

Set your ceiling before the auction opens

Research the domains estimated value using NameBio comps. Add 20% for the auction premium. Write your max bid down. Do not change it during the auction. Emotional bidding is the fastest way to overpay.

Bid timing tactics

- Early bidding (days before close): signals interest and invites competition. Avoid it.
- Proxy bidding: most platforms (GoDaddy, Namecheap) let you set a max bid once. Use this — the system bids for you up to your ceiling.
- Sniping (last 30 seconds): bid your max in the final seconds to deny competitors time to counter.
- Second-chance offers: if you lose, the winner may flip the name. Watch for post-auction outreach.

Multi-catcher strategy

When a domain expires, multiple services compete to register it first. Bet on more than one catcher:

- SnapNames: strongest for .com drops.
- GoDaddy Auctions: largest marketplace, highest catch rate for .com.
- Park.io: best for .io, .co, and newer gTLDs.
- Dynadot: good for budget domains with less competition.

You only pay the catcher that wins. If none catch it, the domain drops to hand-register at retail price.

Example: filled availability tracker

Domain	TLD	Status	Est. price	Path
brightnode	.com	Parked	$1,500-3,000	Outreach
vaultfolio	.io	Available	$30	Register
chainprism	.com	Premium (Sedo)	$2,500	Marketplace
nodebase	.co	Expiring soon	$15	Backorder

Status: Available / Premium / Take
shortlist. One will be yours.

PART 7

The negotiation playbook

Most owners never respond to a first email. The winners are the people who follow a sequence, stay professional, and never reveal urgency. This is the exact sequence.

The four-step outreach sequence

1. Qualify the owner. Use WHOIS, the parked page, and socials to learn who they are and whether they actually sell.
2. First contact, short and neutral. No brand story, no budget. Just ask if they would sell and invite a price.
3. Anchor low, calmly. When they name a number, counter at roughly 40 to 60% with a clean, polite rationale.
4. Close via escrow. Never wire direct. Use Escrow.com so funds release only when the domain transfers.

Email template: first contact (cold)

Subject: The domain [domain]

Hi [name],

I run a project that [domain] would be a strong fit for, and I wanted to ask whether you would consider selling it.

Email template: counter-offer

Subject: Re: The domain [domain]

Thanks for the quick reply. I appreciate it.

To be transparent, based on recent comparable sales I had a ceiling closer to $[your number]. I can do that today, with Escrow.com and cover the escrow fee.

[Your name]

Email template: the ghosting follow-up (day 7)

Subject: Re: The domain [domain]

Hi [name], circling back on this in case it slipped.

Still interested in [domain]. If $[number + 10%] works I can move on it this week via Escrow.com. No pressure either way.

[Your name]

The psychology of a domain deal

PRINCIPLES THAT MOVE PRICE DOWN

- Anchoring: name a number first only if it is low.
- Scarcity of attention: 2 emails max, then silence.
- Walk-away power: a real budget ceiling you will keep.
- Time: parking fees soften sellers over weeks.
- Neutrality: never show you need this name.

MOVES THAT BACKFIRE

- Naming your funded startup.
- Sending a 4-paragraph pitch.
- Bidding against yourself upward.
- Threatening legal action (UDRP).
- Using a free email for outreach.

Do and do not

- Do use a personal email, not a template-looking one. Reply rates drop with marketing-speak.
- Do follow up once after 5 to 7 days. Most deals close on the second touch.
- Do reveal budget only after they name a number. He who names first usually loses.
- Do not mention your startup name, funding, or launch date. That signals urgency and raises the price.
- Do not send a long email. Two short paragraphs out-close a pitch every time.
- Do not wire directly. Escrow only, always.

TIP

If an owner ghosts, set a calendar reminder for 30 days and re-ping with a slightly higher number. Parking fees make sellers soften over time.

Example: negotiation walkthrough

You target brightnode.com. Email the owner using the first-contact template. They reply: "Looking for $4,500." You counter at $1,800, citing NameBio comps (median $2,000 for similar compounds). They drop to $2,800. You respond at $2,200, noting your walk-away is $2,500. They counter at $2,400. You accept and close via Escrow.com. Four emails over 11 days.

The owner was motivated — the domain had been parked for four years with no inbound offers. Staying inside your ceiling is what made the deal work, not a clever opener.

PART 8

How to evaluate a domain name

Score each candidate against these 10 criteria. Each one tells you something different about whether the name is worth pursuing as a brandable, ownable asset.

The 10 evaluation criteria

#	Criterion	What to look for	Score guide
01	Length	Under 12 characters. Under 8 is premium.	0 = 15+, 5 = <7
02	Spellable	Say it once. Can they type it later?	0 = must spell, 5 = obvious
03	Memorable	Does it stick after one hearing?	0 = forgettable, 5 = sticky
04	Pronounceable	Any tongue trips reading aloud?	0 = mouthful, 5 = effortless
05	Brandable	Brand or description?	0 = generic, 5 = ownable name
06	Relevant	Fits category without boxing in.	0 = irrelevant, 5 = perfect fit
07	No clutter	Hyphens, numbers, awkward combos?	0 = cluttered, 5 = clean
08	TLD quality	.com or credible ccTLD/gTLD?	0 = spam TLD, 5 = .com
09	Ownable	Trademark conflict? Handles free?	0 = blocked, 5 = all clear
10	Budget fit	Acquirable within your real ceiling.	0 = over budget, 5 = under

How to weight the score

Length and Spellable matter most. If either scores under 3, the name is likely unfixable no matter the total. Treat Ownable as a hard gate: a name you cannot trademark is worth 0, regardless of brand appeal.

Worked example: scoring brightnode.com

Criterion	Score	Why
Length (10 chars)	4	Good, not great. Prefer under 8.
Spellable	5	Obvious spelling, zero ambiguity.
Memorable	4	Strong compound, sticks well.
Pronounceable	5	Two clean syllables, effortless.
Brandable	4	Clean compound, category-neutral.
Relevant	4	"Node" suggests tech broadly.

No clutter	5	No hyphens, numbers, odd combos.

TLD quality

.com is the gold standard.

Ownable

Trademark check recommended.

Budget fit

Under $2,500, inside ceiling.

Total: 43/50. Verdict: buy within your ceiling. This name is worth negotiating for.

PART 9

Managing your domain portfolio

A domain you forget to renew becomes someones domain. Track every name, set auto-renew on everything, and review quarterly.

Example: portfolio tracker

Domain	Registrar	Expiry	Auto-renew	Cost/yr
dablock.com	Cloudflare	2027-11-15	ON	$9.58
brightnode.com	Porkbun	2026-08-22	ON	$10.99
vaultfolio.io	Namecheap	2026-03-01	ON	$32.50

Renewal strategy

- Enable auto-renew on every domain. Missed renewals go to auction and cost 10x the original price.
- Keep a backup payment method on file. Expiring cards have lost more domains than any other cause.
- Review your portfolio quarterly. Drop names that no longer serve a purpose.
- Transfer valuable names to a single registrar for a consolidated renewal cycle.
- Set a calendar reminder 30 days before any expiry that lacks auto-renew.

If you own more than ten domains, consider a portfolio management tool like DomainPunch or TLD-List to track renewals at scale.

Domain health checklist

AUTO-RENEW HYGIENE

- Auto-renew ON for every domain.
- Backup card on file, not expiring.
- Registrar email current + monitored.
- Transfer lock on (unless transferring).
- DNS / nameservers documented.

SECURITY

- Registrar 2FA enabled.
- WHOIS privacy ON where offered.
- SSL auto-renewing.
- Email forwarding tested yearly.
- Recovery codes stored offline.

PART 10

How to sell a domain you own

You registered a name you do not need, bought one that no longer fits, or built a portfolio you want to exit. Selling is the other half of the domain lifecycle.

The three selling paths

Path	Best for	Effort	Typical outcome
List on marketplace	Clean, brandable names	Low	Passive. 10-20% platform fee. May take months.
Outreach to buyers	Names tied to specific companies	Medium	Higher price. Faster close. You do the legwork.
Auction the name	Premium names with known demand	Medium	Market-driven price. Fast. Risk of no bids.

Pricing your domain to sell

- Check NameBio for comparable sales. Price within the range, not above it.
- List at 20-30% above your floor so you have room to negotiate down.
- If the domain has been listed 6+ months with no offers, the price is too high or the name is too weak.
- Premium names ($3,000+) need outbound outreach. Nobody finds a $5K name browsing a marketplace.

Marketplace listing tips

- Write a one-sentence description explaining why the name is valuable. Do not paste an appraisal number.
- Set a buy-it-now price AND accept offers. Offers below 50% of BIN are noise; ignore them.
- Renew the domain for at least one year before listing. Buyers avoid domains about to expire.
- Use Escrow.com or DAN.com for the transfer. Never release the domain before payment clears.

Outbound selling: the one-email reach-out

Subject: [domain] — available for purchase

Hi [name / team],

I noticed [target company] does [relevant thing]. I own [domain], which could be a strong fit for what you are building.

I am looking to sell it. If you are interested, I can share a price and we can close quickly via Escrow.com.

Thanks,
[Your name]

Three sentences. No appraisal, no story, no urgency. If they are interested, they will ask for the price. If they are not interested, no sentence count will change that.

PART 11

Legal, trademarks, and UDRP risk

A domain you cannot legally keep is worthless. Before you pay, confirm no live trademark blocks it, and that you are not walking into a dispute. This is a quick risk check, not legal advice.

The pre-buy legal checklist

- Search the USPTO TESS (US) and WIPO Global Brand (international) for the exact name and close variants.
- Check the Nice classes relevant to your product (most software is class 9 + 42).
- Search existing live websites using the name in your category.
- Confirm social handles are not actively trademark-claimed.
- If a mark exists in your class, treat the name as unusable, full stop.

UDRP, in one paragraph

UDRP (Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy) lets a trademark holder force a transfer of your .com if they prove you registered it in bad faith to profit from their mark. Generic names are safe; names that mimic a brand to squat are not. It costs the complainant about $1,500 and runs in roughly two months. If a brand could reasonably claim your name, do not buy it.

LOW-RISK NAMES

- Common dictionary words in a new class.
- Invented / brandable compounds.
- Names with no live trademark hit.
- Names unlike any funded competitor.

HIGH-RISK NAMES

- A competitor name + TLD swap.
- A misspelled famous brand.
- A name matching a trademark in your class.
- A name clearly registered to resell to a brand.

PART 12

After you acquire: the setup checklist

Owning a domain and using it are different things. Run this checklist in the first 48 hours after transfer so the name actually points somewhere and is protected.

1. Lock the domain at the registrar (transfer lock ON).
2. Point DNS to your host (A/AAAA records) or your CDN (CNAME).
3. Set up the apex + www, and redirect one to the other (pick www or apex, not both).
4. Provision SSL (Let's Encrypt auto-renew or registrar cert).
5. Configure email (Google Workspace, etc.) and verify SPF / DKIM / DMARC.
6. Set up the redirects from any old domain to preserve link equity.
7. Enable auto-renew + add a backup payment method.
8. Grab the matching social handles + an ENS name if Web3.
9. Submit the site to Google Search Console + sitemap.
10. Set a 30-day calendar check to confirm everything resolves.

> **TIP**
> If you acquired a name someone else links to, set up 301 redirects from the old URLs to your new equivalents. You keep most of the inbound traffic and SEO value that way.

PART 13

Emergency recovery playbook

Domains go wrong in three ways: they expire, they get stolen, or they get suspended. The first 24 hours determine whether you get yours back.

Missed renewal / expired domain

- Check the grace period: most registrars give 30-45 days to renew at the regular price. Act within this window.
- If past grace period, the domain enters the redemption period (30 days). Renewal costs $80-150. Do it immediately.
- If past redemption, the domain drops and anyone can register it. Place backorders on multiple catchers.
- Do not panic-buy from auction listings that look like your old name. Scammers list expired domains at inflated prices before they drop.

Domain stolen / unauthorized transfer

- Contact your current registrar immediately. Request an account hijack report.
- If already transferred to another registrar, file a registrar transfer dispute with ICANN (icann.org/compliance).
- If the domain is parked at the new registrar, send a legal notice to abuse@[registrar].
- After recovery (if it happens), enable 2FA on every account tied to the domain.

Domain suspended by registrar

- Check your email for the suspension notice. Common causes: DMCA complaint, phishing report, WHOIS inaccuracy.
- For DMCA: remove the infringing content and file a counter-notice. Most hosts restore within 10-14 days.
- For WHOIS inaccuracy: update your WHOIS data at the registrar. Suspension lifts within 24-48 hours.
- If the suspension is a false positive, contact support with your ID and proof of ownership.

PREVENTION CHECKLIST

- Registrar 2FA enabled on every account.
- Recovery email not on the same domain.
- Registrar lock ON for every domain.
- Auto-renew ON + backup card on file.
- Printed list of domains + registrars offline.

MOVES THAT BACKFIRE

- Same password for registrar and email.
- Letting domains sit with WHOIS privacy OFF.
- Ignoring registrar emails about expiry.
- Sharing auth codes without confirming buyer.
- Letting 5+ domains expire in the same month.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

The tool stack

The tools the domain community actually uses, grouped by job. Pick one per category and go.

Category	Top tools	What for
Availability	Domainr, Namecheap Bulk, One Word Domains	Check TLDs fast, brainstorm unregistered.
Marketplaces	Sedo, Afternic, Atom, Sav, Dan	Buy registered names, make offers.
Auctions / expiry	GoDaddy Auctions, Dynadot, Park.io, SnapNames	Catch expiring names.
Valuation	NameBio, EstiBot, Dofo	Comparable sales + auto estimates.
WHOIS / owner	WhoisXML API, DomainTools, WHOIS.com	Find owners + history.
Escrow	Escrow.com, Dan.com, Payoneer	Safe transfer + payment.
Brokers	Media Options, Grit Brokerage, Saw.com	High-value + anonymous deals.
Registrars	Porkbun, Namecheap, Sav, Cloudflare, Dynadot	Register + manage portfolio.
DNS / SSL	Cloudflare, NS1, Vercel, Let's Encrypt	Resolve, route, encrypt.
Web3 / ENS	ENS App, Unstoppable Domains, Etherscan	.eth names, on-chain identity.
Trademark	USPTO TESS, WIPO Global Brand, TMforum	Clear names before you buy.
Community	NamePros, Domain Name Wire, DomainGang	Forums, news, trends.

REFERENCE

Glossary

Term	Meaning
gTLD	Generic top-level domain (.com, .org, .app). Not country-bound.
ccTLD	Country-code TLD (.io, .co, .so). Often repurposed as generic.
TLD	Top-level domain, the part after the dot.
SLD	Second-level domain, the name before the dot (the part you choose).
WHOIS	Public record of who registered a domain (often redacted under GDPR).
RDAP	Modern successor to WHOIS; same purpose, structured data.
UDRP	Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy. How trademark holders reclaim names.
Trademark class	Nice classification of goods/services a mark covers (software = 9 + 42).
Premium domain	A name already registered that carries resale value.
Hand-reg	Hand-register: buy an unregistered name at retail price.
Backorder	Place a claim to catch a domain the instant it expires.
Drop	The moment an expired domain is released back for registration.
Escrow	Neutral third party (Escrow.com) holding funds until transfer completes.
Authorization code	EPP / auth code needed to transfer a domain between registrars.
Transfer lock	Registrar lock preventing unauthorized transfers.
Domain hack	Using the TLD as part of the word (del.icio.us, notio.so).
ENS	Ethereum Name Service. On-chain .eth names resolving to wallets.
DNS	Domain Name System. Maps the name to servers.
Nameserver	Server that resolves your domain to IP addresses.
Apex	The root domain (yourname.com), vs www subdomain.
Parked	A registered domain showing ads, not a real site. Often for sale.
Registrar	Service you buy domains through (Namecheap, Porkbun, Sav).
Registry	The org operating a TLD (Verisign runs .com).
Grace period	Window after expiry to renew without penalty (usually 0-45 days).
Drop-catch	Service that attempts to register a domain the instant it expires (SnapNames, etc.).

Redemption period	30-day window after domain expiry during which it can be restored at a premium fee.

Domain hijacking

Unauthorized transfer of a domain to another registrar or account.

DMCA

Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Used to request content removal; can trigger domain suspension.

One last thing

Great domains are bought, not found. Most of the value is in the discipline of brainstorming widely, scoring honestly, valuing before you negotiate, and walking away when the number is wrong. Keep this manual open for your next name.