

# RANDOM

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**February 2008**

COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

# THOUGHTS

## Dirty-foot websites succeed

**D**IRTFT is an initialism for “do it right the first time”, but a lot of people look at it and think “dirty foot”. When you’re thinking about a domain name for a website, it’s important to do it right the first time and that may require looking at your proposed name with a dirty mind.

You’ve probably seen a list of horrible domain names. Your goal is to ensure that your domain is never on that list. If you wonder who represents a celebrity, you’ll visit [WhorePresents.com](http://WhorePresents.com). The developers wanted people to read it as [WhoRepresents.com](http://WhoRepresents.com), but our minds don’t always see the same pattern the developer did.

Subject matter expert? Try [ExpertSexChange.com](http://ExpertSexChange.com). Ah, make that [ExpertsExchange.com](http://ExpertsExchange.com). The operators recently added a hyphen between “experts” and “exchange”. And what would you expect to find at [PenisLand.com](http://PenisLand.com)? The owners want you to read it as Pen Island. I’m told that there was once a [MolestationNursery.com](http://MolestationNursery.com) in New South Sales, but it’s now on the Web as [MoleRiverNursery.com](http://MoleRiverNursery.com) instead of the previous [MoleStationNursery.com](http://MoleStationNursery.com).

### The domain name represents you

**I**t’s easy to pick a name that seems innocent to you, but will not represent your company or organization well. Spend some time trying multiple various combinations of capital letters in the domain name you think will work.

Don’t try to save a few bucks by not buying a domain name. I set up [Blinn.com](http://Blinn.com), which costs about \$100 per year for the name registration and hosting, but I could have used my Internet service provider’s hosting for free. Trouble is, I would have had a domain that looks like this: [www.wowway.com/~wblinn/](http://www.wowway.com/~wblinn/). Domain registration is now about \$10 per year and decent hosting can be had for just \$100. Do it right.

When you start looking, you’ll probably find that your first choice for a domain name is already taken. Millions of names have been registered and you can’t use any of those. You may try to find a name that relates to what you’re offering (you can’t have [SuperWarehouse.com](http://SuperWarehouse.com)) or a made-up word that somehow resonates (forget about getting [NetFlix.com](http://NetFlix.com) or [Google.com](http://Google.com)). The name you choose should be as short as possible and easy to remember. Hard to remember names and long names make it easy for a first-time visitor to get the name wrong.

Choose a com domain if you can. The other top-level domains (net, org, info, and the like) aren’t as memorable and prospective visitors will often end up at your competitor’s site if the only difference between your site and your competitor’s is that you’re using “info” and the competitor is using “com”. There’s no shortage of tools to help with the decision. For a useful list, see <http://vandelaydesign.com/blog/tools/tools-to-find-right-domain-name/>.

### Hosting isn’t free

**O**nce you’ve selected your domain name, don’t try to get by with free hosting. Well regarded hosts such as [BlueHost.com](http://BlueHost.com) in Orem, Utah, will host your site for about \$100 per year, provide excellent uptime, give you a lot of disk space, and allow plenty of traffic. I’ve also heard good reports from trusted friends about Texas-based [JaguarPC.com](http://JaguarPC.com). Or you can try to save that \$100 per year by using a free service and find that it serves ads along with your Web pages, that you don’t have much space to work with, that features are limited, and when people try to use the site they’re locked out by bandwidth limitations.

Form follows function. A site can be beautiful but useless. You’ve probably encountered some of the over-designed monstrosities that play a Flash movie before allowing you to enter the site. Or the don’t work at all if you haven’t yet installed the latest version of Flash.

Websites can be functional without being ugly. But if you must err on one side or the other, err on the side of functionality. If people can’t figure out how the hell to navigate from one page to the next, they’ll head back to Google and look for the next site on the list.

People won’t have come to your website to be entertained (unless you’re operating a game site or your name is Sony Pictures or Warner Brothers) or to be impressed with the design (unless they’re looking for a designer). Make it work, then make it pretty.

Keep in mind that Google is not your client. If your primary concern in developing the site is search engine optimization (SEO), you might forget about the people who will come to the site. The site must be usable by humans who come to the site, so design for people first and then do what you need to do to make the site work properly with the various search-engine spiders.

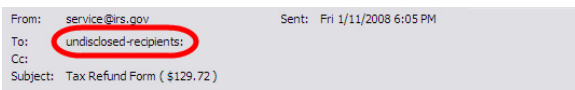
Vincent Flanders (*Web Pages that Suck*) detests what he likes to call “mystery-meat navigation”. When you arrive at a website and see lots of links but no indication about where they links go, you’ve encountered mystery meat. Creating a mystery-meat site is both rude and self-defeating. When users can’t figure out what to click, they’ll just hit the back button go elsewhere. Give users a clear way to navigate.

When you started thinking about your site, you had a target audience in mind. Maybe it’s “left-handed auto mechanics who work on Minis” or maybe it’s a bit more broad—something like “people who enjoy visiting zoos”. Whether broad or narrow, you have a target audience in mind. Don’t forget that target when you’re designing a site. It’s easy to make it pretty. Or make it in a way that you like it. But if the target audience doesn’t care about pretty or if you’re not in the target market, you won’t be serving your audience well.

Think about what you’re doing. Try to view your development efforts in the same way someone in your target audience would. There aren’t any secrets to developing a dirty-foot website. But it does require your full attention and concentration. **β**

## My IRS refund

The IRS must really be getting efficient! I received an e-mail the other day telling me that my refund is ready. I found that remarkable because I hadn’t yet filed the return or even filled out any tax forms. The information from my CPA is still on the desk. Might this be a phony? Are there any dead giveaways? You bet. Let me count the ways:



From: service@irs.gov Sent: Fri 1/11/2008 6:05 PM  
To: undisclosed-recipients:  
Cc:  
Subject: Tax Refund Form ( \$129.72)

### Internal Revenue Service United States Deptment of the Treasury

After the last annual calculations of your fiscal activity we have determined that you are eligible to receive a tax refund of **\$129.72**. Please submit the tax refund request and allow us 3-9 days in order to process it.

A refund can be delayed for a variety of reasons. For example submitting invalid records or applying after the deadline.

To access your tax refund, please [click here](#)

Best Regards,  
Tax Refund Department  
Internal Revenue Service

<http://www.radiodetali.su/tp/templates/search.php>

**SU is the domain for the Soviet Union. Although the nation no longer exists, the top-level domain remains and is administered by the Russian Institute for Development of Public Networks.**

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- The message has been sent to “undisclosed recipients” (blind copied, in other words.)
- My name is nowhere on the form. Wouldn’t the IRS have that?
- There’s no IRS logo; the agency name is too large; the agency name is also in tacky bright blue.

- I’m invited to click a link to “access my tax refund” but the message says it will take 3 to 9 days to process it. Let’s think about this one: For the IRS to know that you have a refund coming, you must first file a tax return, yet this form it telling you that you have to fill out a form but they already know what your refund is. Maybe some people like this kind of circular reasoning, but it makes me dizzy.
- Oh—and then there’s the link that’s hidden behind “click here”. The link goes to a server in the “SU” top-level domain, and that’s the TLD of the Soviet Union. The country doesn’t exist any more, but Russia continued to maintain the domain and that of other soviet-era entities. I know that the dollar seems to be in free-fall and outsourcing is increasingly common, but I’m fairly sure that the IRS will have a GOV top-level domain and that it hasn’t been outsourced to Russia. **β**

## Yet another tape goes missing

Personal information about more than half a million JC Penney customers (and maybe another 100 retailers) may have been compromised last October when a computer tape “went missing”, but it wasn’t announced until January. GE Money, the company that handles credit card operations for Penney and others, said that the missing information includes Social Security numbers for about 150,000 people.

The data was on a backup tape that disappeared. It was supposed to be stored at a warehouse operated by Iron Mountain Inc. The company says the tape was never checked out, but it also can’t be found. So far, there’s no evidence of fraudulent activity on the accounts involved. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar and sometimes a lost tape is just a lost tape, but GE Money is paying for 12 months of credit-monitoring service for customers whose Social Security numbers were on the tape.

Letters notifying customers were sent out in GE Money envelopes and many of the consumers who received the envelopes threw them away without opening them because they thought the envelopes just contained a credit card solicitation. If you have a JC Penney card, it might be worth checking. **β**

## on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

“Successful forecasting requires accurate assessment of workload requirements and workforce availability, ensuring that workers understand the needs, and that they are prepared to fulfil them.”