

In an infamous episode of the American sitcom *Seinfeld*, comedian Jerry Seinfeld asked the question, “Are you master of your domain?” Of course, he wasn’t quite talking about domain names, but the question is a good one, none the less.



When it comes to domain names, it’s important to treat them as valuable assets and nothing less. While maintaining a presence online isn’t expensive (\$25 per year for the domain name, plus about a few dollars a month in hosting costs), websites are often in reality important tools worth far more than those limited costs might indicate.

Every now and then I get a call from someone who has “lost control” of their domain name. The story usually goes something like this: the person on the phone didn’t know much about the Internet but needed to get either a basic website online, or needed to have an email account with a personal customized email address for their business. The person asked an Internet-savvy friend to register the domain name and get hosting arranged. To save time and to avoid any hassles, that well-meaning Internet-savvy person simply registered the domain name (sometimes in their own name) and got the site up and running. No worries, right?

To quote *Seinfeld* again, “Serenity now! Insanity later.”

What generally happens is this: a year passes by and the domain name expires. At this point, the person who *thinks* they own the domain name calls to find out why their site is offline. They haven't received any renewal notices because the administrative email address is either incorrect, or they don't have access to it.

Getting the site back online then turns into something of a complicated task. In many cases the "owner" of the domain has no idea where the domain was registered, let alone the username and password required to change the administrative contact information.

Of course all of this could be avoided had the person treated the domain name as something of value and ensured that they understood the process and maintained control. Here's some tips to ensure that domain buyers are well served and will be "masters of their domains."

- **For domain buyers:** If you are registering a domain name, do some research to make sure you understand the process, what you are getting for your money and what your responsibilities are.
- **For tech-savvy friends:** If you are registering a domain name for someone else, **don't**. Instead, take the time to explain why it's a bad idea. By all means, walk the person through the process, but make sure you explain that they have certain responsibilities to ensure the domain remains theirs. Make sure to register the domain in the name of the owner, and make sure relevant information like URLs for control panels and the all important username and password are given to the domain owner for safekeeping. Explain the importance of guarding usernames and passwords, and most importantly, of keeping Whois information and that all important administrative email address up to date.