



# Political Website Domains and Hosting - What You Need To Know

A free guide from Online Candidate

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Campaign websites and more.

# Political Website Domains and Hosting – What You Need To Know

Securing (registering) a domain name (i.e. smithforsenate.com) is one of the first steps you should take even if you are just considering a run for office. Registering a domain name is simple and inexpensive, and it can be done long before you commit to having a campaign website.

**Domain registration and web hosting are two separate processes.** First, a domain must be registered through a *domain registration company* (called a registrar). That domain name is pointed to the server of a hosting company where the actual website resides. You can choose to register your domain name and host your site with the same company, or you can split your domain registration and hosting between two companies.

Domain names need to be renewed regularly to remain active.

You can check if a domain name is available through a registrar site by performing a ‘Whois’ search on a registrar website. If the name you want is available, then you can register it for yourself.

The registrar is considered the ‘owner’ of the domain, so it is important that the domain name is registered in *your* name, not the name of the person who happened to reserve it.

**Note:** *Online Candidate website domains are registered in the client’s name and address. This gives the client control over their domain name, no matter what website host they use.*

**In choosing a domain name, simple is often best.** If your name is John Smith, go with johnsmith.com or the name that will appear on the ballot. If your name is already registered, try a variation (eg. electjohnsmith.com). Search engines weigh the domain name heavily in determining relevancy for a keyword phrase. If you have your name somewhere in the domain name, it boosts the chance that your site will rank well for a search of your name.

**Keep your domain name short and memorable.** Even though you can have over 60 characters in your domain name, how many people will want to type *electjohnsmithfortinytowncouncil.com*?

**Don't use hyphens or numbers.** Hyphens are hard to remember, and numbers are difficult when telling others about your domain. Do you mean the numeral (4) or the spelling (four) in *voteforsmith.com*? If you need numbers in your domain, you might want to register the variations to be safe.

**Keep it .com if you can.** If you are going to register a .org or a different vanity extension, you'll want to be sure you have the .com version as well. It's still the default that people type for a website. It's also confusing to voters if you have the .org and they visit the .com – and it's a different organization.

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*A .COM domain name is included FREE with any Online Candidate website package.  
Other domain extensions are also available.*

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**Vanity extensions are available.** You can register .DEMOCRAT and .REPUBLICAN names to convey your identity to prospective voters or existing constituents. Again, if you register they extensions, it's a good idea to also secure the .com version of the name.

**Remember that domain names are rented from a registrar and never owned.** You really have no control over who may later pick up a domain name that is not renewed. It's a reason to keep your domain name simple and to be prepared to hang onto it for a while.

**Most registrars allow you the option of a *private registration*.** This hides the domain name owner's publicly available information and prevents the registrant's name, address, email address and phone number from being found online. This service adds a bit to your costs, but it's an option worth considering if you value privacy.

**Keep a record of your domain information,** and to be safe, mark your calendar for renewal at least a month ahead of time. If you renew early, the additional renewal period simply pushes your expiration further out from the initial expiration date.

# If the Registrant Is Not You, Then You Don't Control Your Domain

We always tell potential clients that *we register their domain in their name*, not ours. For whatever reason, that surprises a lot of people. It could be because it never occurred to them that the domain's Registrant is important.

Actually, the registrant is *critical*.

*If you are not listed as the Registrant of your domain, then you do not have control over the name.* The Registrant is the person who can control where a domain name points and whether it can be transferred to another service or owner.

This can be a problem with some unscrupulous services or webmasters that allow you to 'instantly' register your domain through them. They put themselves as the Registrant. This is a trick to keep clients from leaving their hosting service. Often the client finds out that they do not own their domain name when they attempt to change their website hosting.

That often means that the client is either stuck with their web host or they must create a new website and register a new and different domain name.

**The lesson:** Be sure that YOUR domain name is registered with YOU listed as the Registrant owner.

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*With [Online Candidate website packages](#), the client is always listed the Registrant. It's their domain, and they should have the final control over it.*

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# Political Domain Squatting

Yes, it happens. And it can happen to you.

Domain squatting or cybersquatting is the term used for someone who registers a domain that infringes on another's intellectual property or trademark. Some squatters attempt to sell names back to rightful owners for a profit, while others use the names to deceive. Political domain name squatting has grown in prevalence and can even be a dirty trick that effects local candidates.

The U.S. Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act (ACPA) of 1999 is intended to provide protection against cybersquatting for individuals as well as owners of distinctive trademarked names. States have also taken action. For example, California passed the Political Cyberfraud Abatement Act which says that a person cannot register a domain that could potentially be used for political purposes intended to be used to mislead the public.

Even with these laws in place, some political campaigns still take extraordinary measures to preempt domain squatters. This may include registering anti-candidate or campaign names such as 'smithsucks.com'.

The average local candidate probably does not need to take those precautions. However, it's a good idea for a candidate to register his or her domain (and have a website ready) **BEFORE [they announce their intention to run for office](#)**.

Keep an eye on any squatted domain name(s) and make sure it is never used for a website or used to redirect traffic to another website. If it does, you might want to go legal on them and report them to your local board of elections, particularly if there is malicious or deceitful intent.

There have been cases where a campaign insider or an outside supporter has registered a domain name with the intention of preventing the name from 'falling into the wrong hands'. Then they turn the name over to the campaign when and if it is needed. Sometimes that works out best for everyone.

Odds are, if a political opponent registered a candidate's name, they probably won't even do anything with it. Using the squatted domain for an actual website or to direct the traffic elsewhere would cause more trouble than it's worth.

Sometimes you'll find some enterprising individual has snapped up a bunch of names related to your campaign. For example, they'll offer to sell you 'VoteJones.com'. But if your campaign is already using 'ElectJones.com', what's the point of the second name? If you don't want or need the name, let squatter keep the name and be out the registration fee.

Besides, you have better things to do than get hung up about who registered what domain names. You have an election to win!

## Website Hosting

A web host is a company that maintains specialized computers called servers that store a website's files and make them available to others through the internet. It should not be confused with registering a domain, which is a separate process.

There are many types of web hosts out there. Your hosting needs will depend on what kind of website you want and what the purpose of the website will be.

If you are hiring a web designer to build your site, they will typically be able to include hosting and include the costs in the project.

If you are going it alone, you should know that *free website hosting is not a good idea*. You may be forced to display ads on your website that you have no control over, they may have little customer support, and they may close shop without warning. This is one case where you definitely 'get what you pay for'.

# What To Do With Your Campaign Website After The Election

The election is over. As a candidate, you've either won or lost. All the advertising has ended, the final bills are paid and the signs come down. But don't forget the campaign website – it's still out there. Here are some ideas for dealing with your website after Election Day.

## Update the site

No matter what you do, you should post a final election update to your site as soon as possible. Won or lost, your home page should acknowledge the results. Thank your friends and supporters for their help – they deserve it.

If you have a domain name that is year based (electsmith2018.com), you should keep the website up for a few months, or until the end of your hosting period. Your site may still get traffic from those interested in the outcome of the election or what is happening with the candidate. With a date-based name, odds are you won't use that same name/website again. If you have a name that is position or name based (smithforsupervisor.com or joesmith.com), consider the long-term benefits of keeping the site active until the next campaign vs. shutting the site down completely.

## Keep the campaign alive

To keep volunteers and fundraisers available and in the loop, elected officials and PACs should never truly shut down their campaign organizations. You may want to shut down certain pages or sections of the campaign website but continue to run the site with relevant news and event updates. In other words, keep the interest alive until the next campaign!

## Convert to personal site

If you are done with politics altogether, your website can always be redesigned and repurposed for another use. If you run a business in your name, you can either switch the entire site over or point the domain to another site.

## Redirect your domain name

Instead of having the domain name point to your campaign website, you can have the name point to another website or web page. Depending on the elected position, your newly-won office may already have an official web page waiting for you. Use the traffic that would have gone to your old website and send it there.

## Shut down the site for the next election cycle

For many local candidates, this seems to be the most common – and unfortunate – end to their websites. When the hosting period ends, they simply stop the hosting and let the domain name lapse.

There are a few downsides to completely shutting down a campaign website and letting the domain name go:

- Someone else can pick up the domain name, and you'll probably have a tough time getting it back.
- You'll have no control over a new website that someone creates with your lapsed domain name.
- All the links that you built up over the last campaign will now go nowhere. There's no guarantee that those links will still exist the next time you revive your website (assuming that you have not let your domain name lapse).

Even if you want to completely shut everything down, we suggest that you keep the domain name active – especially if the domain name matches the candidate's name. **Keeping a domain name active costs little - and it keeps the name in *your* possession.**



**The easiest way to start your campaign website.**

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Our softcover book, *Running for Office as an Online Candidate: Web Strategies for Local Campaigns*, is now available on Amazon.

This resource is packed with tips, tricks and useful strategies for local political and issue-specific campaigns. *Running For Office as an Online Candidate* provides a blueprint for using the web to help you win your election.



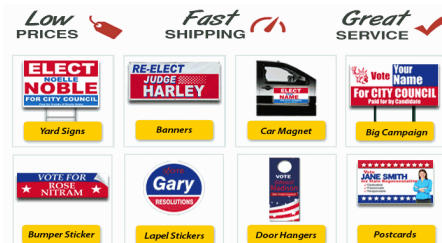
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