

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

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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 actually 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.

A few of the more popular domain registrars include:

- [Godaddy.com](https://www.godaddy.com)
- [Dotster.com](https://www.dotster.com)
- [Joker.com](https://www.joker.com)

You can check if a domain name is available or not through a registrar site by performing a ‘Whois’ search on the registrar website. If the name you want is available, then you can register it for yourself.

When registering a domain, *make sure that the registrar of your domain name is the candidate or the campaign’s name*. 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.*

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.

In choosing a domain name, simple is often best. Some political consultants advise against using your own name for a domain name. We disagree as a matter of opinion. 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. In other words, 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 actually want to type *electjohnsmithfortinytowncouncil.com*?

Keep in mind 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.

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.

By keeping your domain name registration separate from your web hosting, you will ensure that you will always own and control your domain.

## 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 can be done separately.

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 arrange for 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 up 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 signage comes 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 (electsmith2010.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 re-purposed 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.

**Unabashed plug:** *If you like our Online Candidate® content management system, the CMS can easily be used for a personal or business website. A new look can equal a new 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 they at least keep the domain name active – especially if the domain name matches the candidate's name. Keeping a domain name active is a nominal fee, and it keeps the name in *your* possession!

## **Additional Resources from OnlineCandidate.com:**

[Is Your Campaign Website Domain Really Yours?](#)

[Alternate Domain Names for Campaign Websites](#)

[Legend of the Missing Web Designer](#)

[Microsites Can Extend Your Campaign Reach](#)

[Seven Ways to Ruin a Campaign Website](#)

## **From OnlineCandidateResources.com (our membership website):**

[Choosing and Registering a Domain Name](#) - Getting the right name is important for now – and in the future.

[Political Domain Squatting and Other Dirty Tricks](#) - What to do if someone takes your name or attempts to hold your campaign hostage.

[Renewing Domain Names](#) - How to do it, and what to look out for from shady operators.

[Planning Your Campaign Website](#) - Ideas for planning the initial content of your website.

[Choosing a Web Designer](#) - What should you look for and what questions should you ask?

[Website Hosting](#) - Not all hosting is the same. Learn your options.

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