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The Five Basic Steps for Registering a Domain Name for Your Municipality (2008)

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MUNICIPAL TECHNICAL ADVISORY SERVICE

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MTAS OFFICES

The Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) was created in 1949 by the state legislature to enhance the quality of government in Tennessee municipalities. An agency of the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service, MTAS works in cooperation with the Tennessee Municipal League and affiliated organizations to assist municipal officials.

By sharing information, responding to client requests, and anticipating the ever-changing municipal government environment, MTAS promotes better local government and helps cities develop and sustain effective management and leadership.

MTAS offers assistance in areas such as accounting and finance, administration and personnel, fire, public works, law, ordinance codification, and water and wastewater management. MTAS houses a comprehensive library and publishes scores of documents annually.

MTAS provides one copy of our publications free of charge to each Tennessee municipality, county and department of state and federal government. There is a $2 charge for additional copies of "Five Basic Steps for Registering a Domain Name for Your Municipality."

Five Basic Steps for Registering a Domain Name in Your Municipality

STEP ONE — SELECT THE TYPE OF DEVELOPER

Selecting your Web site developer is a pivotal decision because it determines how involved in all of the following steps you will need to be. The types of developer vary but usually fall into one of the following categories: volunteer, in-house personnel, or a contracted individual or company. Each of these types offers its own benefits other than costs, which are outside the scope of this article. In order to evaluate each type, you will need to consider what you would like to accomplish with your Web site as well as the experience level each type of developer will offer you. Here is a quick overview of the categories of benefits you should consider when evaluating the type of developer to use.

STEP TWO — DECIDE ON A DOMAIN NAME

Deciding on a domain name is a very important part of the process as this name will be what everyone types into their browser to locate your Web site. The domain name could also become part of your city's identity on business cards, stationery, etc. A domain name consists of a top-level domain and a second-level domain. A top-level domain (TLD), or domain extension, is the part of the domain name located to the right of the dot, e.g. com, edu, org, gov, net. The part of the domain name to the left of the dot is called the second-level domain (SLD) name. This is the readable part of the domain name that refers to the entity or organization behind the Internet address.

The most common TLDs or generic TLDs (gTLDs) are .com, .net and .org. These common extensions have certain guidelines but are all options for a city to use. One additional option for a city to use is the "www.ci.CITYNAME.tn.us" form, which is part of the Country Code Top-Level Domains

BENEFIT	VOLUNTEER	IN HOUSE	CONTRACTED
Experience level	Varies – requires evaluation	Varies – requires evaluation	Should be the highest
Cost	Free or very low cost	Minimal if personnel are already on staff	Higher than the other two
Development time	Generally slowest	Depends on other duties	Fastest
Quality of end product	Depends on experience	Depends on experience	Highest
Maintenance of Web site/design	Reliant on volunteer – could be slow	Depends on other duties	Depends on contract
Ownership of design files	Request a copy	Not applicable	Depends on contract (Try to maintain ownership)

(ccTLDs). Some cities may register the names "www.MTAS.com," "www.MTAS.net," "www.MTAS.org" and "www.ci.MTAS.tn.us." Shorter names are easier for people to remember, but if you want to include additional identifiers such as "town of" or "city of" that is acceptable as well. That might look like "www.townofmtas.org" or "www.ci.townofmtas.tn.us."

STEP THREE — SELECT A REGISTRAR

This step may not be necessary depending on the type of developer you choose. For example, if you are contracting with a professional Web site development firm, it could manage the entire process for you, which should include all the remaining steps. It would be good for you to review the steps in case you change companies at a later time. You may choose to register your own domain name so that the city maintains control rather than giving that control over to someone else.

The registrar is the retail company from whom you purchase the rights to your domain name. This company should be accredited by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) at http://www.icann.org or by a national ccTLD authority to register Internet domain names. ICANN has authority over all the gTLDs, which the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) at http://www.iana.org has authority over ccTLDs.

The registrars for the gTLDs are numerous and the pricing is very competitive. Here is a link to the list of ICANN accredited registrars: http://www.icann.org/en.registrars/accredited-list. html. Some that you may recognize are GoDaddy.com and NetworkSolutions.com.

For our ccTLD registration, there is only one registrar and that is Neustar at http://www.nic.us/. In order to purchase a domain name such as www. ci.CITYNAME.tn.us you will need to provide specific documentation, which is explained on Neustar's Web site at www.neustar.us/register/locality.html.

STEP FOUR — REGISTER THE DOMAIN NAME

The process of registering your domain name may differ slightly depending on the registrar you choose but will be similar in several ways. First, you will need to provide contact information for your domain name. There are four types of contacts for all domain name registrations: registrant, administrator, technical contact and billing contact. Depending on the registrant, additional information may be required. The listed registrant is considered the domain owner. The registrant should be your city with your city's contact information. The administrator is the contact who can interact with the registry or registrar for the domain owner. The technical contact person is the person who manages the domain. The billing contact receives invoices for domain registration fees. Each of these contacts can be different entities or all the same. If you are outsourcing your Web presence, all of these may have the company or person with whom you are contracting as the contact person. However, you should request in the contract that the city be listed as the registrant.

Most registrars give access to their registration database by letting you create a user name and password when you register your domain name. Therefore, if you allow an outside vendor or person to register your name and do not have in the contract that the city will retain ownership of your domain name after the contract expires, the company could actually keep the domain name, sell it to someone else, or just let it expire. Getting the rights back to the name could be difficult, expensive and time consuming. If you do maintain your own domain name, make sure that your contact information is accurate because most registrars will automatically list an expired domain name for auction on The Domain Name Aftermarket (TDNAM). Some registrars will give you a grace period to claim the name, but if they are not able to contact you and someone else bids on and purchases the name, you lose the rights to it. You will then be put in the

position of trying to purchase your name from the person or company that won the auction.

STEP FIVE — POINT YOUR DOMAIN NAME TO YOUR WEB SITE

The final step depends on who your registrar is and where your Web site is hosted. If the registrar is also hosting your Web site, or if you have contracted this out to a vendor, then this step will most likely be handled by that party. If you maintain your Web site in-house or with a vendor other than your registrar, you will have to make DNS changes to your domain name. These settings can be obtained from your host company, and the steps to make the changes can be found on your registrar's Web site. Once your domain name is registered and your Web site is live, let us know at MTAS so we can update our records to reflect your new Web address.

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