



Branding with Domain Name Superlatives and Typos^{*}

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This essay considers the impact on corporate brand names of typos and superlatives in domain names. Properly used, they complement the brand name. In fact, when the three—typos, superlatives, and brand name—are owned together, their value doesn't just combine. Each of the three becomes more valuable than it would be if owned separately.

For a domain name—say, keyword.com—the key word reflects corporate image, which can either be distinctive (e.g. VeriSign in VeriSign.com) or generic (e.g. BestBuy.com). The top-level domain (TLD), the “.com” in this case, signals the domain's organizational type,¹ geographical business presence,² and brand image. The “.com” is now one of the most widely recognized brands, signaling as it does a for-profit orientation, prominence, authority, and a global presence, as evidenced by searchers typing in the browser key words followed by “.com”.

For a message to be sticky, it must be convincing and unique. Lies in advertising cause tremendous damage to brand equity. Thus, when someone uses a domain name such as BestKeyword.com, the message told by the Web site's content must bolster the superlative in the domain name. Otherwise, the domain name's value will be diminished. Parking a domain name can be value destroying, as the owner is better off forming a cooperative relationship with the brand owner. From the perspective of brand owners, a portfolio approach to corporate domain-name strategy recommends that the brand owner acquire the parked name, agree to lease it, or request the placement of an ad link to the branded site.³

^{*} The essay is a synthesis of [“Superlatives and Typos in Domain Name Branding”](#) and [“Reinforcing Brand Names With Typo Domains.”](#)

¹ For a framework for the selection of the extension and premium estimates, see Alex Tajirian, [“Branding Hierarchy and Premiums Among gTLDs,”](#) DomainMart (January 2006).

² For an outline of presence signaling, see Alex Tajirian, [“Branding Strategy: The TLD Dimension,”](#) DomainMart (November 2005).

³ Alex Tajirian, [“Don't Litigate, Open Them Up!”](#)

Typo domain names are associated with either the generic (e.g. laons.com for loans.com) or the distinctive (ViriSign.com for VeriSign.com). Either way, typos not only siphon traffic⁴ from the non-typo domain but also, and more importantly, dilute brand equity. The dilution arises when a visitor ends up in nowhere land because the domain name was mistyped in the browser. The frustrated visitor might blame the typo-domain owner for cybersquatting and/or the brand name owner. The brand-name site owner may be blamed for not providing would-be visitors with a positive experience. Blaming the brand name owner should not be a total surprise. For example, criminals who lose their legal battles tend to blame their attorneys; the judges and prosecutors are seen as just doing their job. Thus, for brand-name owners, registering typo domain names is an offensive strategy, not defensive— such registrations create shareholder value.⁵

While trying to reach Motorola.com, I accidentally typed Motorolla.com. To my surprise, no site turned up. When I refreshed, the browser defaulted to Google with a message saying, “Did you mean: Motorola.com?”

Of course, having no site is one option for the owner of a typo domain name. But users without a site to find tend to become frustrated, with negative results for online brand image. Another approach, of course, would be to have an instantaneous forward to Motorola.com’s home page. A third would be to set up a page that indicates the correct brand name and then, within the shortest reasonable time, automatically refreshes to the correct site.

The first option is the least desirable, the second does no harm. It’s the third that adds positive value. By flagging the user’s error and showing the correct logo, the third approach bolsters the brand name and alleviates any concerns about the missing Web site. ■

⁴ Alex Tajirian, “[.Value-Loss Sources Mitigated by Defensive Registrations.](#)”

⁵ For a distinction between offensive and defensive registrations, see Alex Tajirian, “[Carlton and Kende’s Narrow Understanding of Corporate Domain Registrations.](#)”