

Should I buy a bare .uk domain name?

Management summary:

If you own a **.co.uk** domain name (purchased before 29 October 2013) you currently have the exclusive right to purchase a variant of that name without the **.co** element. That right expires on 10 June 2019.

Example: The owner of *honest-john-motors.co.uk* has the exclusive right to buy *honest-john-motors.uk* without the **.co** element, this is now known as a *bare .uk name* to distinguish it from the **.co.uk** version.

If you own a **.co.uk** domain name you should secure the bare **.uk** variant before 10 June 2019.

You should hold it for at least 2 years then review the situation as detailed below.

LaserTechnik will be buying the bare **.UK** variant of our clients **primary domain name** at no cost to you, the client. We will make no charge for the first year, if you choose to keep the name beyond that the cost is subsequently £15 p.a.

This only applies to the primary domain name used for your web site and email, if you have additional names for which you'd like to hold the bare **.UK** variant please ask. Additional names are typically variants of the primary (*stephen-smith.co.uk* & *stephensmith.co.uk*, common mis-spellings *steven-smith.co.uk*) held to prevent potential use by a competitor.

My advice is that you should not use the name but hold it "defensively" to prevent it falling into the wrong hands to your detriment.

If you'd like to know more, read on...

Detailed answer:

Until 28 October 2013 all UK domains had to include an element between the name and **.uk** – so in addition to the well known **.co.uk** (intended for commercial use) there are **.org.uk** (for non-commercial organisations) **.ac.uk** (academic institutions) and several others. The **.uk** element is known as a Top Level Domain name (TLD).

The **.co**, **.org**, **.ac** element is a **second level name** and the *honest-john-motors* element a third level name. [While I have your attention, you can add further levels to a name you own, you may have seen examples like *shop.nottinghamforest.co.uk*, separating the Notts Forest FC shop web site from their informational web site].

By far the most widely used second level **.uk** name is **.co**

Why the change?

1. Most other TLDs don't require a second level name so removing that requirement brings UK in-line with most other countries.
2. The change shortens names by 3 characters.
3. It almost doubles the number of **.uk** names available (in theory).
4. Bare **.uk** is limited to those with a UK address

To expand on **item 3**: it's highly likely (and strongly advisable) that businesses owning a **.co.uk** domain name will buy the bare **.uk** variant to prevent the variant being snapped up by a scammer or

competitor. Owners of .co.uk names for non-commercial purposes **may** be less concerned about a third-party taking the variant. The result is little increase in the meaningful availability of unique names.

Item 4: anyone can register .co.uk, bare .uk registrants “*must have a presence in the UK.*”

Theoretically this is “better”, for example Chinese companies have been registering .co.uk names to get the benefits of appearing to be UK based. However it remains to be seen whether Nominet will check that contact details are valid or anything more than a forwarding service.

Should you buy the bare name?

The simple answer is “yes” but there’s a cost, an annual renewal fee with a retail cost which depends on the added value features like management, email, DNS and web routing.

To protect LaserTechnik clients we are in the process of securing the bare .uk variant(s) of all the **primary** (see above) .co.uk domain name(s) we hold for the first year **at no cost to the client**. That means the name will be registered **in our client’s name** until at least a month after the 10 June 2019 deadline. After that name(s) will be renewed at a cost of £15 p.a. unless you request otherwise.

That raises the question: is it worth keeping the name beyond the first year? The answer is “it depends...”

The cost of a domain name is insignificant when compared with the cost of preventing a competitor diluting your brand or the cost and hassle of dealing with a scammer or a competitor passing themselves off as your business.

If you hold, as is very common, many .co.uk names to protect variants, trading names and brand names the annual cost may start to look high. (Example: I understand Unilever has many thousands to cover all their current and inactive brand names). We believe the pragmatic approach is just to protect the **primary name** (see above) but will obtain any variants on request.

What are the reasons to buy the variant?

See “why the change” above but...

With a long name like *honest-john-motors.co.uk*, do the extra 3 characters matter?

Adding the bare .uk option may appear to make more names available but this is a bit of an illusion. Most .co.uk name holders should buy the corresponding .uk name to avoid the risk of confusion. If *honest-john-motors.co.uk*, found a competitor had bought *honest-john-motors.uk*, the original John would not be happy. In order to protect his business he would need to use a lawyer to attempt to gain control of the name. Compared with hiring a lawyer a few pounds a year is chicken-feed.

A cynic might take the view that allowing bare .uk names is a bit of a scam on the part of Nominet (Nominet is the overall controller of .uk names). At a stroke they double their income for barely any effort on their part. They could (should?) instead just automatically give .uk name holders the corresponding .uk for at most a tiny price increase. Nominet has a track record – already highly profitable they increased their prices by 50% in 2016.

Many organisations have chosen to buy the name defensively but not to use it (e.g. *bbc.uk*, *ibm.uk*, *tesco.uk*: all purchased but not used at time of writing).

Are there reasons not to buy the variant?

In the short-term no, LaserTechnik is funding the first year’s registration for our long-term clients primary names so there’s no immediate risk to you. You need to protect your name, buying the

variant eliminates the risks of not owning it. Scammers will be looking for ways to exploit the situation after 10 July 2019, see below.

Longer term Honest John might take the view that *honest-john-motors.uk* is unlikely to be attractive to anyone else so it's safe to let it lapse. However shorter more generally applicable names, especially those made up of a short single word noun or proper noun are highly valued and anyone owning one of those should keep both .uk and .co.uk long-term.

How should the name be configured/used?

There are four options:

1. Have all traffic addressed to *honest-john-motors.uk* routed to the current web site at *honest-john-motors.co.uk*
2. Do not actively use the name but route it to a holding page or make it return a "not found" or error page.
3. Make the bare .uk name your primary address for web and email and .co.uk just redirect to the new variant.
4. Special situations: there are always exceptions, get in touch to discuss....

At present, following the example of the BBC, IBM and Tesco, I favour the second option. My reasoning is:

- Users are familiar with .co.uk (and .com) and some are suspicious of anything else. Bare .uk only serves to confuse the issue. As an example, HSBC caused some consternation (in Aug 2017) when users who'd accessed HSBC.co.uk found themselves redirected to the unfamiliar HSBC.uk (worse still HSBC.uk was not showing the green security lock icon).
- The only real benefit is saving 3 keystrokes – big deal!
- If usage does remain low Nominet might do what they should have done in the first place and make a small increase in the wholesale price of a co.uk name but include the corresponding .uk variant.
- If you do hold the name it's a trivial task to switch to option 1. On the other hand if you chose to use option 1, it will become known to users, there may be external links routing to it so switching back to option 2 could present problems.
- If you use the name as in option 1 but then choose to let it lapse, then as a formerly "active" name its value to a third party becomes greater.

Discard option 3

- The above considerations apply
- You risk losing prominence in Google search results
- There's a risk of difficulties for people who already know your web and email addresses
- There'd be a need for changes to web site, printed stationery etc

If I hold multiple .uk names do I need to buy the variant for all of them?

In the short term, yes (especially as year one won't cost you anything), longer term you may let some lapse – keep reading...

Some years ago there was understood to be an advantage from having multiple names pointed at the same web site, it might appear twice in search engine results and so deliver more visitors. With a few exceptions, that is no longer the case.

honest-john-motors.co.uk might benefit from owning *honest-john-motors.com*, because some users

will get the name wrong but will still get to the same web site, on the other hand if John **also** owned *honest-john-used-motors.co.uk*, the justification for owning or using that variant are now rather more flimsy and renewing *honest-john-used-motors.uk* after the free first year may be unnecessary.

How might a scammer use a bare .uk name to my disadvantage?

We can only speculate. They may decide there is nothing to be gained here, they may just seek out high-profile names. We are spending a few pounds to prevent a problem that may not exist. On the other-hand scammers do already try to find name variants in order to host sites holding malware. Recently I've been getting junk emails purporting to be from Amazon and using Amazon branding but the clickable links go to *amazn.co.uk*, how much more desirable would it be for them to host their malware at the bare .uk name: *amazon.uk* (which is why Amazon have already bought that).

A common scam has been email (or even post/phone) messages proposing that you buy the .cn (China) or .asia variants of your name. A Google search for "chinese domain name scam" will find plenty of examples and explanations of how the scam works. This is how bare .uk domain name scammers might operate too and they may actually buy the names to hold you to ransom.