

# SILVIA CARTER

## GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY:

How to set up local,  
international & global SEO

BOOK 2 OF 7



Excerpt from:

# **GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to Set Up Local, International & Global SEO**

# **SILVIA CARTER**

## **GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to Set Up Local, International & Global SEO**



The Digital Exporter Series consists of seven independent books with more than 100 international case studies, each sharing the best tools, actionable solutions, and step-by-step explanations on how to sell online across channels and borders.

- Book 1 – [STARTING THE GLOBAL DIGITAL JOURNEY: How to create the best international web strategy.](#)
- Book 2 – [GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, ORGANICALLY: How to set up local, international & global SEO.](#)
- Book 3 – [GETTING CLIENTS OVERSEAS, BY ADVERTISING: SEA, SMA and other acquisition channels.](#)
- Book 4 – [SELLING ONLINE INTERNATIONALLY: How to set up & manage a cross-border e-commerce.](#)
- Book 5 – [SELLING ONLINE INTERNATIONALLY: How to sell on local & international marketplaces.](#)
- Book 6 – [DEVELOPING A STRONG INTERNATIONAL BRAND: Multilingual social media & social selling.](#)
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# CHAPTER 5

## DOMAIN NAMES FOR EXPORT

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*When you embark on your digital export journey, one of your first decisions is the choice of an international website domain name.*

*This choice can have a significant impact on the success of your website and of its SEO performance in the targeted export markets. Let's look at how you can positively influence the performance of your international website by choosing the right domain names.*

# GOING BEYOND .CO.UK, .DE, .IT, OR .COM

The domain name system, or DNS, was designed to make the web more accessible by replacing the numbers of IP addresses with strings of characters separated by dots and thus creating domain names that are easier to use and remember.

In an international business environment, it is important for you to know that today, although most domain names are written in the Latin alphabet, a new encoding system, the Punycode<sup>19</sup>, allows browsers to recognize characters other than in the ASCII standard.

With this system, accented letters, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese or other non-Latin-alphabet words, and even emojis can be included in a domain name. Whenever Punycode is applied, the domain name is referred to as an internationalized domain name, or IDN.

Domain names are made up of three parts:

1) The **top-level domain**, or TLD, which is the right-most part after the dot. Top-level domains are managed by the ICANN<sup>20</sup>, under the supervision of IANA<sup>21</sup>, and, basically, they can be of two types:

- **gTLDs**, generic top-level domains: in the 1980s, seven gTLDs were created, .com, .edu, .gov, .int, .mil, .net, and .org, three of which (.com, .net and .org) without restriction as to use and the other four with limited-use restrictions. They were made up of three letters,

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<sup>19</sup> An encoding syntax that converts non-ASCII words in ASCII ones:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punycode>. Unfortunately, Punycode had some phishing issues and therefore its use is highly controlled for now.

<sup>20</sup> Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers.

<sup>21</sup> Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, that is also maintaining a list of the top-level domains which, as of June 2020, contains 1,584 TLDs, including 55 revoked, 8 retired, and 11 tests.

but since 2000 new forms have been and are still being added<sup>22</sup>, such as:

- Sectorial: .biz, .bio, .book, .wine, etc.
- Geographical: .paris, .berlin, .london, etc.
- IDN non-country specific: 在线 in simplified Chinese for online, or شبكة in Arabic for network, or .онлайн in Cyrillic for online, etc.
- The ‘brand’, or dotBRAND: .google, .apple, .gucci, .amex, .hermes, .toyota, .lego, .visa, .hsbc, etc. and also combined with an IDN such as .삼성 for .samsung in Korean, .グーグル for .google in Japanese, etc.<sup>23</sup>

▪ **ccTLDs**, country-code top-level domains: there were 255 in 2017, purely made up of two-Latin-character codes, and 316 in 2020, with the addition of IDNs. They identify a specific country, such as:

- .fr for France,
- .co.uk for the UK,
- .de for Germany,
- .co.jp for Japan,
- .mx or .com.mx for Mexico,
- .cn or .com.cn for China,
- .бг, the Cyrillic IDN ccTLD, or .bg for Bulgaria,
- .рф, the Cyrillic IDN ccTLD, or .ru for the Russian Federation,
- .中国, the simplified Chinese IDN ccTLD, or .cn for China,
- .ভারত, the Bengali IDN ccTLD, or .in for India,
- .المغرب, the Arabic IDN ccTLD, or .ma for Morocco.

Each ccTLD is associated with a specific country, and it is managed by a national organization in charge of deciding the requirements for obtaining it<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> An almost fully updated list can be found on the ICANN website <https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/program-status/delegated-strings>.

<sup>23</sup> The advantages of this approach concern the brand image: by replacing the .com by the .brand as the gTLD at the global level the domain name could enhance the actions of the international and local SEO via the country variations such as www.france.brand or www.usa.brand and so forth. It is not yet proven that this way is more effective, but it remains a solution if ccTLDs are not available.

<sup>24</sup> For example, in France, the AFNIC, manages the .fr, in Germany, the DENIC manages the .de, etc.

Despite that, certain ccTLDs became gTLDs and lost their localization power with search engines because of too many non-country-related uses. This is the case for example with .it or .io<sup>25</sup>.

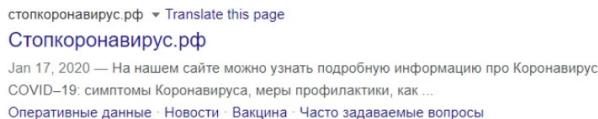


Figure 11: an example of a Russian website with a .рф IDN ccTLD in Cyrillic.

2) The **second-level domain**, which is the part after the first dot. This is the name that you buy and register on a web hosting, which should be linked to your company name or brand. There are lots of affordable and reliable web hosts that can cost as little as 1 to 10 USD a month. Less than a cup of tea, but a very important investment for your digital export success.

3) Each second-level domain can include a **third-level domain**, such as the 'www' or other short strings of characters that can give a geographical (for example, sp. or spain.) or sectorial (for example, shop. or bike. or shoes.) connotation to the website. As you will see in the next pages, this short string of characters, which can also be an IDN, is also referred to as a 'sub-domain'.



### TIP

*Google considers TLDs that are not targeting a specific geography, or that the ICANN did not confirm as ccTLDs, as gTLDs, and those that do as ccTLDs, which are only operational at the country level.*

Wikipedia provides a comprehensive list of the internet gTLDs as well as ccTLDs and IDNs here:

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Internet\\_top-level\\_domains](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains)

<sup>25</sup> Here is a tentative list of other national top-level domains that are managed by Google as generic: .ad, .as, .bz, .cc, .cd, .co, .dj, .fm, .Io, .la, .me, .ms, .nu, .sc, .sr, .su, .tv, .tk, .ws. Unfortunately, Google does not provide an exhaustive list of these exceptions.

# **YOUR BRAND OR YOUR KEYWORDS?**

What is better for growing digital export sales: having your brand or your keywords in your domain name? Well, there is no single right answer but several good ones!

In the past, SEO experts favored domain names made up of the keywords that were relevant to the website's business and objectives, arguing that this technique was favored by search engines' algorithms and would help the ranking in the SERPs.

However, since 2012 with Google's EDM, Exact Match Domain, algorithm update, the presence of keywords in the domain name is less and less likely to help the website's SEO.

This does not mean that you should abandon this technique altogether.

In fact, for your online sales on an international scale, owning a domain name with clear keywords in it allows you to:

- Improve the click-through rate in the SERPs because the links are more comprehensible to the foreign internet users, who will, therefore, be more likely to click.
- Generate more backlinks because your clear domain name will attract many opportunities for consistent and SEO-friendly link exchanges.

However, the choice of the brand in a domain name can also help with selling online overseas. In particular, it helps you build your brand awareness abroad and strengthen the relationship with your foreign clients. Indeed, it is much harder to remember a brand through a generic keyword than through the brand name itself.

To make the right choice between keywords and brand for your international domain name, you must consider how your foreign prospective customers will find you on the internet and how they will remember you. Whether on search engines or via social media, your domain name is the first point of connection with your online foreign prospects.



## TIP

*To choose your domain name for your digital export project:*

- *List some possible domain names that are consistent with your business, containing either clear keywords or your brand or combining both.*
- *Shortlist those that are the easiest to memorize and to pronounce internationally.*
- *Prioritize those that have the lowest cost for online advertising in your target foreign market.*
- *Select the shortest and most relevant domain name.*



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

*To set an effective international domain name that is consistent with your digital export objectives, you must:*

- *Choose the type of domain name: a gTLD if you want to have a generic domain name or a ccTLD if you want your domain name to target a specific country.*
- *Choose a domain name for your digital export project that favors your brand or your international keywords, or both.*