Turning Geo Names into a Digital Empire

October 22, 2025

Thomas "DomainScot" Butler built his reputation by turning geo domains into working businesses. Over decades in the space, he's assembled and operated a portfolio of city-name assets, pairing exact-match domains with local partnerships, practical SEO, and steady lead generation. His approach is hands-on: stand up useful directories and guides, test copy until conversions move, and keep revenue diversified across sponsorships, listings, and services that local buyers actually use. His business runs on discipline and clear process. Butler treats each asset like an operating company—qualifying buyers, setting rational price bands, and deciding early whether a name should be developed, held, or sold. He's fluent in the mechanics most people overlook: clean landers, proof that builds trust, broker vs. founder-led outreach, and the nuts and bolts of transfers and handoffs. The result is a portfolio designed for durable outcomes rather than headline flips.

Mike: What pulled you into domains, and when did geo names become the focus?

Thomas: I got into domains almost by accident. I was looking for a change in business and started exploring the web, where I began hearing more and more about domain names. That sparked my curiosity. I decided to take a course in HTML because I wanted to start some kind of digital business.

My first step was to buy six domain names. Back then, each .co.uk domain cost around £100, which was a big investment at the time. But just a few weeks

later, I sold one of those names for £1,200 — and that was my lightbulb moment.

I had a map on my wall and started looking at it differently. I realised that if you owned a domain that already appeared on every map ever made, you effectively had a brand — no matter how small the town or village.

Back in 1999, most of the good .com and .co.uk names were already registered, but I managed to secure a few Glasgow-related domains. I soon realised that if most products and services are geographically based, and you own the city domain, then you effectively control 100% of the local, hyperlocal traffic — and you own the brand for that location.

We started by buying up glasgowbuilders.co.uk, since we already had a few builders on board. We built simple websites that gave them listings and generated real enquiries. From there, we expanded — basically covering everything from A to Z.

After a few years, I owned around 4,500 domains. Eventually, I sold the majority of them and shifted focus toward .com domains — ones we'd been developing for a few years, centred on products, services, and key locations.

Mike: Tell me about the first city domain you really operated—what you built, how it made money, and what you learned fast.

Thomas: The first geo-related domain I ever bought was Drumchapel.com — one of the local areas on the outskirts of Glasgow. It was a typical housing scheme, and I was actually living there at the time. That's where it all started.

My web design business was doing great back then, but to be honest, the downside was that I was making other people millionaires. That stopped me from fully focusing on my own ideas and concepts. I wanted to build something that was mine.

Around that time, I had my sights set on Glasgow.com. We already had an A–Z of Glasgow-related domains, so it felt like the next natural step. I tracked down

Ben, the owner, and asked if he'd consider selling. He gave me a price — and I'll never forget it. I called my accountant and told him I wanted to buy the name.

Back then, I'd never bought a .com domain through a proper international transaction. I honestly thought I could just jump on a plane, hand over the money, and wait a few days for the name to be transferred. My accountant burst out laughing — he said, "You can't just jump on a plane with a bag of cash to buy a domain!" So, that plan was out.

Not long after, one of the world's top domain investors, Nat Cohen from Telepathy, bought Glasgow.com. That was it — gone. But a few years later, I picked up the phone and called Nat. I asked if he'd ever consider selling. Ninety-nine percent of the time, he said no. But one day, Nat said, "I'll sell you the name."

The feeling was indescribable. It was like waiting outside a maternity ward, pacing up and down until the transfer finally went through. And when it did, Glasgow.com was officially ours.

We didn't tell anyone at first. We wanted to move quietly, strategically — working under the radar. The idea was simple: if we owned the key domains around Glasgow, we'd have complete regional coverage. So, we started buying up nearby towns one by one.

Before long, we had [Clydebank.com](), [Helensburgh.com](), [Cumbernauld.com](), Largs.com, [Dunoon.com](), [EastKilbride.com](), [JohnOGroats.com](), [Saltcoats.com](), and Stevenston.com — plus .co.uk versions like Ardrossan.co.uk, Saltcoats.co.uk, Kilwinning.co.uk, and more.

We didn't stop there — we also owned [Cumbria.com](), [Penrith.com](), [Jedburgh.com](), Hawick.com, [Rhodes.com](), and many others. Most of our customers were local advertisers — small businesses that benefited from the visibility across our growing network. We gave them local pages, links, and real online traffic.

It was like a military campaign — quiet, strategic, and completely focused. And it all started from that one simple name: Drumchapel.com.

Mike: What signals tell you to keep developing a geo asset instead of taking the check?

Thomas: These days, I'm happy to hold onto my city and town pure geo domains, occasionally listing one or two for sale if the right offer comes along. My focus over the past few years has shifted toward niche domain networks, a direction that actually grew out of my early Glasgow projects.

It all started with HotelsGlasgow.co.uk, which I personally registered back in 1999. That single domain eventually evolved into a full network of around 200 hotel websites. Over the last decade, we've continued expanding — buying up geo holiday location hotel domains and key travel-related keywords.

Some of the names include BenidormHotel.com, MagalufHotel.com, SantaPonsaHotel.com, and many more — each tied to real destinations and hospitality opportunities. About 15 years ago, I was also working with a hotel group that was opening an adults-only brand. By coincidence, we already owned AdultOnlyHotel.com — it was the perfect match.

Over the years, we've built out other niche names such as MobilityHotels.com, MotorwayHotel.com, and similar location or lifestyle-focused hotel brands. Now, we're working more directly with hotel groups and partners across Spain, France, Italy, the Canary Islands, Malta, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Portugal, the USA, and of course Scotland.

When we buy domains, we don't stop at just the name. We also secure matching Twitter handles, LinkedIn pages, Facebook accounts, and other digital assets. It all adds value to the overall network — strengthening each brand's online presence and visibility.

Our newest project is a Car Hire network, which is set to launch in about six weeks. It's designed to integrate seamlessly with our travel and hotel platforms, creating a connected ecosystem for holiday planning and bookings.

I still sell domains from time to time — but only if the price and timing feel right. For me, it's never just about a quick sale; it's about long-term vision, development potential, and creating value from [digital real estate](#).

Mike: How does .co.uk or .uk behave against .com when real UK end users are at the table?

Thomas: In the early days, the majority of the domains I bought were .co.uk, since being based in the UK, that was the natural and preferred choice. At the time, .co.uk was considered the local standard, and I was heavily focused on UK-based geo names.

It wasn't until I started paying closer attention to the .com market that I realised the massive difference in global value and demand. The sales figures and interest in .com domains were on a completely different level compared to .co.uk. That was the turning point — I decided it was time to scrap .co.uk and move to .com.

Looking back, I'm very glad I made that move. When Nominet later launched the .uk extension and increased the registration costs, you were essentially paying £10.00 for both names — .co.uk and .uk — just to protect your brand. By then, I was already shifting focus.

Today, around 95% of my portfolio is .com, and that's exactly where I want it to be. I've learned over the years that .com is king — it's the most recognised, trusted, and valuable extension in the world.

Mike: Walk me through your lead-gen engine for a city site.

Thomas: After 15 to 18 years developing geo city and town domains, I decided to put that side of the business on hold. I'd done it for so long that I simply got bored with it and wanted a new challenge. The focus naturally shifted toward holiday destination domains — locations with personality, atmosphere, and global tourism appeal.

Now, my wife and I personally visit many of the destinations we work on. We take all the images ourselves, explore the local restaurants, bars, and cafés, visit the beaches, and experience the nightlife. That gives us a genuine understanding of each location — what makes it special, how it feels, and how people experience it. From that, we can decide which names and destinations are worth developing next.

At the moment, we have around 27 domains related to the Canary Islands, each one part of a larger strategy to build a strong portfolio of travel and accommodation brands.

I'm still based in Glasgow, but people are often surprised when I tell them that you can run a successful digital business from anywhere in the world. The internet truly removed those barriers years ago.

Of course, owning a city .com name isn't always straightforward. In many places, the local cartels — often linked to local councils or tourism boards — try to put up blockers or make it difficult for independent owners to operate. This happens quite a lot to city.com owners around the world.

But at the end of the day, if you own the name, you've already won the game. Ownership is everything. A city or town domain is a global brand — it's on the map, recognised everywhere, and holds long-term value no matter how small the location.

Mike: Negotiating with municipalities, tourism boards, or legacy local brands —what's different and what never changes?

Thomas: Over the years, I've found that a mix of directories, events, and location-based articles works best — especially when developing sites focused on hotels, holidays, and car hire. Most of our designs follow a proven model that's grown and evolved with the travel industry.

When we build a typical hotel site, we create individual pages for each hotel and apartment in that destination. It's all about local relevance and structure.

Back in the early days, we worked as affiliate partners with Priceline, and later transitioned to Booking.com, which became the core of our network.

Recently, however, Booking.com moved the majority of its affiliates to CJ.com after facing legal challenges involving around 10,000 hotels across Europe. That shift was the trigger for us to pivot toward a direct "book direct" model.

Since around 98% of our network already had pages built and optimised, it made perfect sense. The new plan is to add direct email contact forms and booking enquiry pages to each listing — giving users the ability to connect directly with hotels and apartments. We've already integrated Google Maps across all sites to make navigation easy, and AI tools have been a fantastic boost for us in creating both content and imagery efficiently.

One of my personal favourites is the work we did on GlasgowSubway.com. On one of the pages, there's a billboard in the station advertising Glasgow.com, and the train sitting in the platform also carries Glasgow.com branding along its side — a small creative touch, but it always makes me smile.

We've also been building out LinkedIn company pages for each domain — an effective way to strengthen our professional presence and help businesses connect through their local brands. On top of that, we continue to experiment with Twitter accounts and other social platforms for each site. It's all about trying new approaches, testing engagement, and finding what works best for each market.

Mike: What mix of directories, events, and articles has proved effective in your experience?

Thomas: Directories are fantastic for local relevance. They help businesses get listed and found by customers searching for something specific in a particular location. Events work well for building community engagement — both online and offline — while articles add authority and keep the content fresh. It's the balance between all three that really brings a domain to life.

Mike: Which monetization strategy actually pays in your experience — local sponsorships, paid listings, affiliates?

Thomas: When it comes to monetization, I've found that there's no single strategy that always wins. The key is flexibility — being willing to test different approaches and truly understand the market you're targeting. Sometimes the thing you least expect ends up being the one that brings in the best results.

Over the years, I've tried just about every model — from local sponsorships and paid listings to affiliate programs and direct advertising. Each has its strengths depending on the type of domain, the audience, and the stage of development.

For local geo sites, sponsorships and paid listings often perform well because local businesses value visibility within their own community. For hotel and holiday domains, affiliate programs worked brilliantly in the early years — especially with Priceline and later Booking.com. But the market has changed, and these days, direct partnerships and enquiry-based bookings often produce better long-term returns and stronger relationships.

One of the most interesting trends I've seen lately is that after [developing a domain](#) and building up content, other businesses in the same niche often approach us wanting to buy the name outright. It's a pattern that repeats itself — once a site starts generating traffic, it becomes a competitive threat to existing players in that market. In many cases, the domain itself becomes the monetization.

So, in my experience, the best strategy isn't about choosing one method — it's about understanding the market, targeting it precisely, and being ready to adapt. That's when the real opportunities appear.

Mike: If you were starting fresh today with a modest budget, how would you rebuild a geo portfolio in 12 months?

Thomas: If I were starting fresh today with a modest budget and aiming to rebuild a geo domain portfolio within 12 months, I'd approach it very

strategically. I'd start by researching emerging destinations — places where tourism, real estate, or local business interest is growing but the best domain names are still available or affordable.

In the last couple of years, I've been developing two major geo networks, both built on that principle.

A few years back, I had never even been to the Canary Islands. I was researching hotel domain names and came across a few that caught my attention. The first one I bought was MaspalomasHotel.com. Interestingly, it was a dropped domain that had previously belonged to a local hotel in Maspalomas. Their head office had instructed them to drop it because they wanted everything under the corporate website.

As soon as we set up the name and connected the email system, we started receiving all the hotel enquiries that had been going to the original owners. That was when I realised the power of these geo hotel names. The next acquisition was CostaAdejeHotel.com, another key Canary Islands location, and from there we started building a proper Canary Islands hotel network.

My wife and I now visit these destinations personally — we take all our own images, explore the local restaurants, beaches, and attractions, and really get a feel for each area. It's hands-on research that helps us understand what travellers are looking for and which locations are worth investing in next.

The second geo network we're building focuses on the South of France and Monaco. We currently own seven domains covering Monaco and around twelve covering the French Riviera. This area has huge potential, not just for hotels, but for luxury experiences, yachting, and high-end tourism.

While researching, we spotted another opportunity and began buying sailing and charter names, including YachtHires.com. Then, just for fun — and maybe a bit of curiosity — we picked up SubmarineHire.com and SubmarineCharter.com. Believe it or not, we've had five genuine enquiries for submarine-related experiences in the last six months. It just shows that if you

own the right name, you'll attract the right kind of attention — even in the most unexpected markets.

If I were starting over now, I'd follow that same approach:

- Identify underdeveloped geo markets with real-world demand.

- Buy strong, brandable names tied directly to travel, hotels, and experiences.

- Build content and credibility quickly, using modern AI tools for images and copy.

- Visit and understand the locations, so the brand feels authentic.

- And most importantly, be ready for opportunities you don't expect — because sometimes, the names that seem like a gamble turn out to be the most valuable.