FREE GUIDE · KARKI DIGITAL STUDIO

Domains, Hosting and Email Explained

Who should own your website address, what hosting and business email really involve, and what to check before you pay a renewal. In plain English, for small businesses in Ireland.

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START HERE

Three things, three bills

Most small businesses pay for three separate things, often without knowing which is which. When something goes wrong, or when you want to change web designer, knowing the difference saves you money and stress.

Thing	What it is	Like...
Domain	Your address on the internet, like `yourbusiness.ie`. Rented by the year.	Your shop's street address and phone number. Customers find you by it.
Hosting	The computer that stores your website and shows it to visitors, day and night.	The building your shop is in. You can move to another building and keep your address.
Email	Mailboxes like `info@yourbusiness.ie`. Often sold with hosting, but can be separate.	Your post box. It uses your address, but the post can be handled by anyone you choose.

The one rule. Your domain must be registered in **your** name or your company's name, with **your** email address on the account. Hosting and email can be handled by a web designer or IT company, but the domain is yours. If you remember nothing else from this guide, remember this.

CHAPTER 01

Your domain: the part you must own

.ie or .com?

If your customers are in Ireland, a `.ie` address tells them straight away that you're an Irish business. A `.com` suits businesses selling internationally. Many businesses register both and point one at the other, so nobody else can take the name.

Getting a .ie

The .ie registry checks that every applicant has a real connection to Ireland. A business can usually show this with its CRO number, a registered business name (RBN) number, or its VAT number. Individuals can use documents such as an Irish passport or an Irish driving licence. Irish companies with an active CRO number can often register without sending any documents at all. You register through an accredited registrar (a company that sells domains), not the registry directly.

Who is the "registrant"?

The registrant is the legal holder of the domain. It should be your business. Two other names often appear on a domain account: the **account holder** at the registrar (the login), and the **technical contact** (often your web designer). It's fine for a designer to be the technical contact. It's not fine for the designer to be the registrant or the only person with the login.

> **Why this matters.** If someone else holds your domain and you fall out, go out of business together, or simply lose touch, getting your address back can take weeks, and in the meantime your website and email can stop working. We see this more often than you'd think.

How to check who holds your domain

1. For a .ie, use the WHOIS search on the .ie registry's website (weare.ie). For a .com, use any WHOIS lookup. It shows the registrar and the renewal date. For privacy, an individual holder's name is usually hidden.
2. Log in to the registrar's account. If you don't have a login, ask whoever set up the website for one, in your name and with your email.
3. In the account, check the holder or registrant name is your business, and the contact email is one you read.

Moving a domain

You can move a domain to another registrar, or move the holder from one person to another. The current registrar or account holder has to agree or release it, which is another reason to have your own login. Moving a domain doesn't have to move your website or email, as long as the settings (the DNS records) are copied across first.

CHAPTER 02

Hosting: what you need and what you don't

Hosting is where your website lives. For most small businesses, the choice is simpler than the sales pages make it look.

Type	What it is	Good for
Website builder e.g. Wix, Squarespace	Hosting and an editor in one monthly plan. You can't move the website to another host; you can only rebuild it.	Very simple sites you'll edit yourself.
Shared hosting	Your site shares a server with others. Cheap and fine for most business sites.	Brochure sites, menus, small shops, WordPress.
Managed or cloud hosting	More power and support. Costs more.	Busy shops, booking systems and web apps.

What you actually need

- **A free SSL certificate**, so your site opens with `https` and a padlock. Every decent host includes one. Without it, browsers warn visitors your site is "not secure".
- **Automatic backups** you can restore yourself, kept for at least a week or two.
- **Servers in or near Europe**, so the site is fast for Irish customers and personal data stays under EU rules.
- **Support you can reach** by chat or email when the site is down.

What you usually don't need

- "Unlimited" anything. A small business site uses a tiny fraction of a basic plan.
- Paid security add-ons sold at checkout, unless your web designer asks for them.
- A dedicated server, unless you're running a large shop or an app.

Who should pay for hosting? Either works. Some businesses pay the host directly, and some pay their web designer a monthly fee that includes hosting, updates and support. What matters is that it's written down who pays, what's included, and how you get a copy of your website if you leave.

CHAPTER 03

Business email that reaches inboxes

An address like `info@yourbusiness.ie` looks more trustworthy than a free Gmail or Hotmail address, and it stays with the business when staff change.

Your options

Option	What to know
Email from your host	Often included with hosting. Fine for a few mailboxes. Check the mailbox size and that it works on your phone.
Google Workspace or Microsoft 365	A monthly fee per person. Very reliable, and includes calendar, shared files and good spam filtering. The best choice if several people share email.

Why your emails land in spam, and the fix

The big email providers (Gmail, Yahoo, Outlook) now check that email really comes from the business it claims to come from. Since 2024, Gmail and Yahoo require businesses sending large volumes to prove it, and every sender is better off doing the same: quotes and invoices from unproven addresses are more likely to go to spam. Three settings, added to your domain's DNS, do the proving:

Setting	What it does	In plain English
SPF	Lists the services allowed to send email for your domain.	"Only these companies post letters for us."
DKIM	Adds a digital signature to each email.	"This letter has our seal on it."
DMARC	Tells inboxes what to do with email that fails the checks, and sends you reports.	"If a letter isn't sealed, don't trust it."

Your email provider gives you the exact values to copy into your DNS. Start DMARC in reporting-only mode (`p=none`), and only make it stricter once you're sure all your real email passes, or you could block your own invoices.

Quick test. Send an email from your business address to a Gmail account. Open it, choose "Show original", and look for **SPF: PASS**, **DKIM: PASS** and **DMARC: PASS**. If any say FAIL or are missing, ask your email provider or web designer to fix it.

Sending newsletters?

Use a mailing service rather than your normal mailbox, only email people who agreed to hear from you, and include a one-click unsubscribe link. It's the law in Ireland, and it keeps your normal email out of spam.

CHAPTER 04

Renewals, prices and traps to avoid

The renewal price is the real price

Domains and hosting are often cheap in the first year and much dearer after. Before you buy, look for the **renewal** price, not the offer price. Prices change, so compare them on the day.

Turn on auto-renew, and keep your card up to date

If a domain isn't renewed, your website and email stop working, and after a grace period the name can be released for anyone to register. Turn on auto-renew, and make sure the renewal reminders go to an email address you actually read.

Common traps

- **Scam renewal letters.** Letters or emails that look like invoices for "domain registration" or "search engine listing", from a company you've never used. Only pay renewals inside your own registrar account.
- **Domain registered by someone else.** A designer or relative "kindly" registered it in their name. Move it into yours while everyone is on good terms.
- **Everything in one account you can't open.** If one person holds every login and becomes unavailable, the business is stuck. Keep the logins in a password manager the business controls.
- **Paying for the same thing twice.** Email from your host and from Microsoft or Google, or two hosting plans after a move. Check your card statements once a year.
- **No copy of your website.** Ask for a full backup when a project finishes, and once a year after that.

Changing web designer? Before you say goodbye, make sure you have: the domain login in your name, the hosting login or a full backup of the site, all email passwords, and logins for anything else connected to the site (Google Business Profile, analytics, booking or payment accounts).

CHAPTER 05

One-page checklist for your accounts

Print this page, and tick each item once. Do it again once a year.

Domain

- [ ] I know which company (registrar) my domain is with.
- [ ] The holder or registrant is my business, not a designer or a relative.
- [ ] I have my own login, with an email address I read.
- [ ] Auto-renew is on, and the card on file is current.
- [ ] I know the renewal date and the renewal price.

Hosting and website

- [ ] My site opens with https and shows a padlock.
- [ ] Backups run automatically, and I know how to get a copy.
- [ ] It's written down who pays for hosting and what's included.

Email

- [ ] My business uses an address on my own domain.
- [ ] SPF, DKIM and DMARC all pass (see the quick test in chapter 3).
- [ ] I'm not paying for email twice.

Logins

- [ ] All logins are in a password manager the business controls.
- [ ] At least two people can get in if one is away.
- [ ] Two-step sign-in is on for the domain, hosting and email accounts.

Want a hand? We set up and look after websites, domains and business email for small businesses in Ireland, and we can check your accounts for you. Free website review at **karkiventures.com**, or email **info@karkiventures.com**.

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