Domain names and HTTPS

What an individual arranges outside Exponential to give a site its own address and the lock in the browser - buying a domain from a registrar, pointing DNS at the server, telling Exponential its address, getting a…

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This page is for individuals who want their site at an address of their own, with the lock in the browser.

> **Note**
>
> Domain names and DNS are **outside Exponential**. Exponential cannot buy, register or renew a domain, and it does not manage DNS. You arrange them with a registrar (and, for DNS, with whoever hosts your DNS). Exponential only needs to be told the address it is reached at.

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The pieces

Piece	Who provides it	Exponential's part
The domain name	A registrar, rented yearly	None
DNS records (where the name points)	The registrar, the host or a DNS service	None
The certificate for HTTPS	The host, or Velocity with Let's Encrypt	Velocity can obtain and renew it
The site's address in the settings	You	`SiteURL` and siteaccess host settings

Choosing and buying a domain

- Short, easy to spell and to say aloud.
- Buy it in your own name, with an address you will still read in ten years; for a club, in the club's name.
- Keep the registrar account safe: a strong password and two-step sign-in if offered. Losing the domain loses the site and every mail address on it.
- Many registrars offer privacy for the owner's contact details; consider it for a personal or family site.

Pointing the domain at your site

At the registrar or DNS service, set:

Record	Points to	For
`A`	The IPv4 address of your server or hosting	`example.com`
`AAAA`	The IPv6 address, if the host has one	`example.com`
`CNAME` or another `A`	The same server	`www.example.com`

On shared hosting the host often tells you to use their nameservers instead; then they set the records. Changes can take a while to be seen everywhere.

Decide which name is the main one (`www.example.com` or `example.com`) and redirect the other to it.

Telling Exponential its address

Exponential builds links, mails and feeds from its configured address. When you go live, map the host names to siteaccesses and set the site URL (Going live: hosts, HTTPS and siteaccesses). If you installed with `exp:install`, the `--url`, `--access=host`, `--host` and `--admin-host` options set this from the start (Choosing an install method).

A separate address for the administration (for example `admin.example.com`) keeps editing apart from the public site.

HTTPS

Every site with a sign-in needs HTTPS; today every site should have it.

Served by	Certificate
Shared hosting	Usually included by the host, often from Let's Encrypt; switch it on in the panel
Apache or nginx on your server	A certificate tool on the server, or one from your provider
Velocity	Velocity obtains Let's Encrypt certificates itself when port 80 is reachable and DNS points to the server, renews them in the background, and serves a self-signed certificate until a real one is usable (Velocity HTTPS and certificates)

After HTTPS works, use one scheme only: redirect `http://` to `https://` and set the site URL with `https://` (Going live, HTTPS).

Mail for your domain

If the site sends mail from your domain (registration, password reset, newsletters), receiving servers check DNS records such as SPF and DKIM for your domain. Your host or mail provider tells you which records to add. Without them, your site's mail often lands in spam (Newsletter mail delivery).

Renewals

- Domains expire. Turn on automatic renewal and keep the payment method current.
- Certificates from Let's Encrypt are short-lived; your host or Velocity renews them. Check the lock once a month.
- Put both dates in your calendar (Running on a small budget).

Checklist

- ☐ Domain bought in the right name, registrar account protected.
- ☐ `A` (and `AAAA`) records for the main name and `www`.
- ☐ One main name; the other redirects.
- ☐ Exponential's host settings and site URL use the real address.
- ☐ HTTPS works on every page; `http://` redirects.
- ☐ Mail records added if the site sends mail from your domain.
- ☐ Renewals automatic and in your calendar.

Related pages

- Setup for individuals
- Going live: hosts, HTTPS and siteaccesses
- Launch checklist for individuals
- Velocity HTTPS and certificates
- Free documentation: this page is free to copy, translate and improve under the GNU FDL 1.3.

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