

Entrepreneurial Advice to Pick the Best Domain Name Brand - With Rob Rawson

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<http://www.domainsherpa.com/rob-rawson-staffcom-interview/>

Today's entrepreneur and business leader started his company on a good, but some might say sub-optimal, domain name. It was MyStaff.com, which seems fine. But then he had the opportunity to buy Staff.com, and drop the "My" portion of the domain name. How much did he pay and was it worth the investment? We'll find out. Stay tuned to hear the whole story.

I have three sponsor messages before we get into today's show.

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Michael Cyger: Hey everyone. My name is Michael Cyger, and I'm the Publisher of DomainSherpa.com - the website where you come to learn how to become a successful domain name entrepreneur and investor directly from the experts.

Many entrepreneurs are faced with a chicken and egg scenario when it comes to launching a new venture and creating a brand for their offering. Should they invest in a great domain name that will cost them maybe tens of thousands of dollars before they even find out if their offering is successful, or should they buy a good domain name and verify their offering is successful first? The downside of going with a good domain name instead of a great domain name of course is that the domain name you really want might go up in value at a later date or, worse, it may not be available at all.

This is the main topic of today's show. I am pleased to welcome today's guest, Rob Rawson, Founder and CEO of Staff.com, an International staffing organization, and CEO of TimeDoctor.com, software that allows you to monitor, track, and analyze what your team is working on regardless of their geographic location. Rob, welcome to the show.

Rob Rawson: Hi, it is great to be with you.

Michael: It is great to have you. I provided a real simple overview of Staff.com and TimeDoctor.com just now. How did I do on those two descriptions?

Rob: It is a good description. Staff.com is focused on remote workers, so it is a whole area of remote working, which is opening up more and more, and also global workers, so you can hire specifically people in the Philippines. You might have a virtual assistant in the Philippines, for example. And at the moment, it is actually a free site, so it is just a free job-posting site to find those people.

Michael: And then TimeDoctor allows you to track what people are working on if you hire them at Staff.com or any other location.

Rob: Yes, that is right.

Michael: Okay. So, it is funny that you mention more and more people are becoming remote workers. I thought I read some statistic recently that said by 2020, 40 percent of all employed people will be contractors working remotely. Does that statistic sound right to you?

Rob: Yeah, I have heard statistics like that, so I think it is. It is definitely a trend. It is obviously not for every single industry. If you are talking about medicine, etc., it is going to be more local, but for a lot of types of work, there is going to be more remote and, in many cases, global.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. So, I actually became familiar with Staff.com and TimeDoctor.com a couple of years ago. Last year, I sold a company called HashTags.org, which was an analytical service for Twitter hash tags, but when I owned it, I used Staff.com to find a full-time writer in the Philippines that could look at trends that are going on, on Twitter, write a quick synopsis of it, and pull in our hash tags to promote our analytical service in hopes that it will be picked up by other services.

Your Staff.com hiring and TimeDoctor.com tracking systems came bundled together, allowing me to communicate with my contractor, track her time, and then pay her. I have not used the system in a few months. Do the two businesses still operate together in that manner?

Rob: We allow people to use them separately or together, so it is really up to you. We have actually had a bit of a change in direction for Staff.com in that before we were more like an agency, so we were working to do the entire process in a managed recruitment process, and now you just post the job and you manage finding the person on the site, similar to another job posting site. And we actually transitioned to make it free for now while we are building up the site, building up the community, and we want to get millions of workers on there. And also, it is an entry point for people to use TimeDoctor.

Michael: Yeah. Does that make sense? Why change it? It seemed like you guys had a great service when I used it. I had an account manager. You helped me find somebody that would match my requirements. If I had an issue, they were there to step in and make sure that things were moving along. It seemed like a great service to me at the time.

Rob: So, it is an easy product to use, to actually get it all managed for you and you have a recruiter, etc., but I believe that that is not going to be a transformational product that is going to really transform the industry, and

that is why I was not as excited about it. I am more excited about something that is going to be big, transformational, and there is a limitation there because there is a limit to how much we can personally find people. So, to have our recruiters going out there and doing a really good job is actually very, very hard to do. It is hard to recruit people, and so for it to be transformational, we wanted to move it into something else.

Michael: Which came first: Staff.com recruiting business or the TimeDoctor.com software tracking business?

Rob: TimeDoctor came first. It is actually something that I built for myself because I had a business with remote workers. I had people working from home. And actually at first, I had a team in the Philippines, and then I wanted to get everyone to work from home, so I actually built the software, so I knew that they would be working and be productive even when they were working from home. So, TimeDoctor came first, and then I had the kind of inspiration to build a staffing site and actually first got the domain name, MyStaff.com, to do that because I did not think that Staff.com was available, but I had heard that it was available and then I eventually did purchase Staff.com.

Michael: Okay, and I am going to ask you more about that, but let me first. I know there is a lot of people watching this show that are thinking wow, he built a software just so he could track his own staff doing something, and the software. You can install it on a Mac or a PC, and it basically records everything that is active in your visible view at certain time intervals. Is that correct?

Rob: Yeah, it has different options, like screenshots every few minutes. You can have also recording the websites and applications that you visit while you are working. So, it also tracks the activities, so the task or list of tasks that you are working on, so you can see exactly what your team is doing even if they are not in the same room.

Michael: And so, if I have my writer at Staff.com working on updating my website news, writing new articles, and posting new events, they can switch between tasks, and then it will record how much time they are putting on each of those tasks and it will do the screenshots of them as well.

Rob: Yes.

Michael: And how long did it take you and how much did it cost to develop the first version that you used for your own use?

Rob: The very first version took probably quite a lot of trial and error to be honest, so it probably took over a year.

Michael: Wow.

Rob: And a lot of really, really poor versions of the product initially. And over that year, I am guessing that I spent maybe up to 20 thousand dollars. Initially I did it through teams that were on Elance and other outsourcing sites, and I had two teams working at the same time because I was so convicted that I had to make it work and I actually picked the team that did the best result, that had the best outcome.

Michael: So, you paid two separate teams to work in parallel to solve this problem to record screenshots and assign different tasks.

Rob: Yes.

Michael: Wow. And so, was it ten thousand dollars each, and that is what came to the 20 thousand dollars?

Rob: Roughly speaking, yes.

Michael: Huh, wow, that is an interesting way to do. And of course you own the software code for both of those options, and then you can maybe take some nice features from one and roll them into the other if you like that.

Rob: It does not quite work that way, so it is completely different technology in base, but yes, it was more of a comparison just to make sure you get a good result. And I think that when you are initially doing some kind of outsourcing, it helps to test different teams out. Obviously I spent too much

money on that. It is better if you test them with a very small amount of money, but it is good to test different people.

Michael: Yeah. So, TimeDoctor came first and TimeDoctor is generally known as a brandable domain name, meaning that you are the one creating the background behind that title. It is not like a general word, like TimeTracker.com. Did you choose TimeDoctor on purpose or did you go back and forth among different domain names and this one was available for you?

Rob: We had a very systematic process and for Staff.com an even more systematic process of finding the domain name, but basically, we brainstormed a list of different domains. Then we saw which ones were available. We approached the ones that might be for sale. So, it was just a process like that. For Staff.com, we took it to another level, which is that we actually interviewed over one hundred people and we actually got them to see which domain names they could remember and write down, because my view on domain names is that the most important thing is the memorability of the domain and there are a lot of domains out there that maybe the person thinks that they are good or clever or whatever, but you cannot actually remember it or you cannot write it down or spell. It is very, very hard to spell.

And so, I think the spelling is also important, because if you are going to have any kind of word-of-mouth, the person needs to say oh, did you hear about this site, and the other person hears about it. They remember it. They write it down. They type it in the search engine five days later. So, we actually got about 15 domain names in a short list and then what we did is we got a video where we actually recorded those domain names in twice. Just basically said Staff.com, MyStaff.com, and Recruitment.com, and all of these different domains that we had as a possibility. And then I showed that video to literally over one hundred people, and then a few minutes later, asked them to write down what did you remember.

And then we actually recorded which were the ones that people remembered the most, and it is surprising because there are some that they just did not remember at all. It just did not come into their head, and there are others that they did remember. And Staff.com was the most memorable. Actually,

MyStaff.com was second or third most memorable. So, we probably could have gone with MyStaff.

Michael: So, you launched on MyStaff.com.

Rob: Yes.

Michael: Because you assumed that even though Staff.com rated higher with your focus group that it probably was not available. Is that what you said?

Rob: Yeah, I actually did hear that it was for sale, but I think they were wanting a much higher figure at that stage.

Michael: Yeah. Do you remember what they were asking initially?

Rob: I think they were looking for like seven figures, like one million dollars.

Michael: Yeah. And what about MyStaff? When you picked that up to launch MyStaff.com, do you remember what you paid for it?

Rob: Yeah, it is a lot and it was a bad purchase. Basically now that I am not using it, I am not going to be able to sell it, but it has got 40 thousand or 30 thousand. Somewhere around there.

Michael: US dollars. Okay. Well, it seems like it is a reasonable amount for a domain name like MyStaff. It is not a six-figure domain name, but it is not a one-thousand-dollar domain name, but the problem is that you picked it and then you picked a better domain name later, Staff.com, and now you cannot do anything with it because people have know it as your company and you are not willing to give it up.

Rob: Just basically if I could sell it, I would sell it.

Michael: You would.

Rob: Yeah.

Michael: All right. Well, maybe we will find a buyer for you. So, you purchased MyStaff.com. You took your website live. And when did you decide that you were going to upgrade to Staff.com?

Rob: I heard that it was available. I kind of just was exploring it. I was actually even exploring it for a friend of mine that was in the kind of remote staffing business and I actually recommended that he buy it, and then it just got in my head that I had to get it. And I had this vision of making Staff.com this billion-dollar company and I had a strategy that I was going to employ for that, and then sort of to attack the enterprise market, I thought this domain name was going to be the difference to actually get it.

And I think that is actually valid, but it is valid if you are attacking the enterprise market. There is an advantage in the domain name.

Michael: So, aren't you attacking the enterprise market?

Rob: We are, but I would say that in terms of the value, because you are going to ask did we get the value. I would say we have got certain value out of it, which is the reputation that people believe you are a reputable company. They respect you more. They kind of take notice just because of the domain name. And there is a certain amount of increase in brandability, but it has not probably had a huge effect for us up to this stage, but that is more due to the fact that we have pivoted the business, so we have gone from one strategy to another and also because we are focused more on the TimeDoctor business, which is bringing in more revenue at the moment.

So, Staff.com, we actually made it completely it free. We are kind of looking at it more as a platform business, similar to kind of LinkedIn, and so in order to build it up, making it free is, in my view, the best first step to just make it the widest usability that we can and really make it the best that we can in terms of how effective the site is and how many people we have, how many users we have on the site. So, it is not about money, which is also a difficult business if you are not earning money straight away from it, if you know what I am saying.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. A lot of software companies will, I think, blog on a regular basis to try and bring more people to their website in hopes that some percentage of them are going to convert over and become customers. So, instead of blogging, it looks like this is sort of your loss leading. If people are going to come, post their resumes on Staff.com, and then employers are going to come and search resumes and post jobs for free, that maybe some portion of them will convert over to TimeDoctor as well.

Rob: Yes, that is part of it. And also, once the site gets to a certain level, the value is there and is a lot more there, and it is also a saleable asset for us. It is something that a lot of the players in the industry may be interested in if we have got millions of profiles and tens of thousands of jobs.

Michael: Yeah, great point. And so, I am going to ask you about value, like you brought up, Rob. Clearly if you paid 40 thousand dollars for Staff.com, and then you generated 40 thousand dollars of new business from that in the first year, you would say it is a phenomenal value. I have got a one hundred percent return on my investment in the first year. Can I ask you what you paid for Staff.com?

Rob: It was around four hundred thousand.

Michael: Four hundred thousand dollars. And so, if I were to summarize what you said just a few moments ago, you have not necessarily received four hundred thousand dollars in financial growth as a result of that expenditure.

Rob: No, I definitely have not because we have not built the business up. It is a free business now, so it is a free platform.

Michael: Right, but if you do someday soon make two million, five million resumes, and then you sell the whole Staff.com with all those resumes business for one million dollars, then you might receive return on that investment and find that it was.

Rob: It has got the potential of being absolutely worth it. And I think on top of that, I think that it will have maintained its value as a domain name by

itself, so it is actually a good investment. I am very happy that I did it, but it was not necessary for the business.

Michael: Right. And if you were selling Staff.com, just the domain name today, do you think it has maintained that value that you paid for it?

Rob: I think domain names have three levels of value, and it is very hard to value them because supply and demand is completely all over the place. There is not a great level of demand. It is basically you either have the domainers who pay one price for things, or you have got the actual end customer and if they are desperate for the domain, then they will pay a whole lot more. So, I would say there are three prices. There is the desperate I want to sell it now, which I am guessing is like three hundred thousand or 25 hundred if you are really desperate and you have to sell it straight away. I think a domainer would probably pay that amount for it.

Then there is the kind of medium term. You really shop around for a buyer. You take a few months, maybe up to six months to try and sell it, and my guess is like three hundred to seven hundred thousand, depending on the situation. And then there is the I must buy it. This is the domain for our business and we have deep pockets, and that is as high as the sky.

Michael: Yeah, it could be over one million dollars.

Rob: Yeah, it could be multiple millions.

Michael: Yeah. How do you know so much about domain names, Rob?

Rob: I have been in Internet marketing and online marketing, and I have not really been in domain names as my main thing, but I have read up various blog articles, so it is just being in the general space for a while.

Michael: Yeah. And have you owned other high value domain names like Staff.com in the past?

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Rob: Yeah, I owned Athlete.com. I just recently sold Responsive.com and Task.com, and I own Faster.com. That is the main. I also own TimeManagement.com.

Michael: Wow.

Rob: So, there are a few.

Michael: Yeah, those are some great domain names. So, you did not necessarily buy those cheap, did you, like they were not registration fee when you bought them.

Rob: No, all of those I bought at a reasonable price and I sold at a profit, other than TimeManagement.com, which I way overpaid for and do not think I will get a sell unless someone really wants it.

Quick break from three sponsors of today's show:

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Michael: I did a lookup on some of these domain names on a site called NameBio.com that looks at public information of domain names. Are you going to be mad if I throw out a price that I see that TimeManagement.com was paid for? I do not know if it was you or not.

Rob: Yeah, it is embarrassing. I am embarrassed by it to be honest.

Michael: Really? TimeManagement. It is a massive industry.

Rob: Yeah, but I tell you when I bought it, I had a lot of money. And since then, I mean I still have some money. It is not like I am poor. I have still got money. I have got money in the bank, but I was really earning a lot of money at that time and I was kind of reckless to be honest.

Michael: And were you earning more at that time because of TimeDoctor or because of some other factor?

Rob: No, that was a variety of other Internet affiliate (Unclear 20:54.1) businesses that I was doing. Yeah, I had the time, which I am not doing at all now.

Michael: Got you. One of the very reasonable prices that I saw was Tasks.com sold in 2009 for 41 thousand dollars. Is that the price that you paid for it?

Rob: Yeah.

Michael: That was a great buy at 41 thousand dollars.

Rob: Yeah, it was great, but I think it was not that amazing to be honest because that was during the crash and the financial meltdown. And if I had have bought any of the stock market at that time, I would have done better than buying that domain, and so the price was a function of the time as well.

Michael: Yeah.

Rob: So, overall, my domains have not been that amazing. None of them have been that amazing.

Michael: All right. I know that founders are always interested in buying a great domain name, but they also want to get social media handles that match the domain name, like owning the Twitter username @Staff to go with their domain name, Staff.com. I looked up your social media handles and I see that you do own the Twitter handle @Staff at Twitter.com/Staff. Was that part of your purchase or did you acquire that after you purchased Staff.com?

Rob: We did not pay for that actually. We got it for free. I am not sure. My co-founder actually got that. I am not sure how he got it.

Michael: Yeah. Is that one of your goals, is to try and get a matching social media handle to go with your domain names?

Rob: It is not a big concern of mine, but maybe it should be.

Michael: Well, and that is the question, why I asked, because if it is not a big concern for yours and TimeDoctor is successful, then it is not that big of a deal.

Rob: Yeah, I think for TimeDoctor we have @ManageYourTime. Honestly we do not have a major, major social media strategy. For Twitter, we are not getting a whole lot out of it, so it is not a big priority.

Michael: Yeah, all right. And do you have any advice for other entrepreneurs thinking about investing in a premium category-defining domain name like Staff.com for their business?

Rob: Oh, I have got a bunch of things to say about it. I would say, in a lot of cases, it does not matter. It is better to get a brandable domain, so I am actually probably on the whole more for brandable domains, but actually good brandable domains are very, very hard to come by as well, and especially if you are going for the .COM. So, if you just go for a none .COM, then it is probably a lot easier. You go for a .IO. I do like .IO. I do not like .CO because it is sort of too close to .COM. If you are going to get something

outside of .COM, why not get something so dramatically different that you cannot get the two confused?

So, there are lower cost options, but if you are going to go for the .COM, which if you are going to become very successful, eventually you probably want to buy it and you will probably pay one million dollars for the domain name, which is going to be overpriced, then you want a really, really brandable domain and that is actually just as much of a challenge, I think, or almost as much as trying to get a Staff.com, because getting that really good brand, I really recommend doing the strategy I said before, which is you get five to ten domain ideas, you figure out how much they are going to cost roughly speaking, and then you literally tell it to 30 to 40 people and you see which ones can remember the domains and can they write it down and accurately spell it.

And I think that, to me, is the indication of a good brand name. You ask what is a good brand name. A brand name is something that people can remember and spell, but especially remember. So, if they can remember what you said, it is a good domain name. If they cannot remember it, it is not a good domain name.

Michael: So, just to summarize what you did, you brainstormed with you co-founder different names for your service. You found the ones that were available. Then you created a video that said we are creating a service that does this, this, and this. I am going to list some domain names right now. And then you say them, and then right after that video, you say now click on the link below and follow this one-question instruction. And then, on that page, you say what brands do you remember from the video that you just watched. You do not want to prep them.

Rob: Yes.

Michael: And if they can write down what you said and spell it correctly, then that is a thumbs up that narrows down the list.

Rob: Yeah, you can do that on video interview very cheaply on a site like Amazon Mechanical Turk, where you can get like one hundred people and

you can select US only, which I recommend doing. Do not go for guys in India, and just basically get one hundred people in the US to go on Mechanical Turk, watch the video, and then you pay them one dollar each to say what they remembered from the video.

Michael: Yeah, great. And do you actually say just the brand or do you say the brand plus the .COM or .IO?

Rob: Plus the .COM.

Michael: Okay, so you might say Time.io, TimeDoctor.com, Time.com, and then just go down.

Rob: Yes.

Michael: And then, at the end, which ones did you remember?

Rob: Yeah. And if people, for some reason, are remembering the .IO, then who needs the .COM in that case? I mean the .COM is still better, but it is basically if you have the brand value that people can remember it, even with a .IO, then go for that.

Michael: Yeah. So, how many total domains and brands would you list in that video? Would you narrow it down to five or narrow it down to ten? What do you think?

Rob: Five is kind of too small to be honest because it is too easy to remember them. I would put a much longer list. When I did it, I think I had at least 15, and I repeated them twice in a different order. So, I said them all once and I said them all again, and then got the person to write down what they could remember. And I think ideally you would want them to remember it the next day, but I think it is okay just to remember it like a minute later because it is still going to test how memorable it is and how easy it is to spell, because you will be surprised at how many misspellings you get of it too.

Michael: Yeah. Now, if you have it nailed down to like Staff.io and Staff.com, but Staff.com is going to cost you, let's say, 250 thousand dollars

and Staff.io is going to cost you 20 thousand dollars, and people could remember both of them. Let's say that the .IO was even more memorable because it is a little bit different than the .COMs that you have. How would you select between the two? Is that the point where you, as a founder, just need to use your gut instinct and go with the decision that is right for the business?

Rob: Staff.io, in that particular case, I would not go for. If you are going to get a brandable, like if you are going to get kind of a generic word, I do not think a .IO is a good idea because you have got a generic plus a .IO, and then it is not going to have any value. You should have a brandable .IO. So, I saw maybe Peppermint.io, for example. Brandable kind of concept, and I would go for something more like that. So, how do you decide which one? It is your budget versus your budget plus that memorability test. That is what I would do.

Michael: Yeah. All right. And TimeDoctor of course is a brandable domain name, meaning that it is a catchy word or you can build a brand around it. Did you use the same process to pick that business name as you did Staff.com?

Rob: I did not use the memory thing, where I got people to memorize to try and remember it because I bought that a bit earlier and I did not have that process at that time, but I did go through a very systematic process with a lot of different domain names and compared them all, and then got feedback and all these sorts of steps that I went through. I really like alliteration as well. TimeDoctor does not have alliteration, but I do owned previously MapMe.com. I sold that because I was not using it, but I love domains like that because I think they inherently are memorable. And if you do the memory test, you will notice that as well. You will see that people can remember MapMe.com better than they can MapSite.com, for example.

Michael: Right. And did you buy TimeManagement.com after you launched TimeDoctor.com? Do you remember?

Rob: I actually cannot remember. I think it was before. TimeManagement.com was before, I think.

Michael: So, why didn't you use TimeManagement.com as the brand domain name for your TimeDoctor software product?

Rob: I think TimeDoctor is better because I think a brandable. Unless you are going for a Staff.com, which is very, very short and very I would say premium, like a super premium non-brandable is still good, but if it is not super premium, like TimeManagement, I basically discount all of those personally. I do not see much value, and now I would not have bought that even for my TimeManagement site. I think it had close to zero value to be honest.

Well, some value. You go to the site and you can see it is about time management. It looks more reputable, but it is a lot less value than what I paid for it.

Michael: Well, I appreciate you being honest about that, Rob. So, as the final question for you, I have asked you if entrepreneurs were launching a business, how do you determine whether it is worthwhile to try and buy a great domain name to launch their business or launch the business first, and you said you would probably go for a lesser cost domain name and launch the business first and get that up and running. And then, if it profitable, I assume you have the opportunity to go back and buy it at a later date. It might cost you more or maybe it will cost you less.

Rob: I think that if you can afford to buy the domain name as well as run the business, which I could do, then I think yeah, buy the domain name. If you are tight for money, then I would probably, in most cases, go for a .IO. But it is not clear-cut. I do think if you have the funding, if you can afford a Staff.com, it is absolutely worth it and it will hold value and provide benefits for you over the long-term, but it is not the number one priority, especially for a startup, especially if you are tight on funding.

So, I think it is way down the list in your priorities, but if you can do it, it is much better.

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Michael: Excellent. Well, I thank you for offering the Staff.com service, Rob. I was a happy customer in the past and I have used the TimeDoctor.com service, and I appreciated that as well.

If you are watching this show and you have a follow-up question, please post it in the comments below and I will ask Rob to come back and answer as many as he can. If you would like to follow Rob on Twitter, you can do so at @RobertRawson. You can follow Staff.com on Twitter at @Staff and TimeDoctor on Twitter at @ManageYourTime.

And this is the part of the show, Rob, where I ask the audience to take 30 seconds out of their time. I know they watched it. We have a rabid fan base and they have enjoyed this. I asked them to send a tweet, click the button on this page, or come back if they are listening on audio and write a quick comment to say thank you to you. I do appreciate you taking time out of your day to come on Domain Sherpa and share back with other entrepreneurs.

Rob: They can maybe comment and say if I overpaid for my domain name. That might be a viral thing that will get out there. Did Rob overpay for his domain names?

Michael: Let's find out. Post a comment.

Rob Rawson, Founder and CEO of Staff.com and TimeDoctor.com. I want to be the first to thank you for coming on the Domain Sherpa Show, helping others understand your path to success so that they can make their own path someday, and thanks for being a Domain Sherpa for others.

Rob: Okay, yeah, it is great to join you.

Michael: Thank you for watching. We'll see you all next time.

Watch the full video at:

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