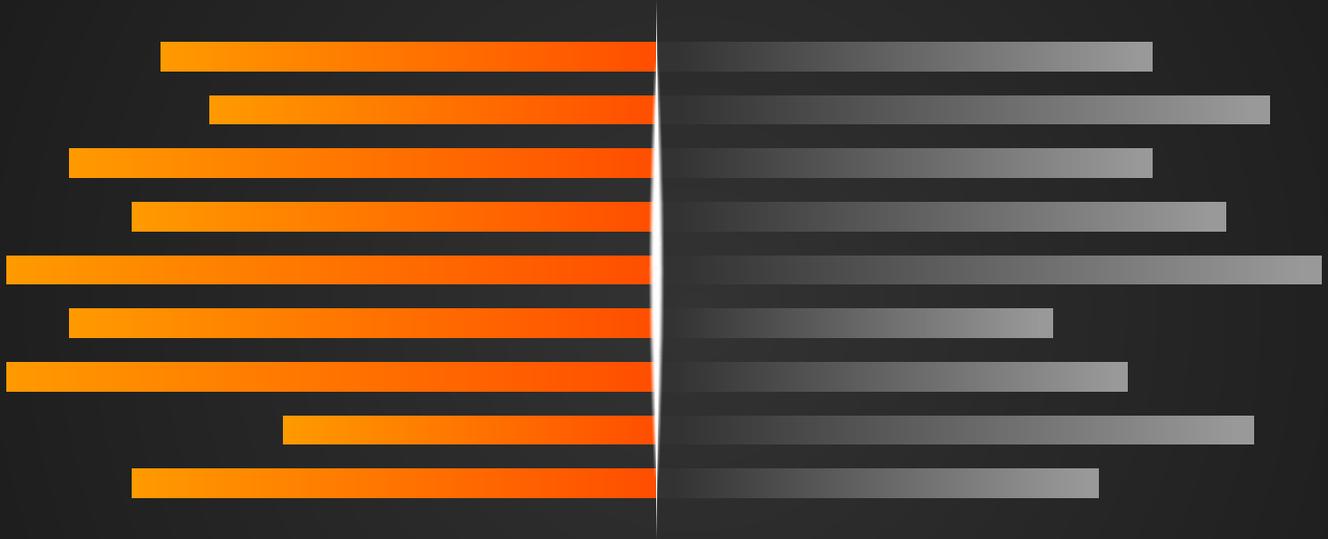# Domain Extensions Study:

HOW TLDs COMPARE

GrowthBadger

How important is having a .com URL?

Everyone has an opinion, but as far as I can tell there's never been a good study comparing domain extensions' performance.

Until now.

I ran a study to find out how 1,500 people would react to 8 popular domain extensions (top-level domains): .com, .net, .org, .biz, .us, .co, .blog, and .io.

Read on for the full results -- they might surprise you.

Contents

① **Method:** Who we studied and how

I used a tricky survey structure with three major parts:

Part 1: Perceived trustworthiness.

I asked how trustworthy they would expect a site to be based purely on its URL. I used the made-up brand "mattressrankings.__" as the domain, with the blank filled in randomly with either .com, .net, .org, or one of the five other domain extensions I mentioned. (I did not specifically draw their attention to the domain extensions.)

As you can see, those domain names are currently available for between $12 - $30 per year, with the exception of the .com version which costs an extra $4,250:

Domain name			Pricing	
✓ **mattressrankings**.com	AFTERMARKET	EXACT MATCH	$4,250 + $12/year	🛒
✓ **mattressrankings**.org			$12/year	🛒
✓ **mattressrankings**.net			$12/year	🛒
✓ **mattressrankings**.business			$12/year	🛒
✓ **mattressrankings**.info			$12/year	🛒
✓ **mattressrankings**.biz			$15/year	🛒
✓ **mattressrankings**.us			$12/year	🛒

Clearly *someone* believes the .com version is a lot more valuable.
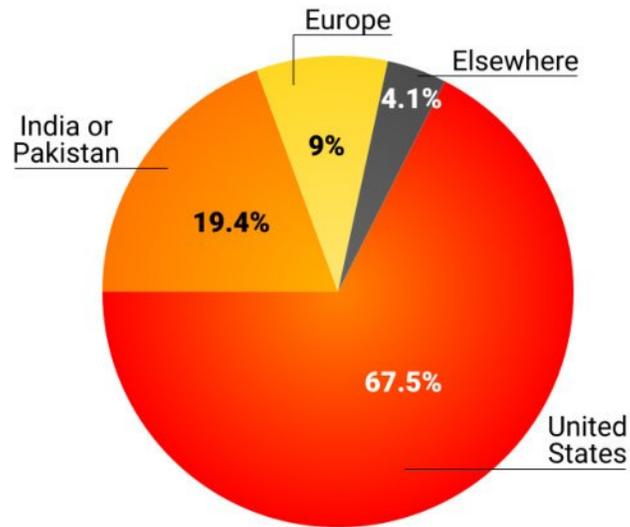
Part 2: Palate cleanser.

Several unrelated questions to distract them and find out their demographics.
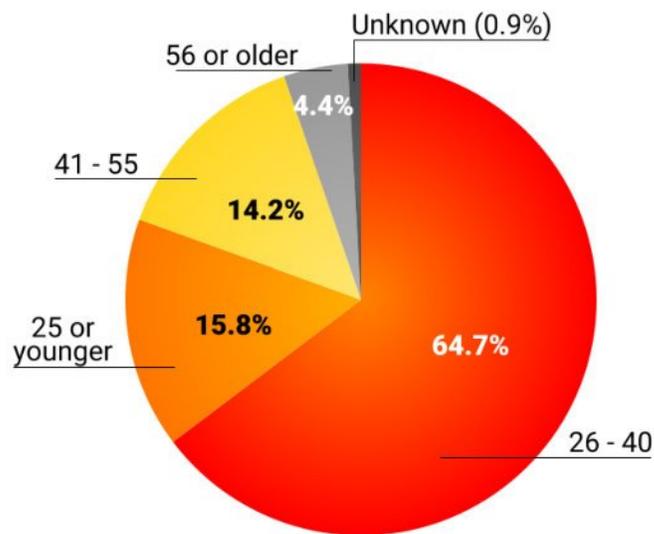
Part 3: Memorability.

Now that they'd been distracted for a little while, I asked them to write the exact URL they saw at the beginning. (They were not able to go back to the original question to see it again.)

Here were the demographics of the 1,500 people surveyed:

Locations

Europe	Elsewhere
	4.1%
India or Pakistan	9%
19.4%	
	67.5%
	United States

Ages

56 or older	Unknown (0.9%)
	4.4%
41 - 55	
	14.2%
25 or younger	15.8%
	64.7%
	26 - 40

In retrospect, I should have used different age brackets since so many people ended up in the 26 - 40 range.

2 How much do people *trust* different domain extensions?

Trustworthiness is perhaps the most important factor when it comes to TLDs (top-level domains).

A URL that is perceived as being trustworthy is more likely to get clicked on, linked to and shared. And it's easier to build a brand out of.

Here's how the eight top-level domains fared in terms of perceived trustworthiness, on a scale of 1 - 5:

**Trust ratings of top-level domains
(scale of 1 - 5)**

.com	3.5
.co	3.4
.org	3.3
.us	3.3
.net	3.2
.blog	3.2
.io	3.0
.biz	2.9
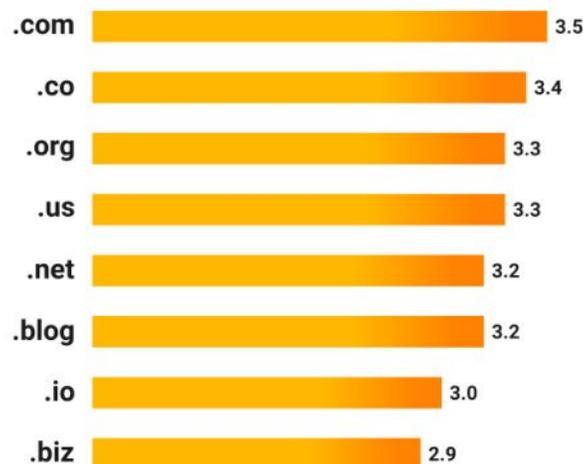
Sample size: **1,500**   **Growth**Badger

As you can see, .com comes out on top with a score of 3.5. But it doesn't win by a mile: .co comes in right behind it with a 3.4, followed by .org and .us with 3.3.

Bringing up the rear is .biz with a 2.9 trust rating: 17% lower than .com's. And .io doesn't do much better.

> 🔑 **Key takeaway:** *.com is the #1 most trusted TLD.*
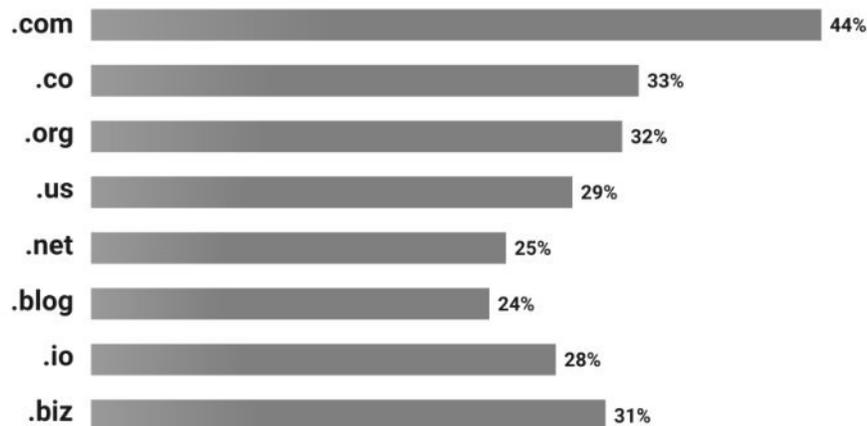
3 How *memorable* are different domain extensions?

Memorability is another important factor.

Are people more likely to remember URLs with some TLDs over others?

As you can see, yes they are:

Memorability of top-level domains

TLD	Score
.com	44%
.co	33%
.org	32%
.us	29%
.net	25%
.blog	24%
.io	28%
.biz	31%

Sample size: 1,500 ─────────────────────────── GrowthBadger

The .com top-level domain again comes out on top, with a 44% memorability score. (Meaning people correctly remembered the .com URL 44% of the time.)
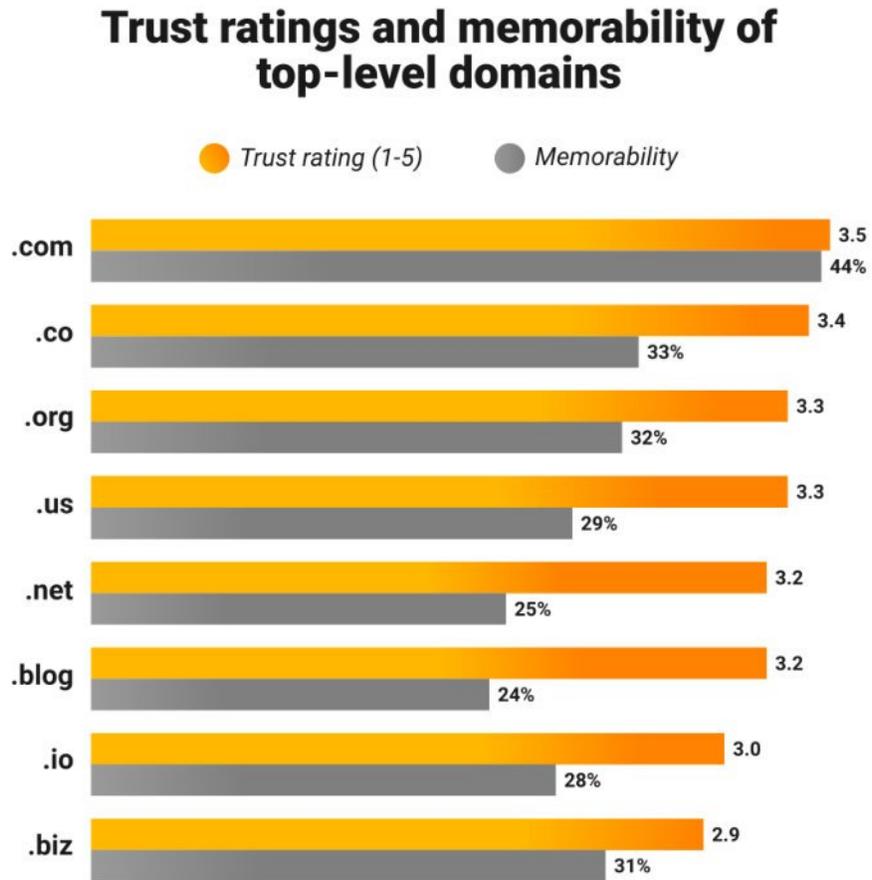
And .co again comes in second place, but at 33% it's a full quarter less memorable than .com.

Comparing .com to its two traditional main competitors, .org or .net, you can see it's not even close.

Interestingly, .biz actually does better than .us, .io, .net and especially .blog (which is the least memorable).

I was also surprised to see .net perform so much worse on this test than .org.

Here are those same memorability results alongside the trust ratings:

Trust ratings and memorability of top-level domains

● Trust rating (1-5)   ● Memorability

Domain	Trust rating (1-5)	Memorability
.com	3.5	44%
.co	3.4	33%
.org	3.3	32%
.us	3.3	29%
.net	3.2	25%
.blog	3.2	24%
.io	3.0	28%
.biz	2.9	31%

Sample size: 1,500 ——— GrowthBadger

So far .com is winning this race, with .co in second place.

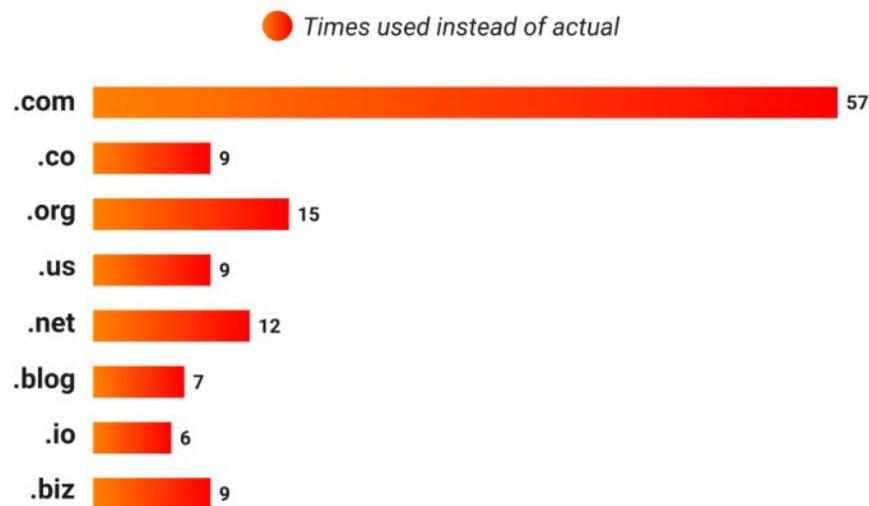🔑 **Key takeaway:** *..com URLs are over 33% more memorable than URLs with other TLDs*

4 **When people remember the top-level domain *incorrectly*, which TLD do they say instead?**

This last factor is an interesting one: when people remembered the URL almost correctly -- in other words, when they got the "mattressrankings" part right but put the wrong domain extension after that -- which domain extension did they say?

This helps us see how much of a bias people have in favor of each TLD.

For example, if the correct URL was *mattressrankings dot net* but they misremembered it as *mattressrankings dot **com*** instead, that would be a "point" for the .com TLD.

When the top-level domain was remembered incorrectly, which one was used instead?

● Times used instead of actual

TLD	Value
.com	57
.co	9
.org	15
.us	9
.net	12
.blog	7
.io	6
.biz	9

Sample size: 1,500 — GrowthBadger

First place again goes to .com, and it's not even close.

Out of all the wrong-but-almost-right answers, 57 of them said .com instead of the correct TLD. That's 3.8 times more often than the next highest, .org.

In other words, .com domains are still thought of as the default. When people aren't sure which TLD a URL uses, they're much more likely to guess .com than anything else.

The distant second place goes to .org, which people incorrectly guessed only 15 times: 26% as often as they guessed .com.

Not shown on the chart above is the .co.uk domain suffix, which received two guesses but wasn't a subject of this study (.us was the only country-specific, or ccTLD, we included, aside from .co which is generally treated as a generic).

Key takeaway: *People are 3.8 times more likely to assume a URL ends in .com than in anything else*
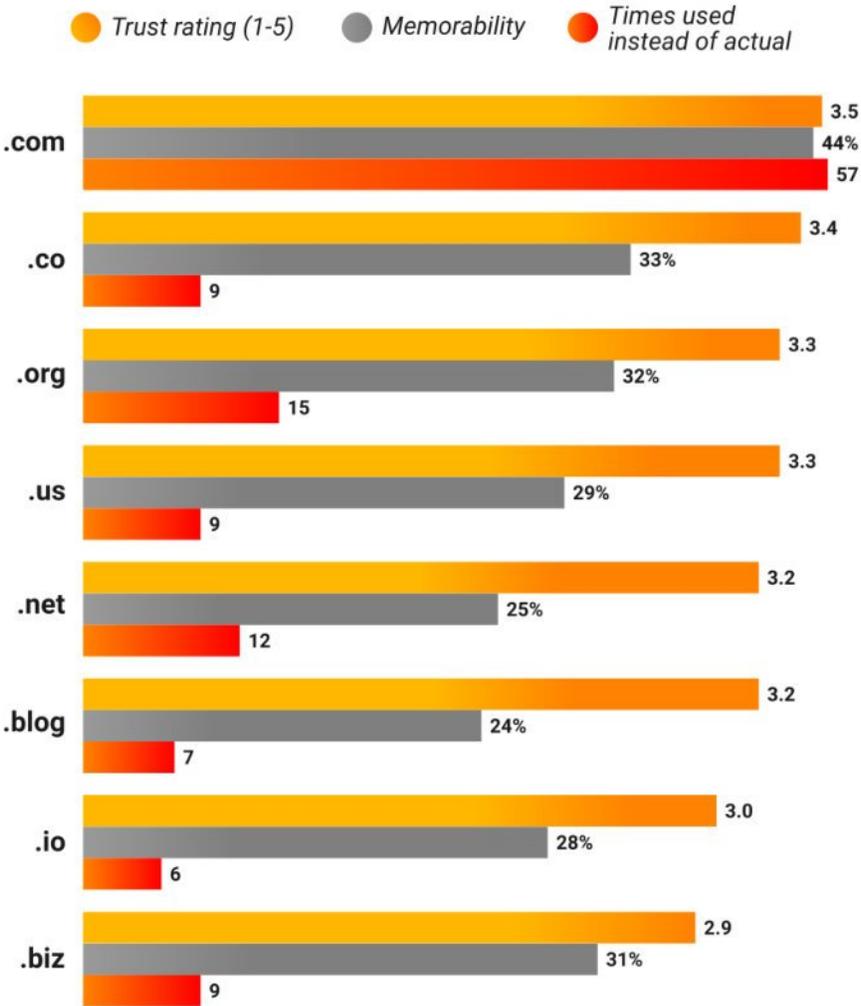
Continued on next page..

Here are all three ratings for the list of domain extensions in a single chart:

Trust ratings, memorability, and times used instead of actual for top-level domains

● Trust rating (1-5) ● Memorability ● Times used instead of actual

.com — 3.5 / 44% / 57

.co — 3.4 / 33% / 9

.org — 3.3 / 32% / 15

.us — 3.3 / 29% / 9

.net — 3.2 / 25% / 12

.blog — 3.2 / 24% / 7

.io — 3.0 / 28% / 6

.biz — 2.9 / 31% / 9

Sample size: 1,500 — GrowthBadger

If you're considering .com vs .org vs .net, .com does seem to have a sizeable edge. A closer contender in most regards would be .co, but .com still comes out on top:

- .com URLs are over **33% more memorable** than URLs with other top-level domains
- .com is the **#1 most trusted** TLD, with .co in second place.
- When people misremember a URL, they're **3.8 times more likely to assume it ends in .com than anything else**

Back to the domain registration pricing I shared at the beginning of this article: is mattressrankings.com really worth $4,250 more than the same URL with another domain extension?

For a business, to me it seems like a clear "yes"; the benefits shown above would almost certainly be worth more in the long-term than a one-time payment of $4K.

However, as Cyrus Shepard points out below, that doesn't mean .com is **always** the best choice. Wikipedia.com, savethechildren.com, and charitywater.com all look pretty strange, since we're used to seeing non-profits use the .org TLD.

Now let's see what Cyrus and a few other experts have to say about these findings.

Cyrus Shepard, Founder of Zyppy.com:

"Wow, terrific study. A few things jump out at me.

1. *Obviously, this reinforces .com as the standard choice of domain extensions. As the old saying went, 'Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM' (computers). Similarly, buying the .com if you can get it, is typically going to be your best bet. (unless, of course, a visible brand is using one of the other extensions)*

2. *It's hilarious to me that people trust .co - a country code top-level domain for Colombia - more than they do .org - a generic top-level domain used by Wikipedia, non-profits, and other orgs.*

3. *I'd stay away from .biz domains at all cost. Not only does this survey show a low trust, I've seen several other studies over the years that show folks tend to associate this extension with spam.*

4. *Finally, despite the dominant trust and memorability of .com domains, I believe it's still fair to use the extension that best works for you. Most of the time, that's going to be the .com. Many sites—Wikipedia being the obvious example—use .org and other extensions with little actual downside. Of course, if you're a smaller player, or there are other businesses with similar domain names in your space, it's always going to be best to go with the .com, the reasons for which are made obvious by this survey."*

Tim Soulo, CMO & Product Advisor at Ahrefs

"I'm quite surprised with the 'trust rating' results. I thought that '.com' would outperform others by a much larger margin."

Glen Allsopp, Founder of Gaps and Detailed

"I had to double check the .biz numbers with Kyle as I just couldn't believe them upfront. Nine people, who weren't originally shown a .biz domain, thought that's what they might have seen when asked later on? That's really surprising.

He reminded me that only 9 of 1,500 people acted in this way but I was still shocked.

I'm really happy to see .co domains ranking highly as I naturally trust them more as well. I can't logically tell you why (close to .com? the new thing for makers?) but it's nice to see I'm not alone."

Britney Muller, Founder of Pryde Marketing and Senior SEO Scientist at Moz:

"It's always been industry standard to secure a .com instead of another TLD due to it being so commonly used. The thought process being; people might forget your URL, or go to the .com site if you use a less common TLD. However, we've never had any research backing this theory up, UNTIL NOW!

The fact that 57 people used .com instead of the actual TLD is proof of this concept. What surprised me most is that individuals found both .com and .co to be more trustworthy than .org, (which has historically been thought of as being perceived slightly more credible). I'm curious if the equivalent .org and .us perception of trust has anything to do with 19.4% of testers living in Asia and 9% in Europe where .us might be more readily used or hold more weight?

Incredible work, Kyle! We need more studies done like this in our space!"

[NOTE: Britney's theory is correct: people in the USA rate .org slightly higher than .us (3.27 vs 3.23), while it's the opposite for people outside the USA (3.42 vs 3.54). - Kyle]

6 **Bonus:** Demographic-specific takeaways

Here are a few interesting takeaways based on age group and geography:

1. The .io domain extension is trusted much more by younger people than older people: on a trustworthiness scale of 1 - 5, people under the age of 26 rate it a 3.8 while people over 40 give it a 2.9.

2. While people over the age of 40 give the .blog domain extension about the same trust rating as younger people do, it is by far the *least memorable* domain extension tested for the older age group, with only 11% recall.

3. The .us domain extension is trusted more by people *outside* the US (who give it a trust rating of 3.5) than people inside the US (who give it a trust rating of 3.2).

If you have any thoughts or questions, please leave a comment on the original post.

Kyle Byers

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