

Replace Your Anonymous Email Address by Registering Your Own Domain Name

This article shows you how to:

- ✓ Choose a better email address and keep it for life
- ✓ Create as many email addresses as you need
- ✓ Choose, set up and manage your domain name

Many of us have chosen to stick with the email address we were given by our Internet service provider (ISP). The trouble is, that's often something awkward like johnsmith3628@myprovider.co.uk. And worse, if you switch ISPs, you'll likely lose that email address and have to notify all your contacts of your new address. The neat solution is to pay for your own domain name, letting you choose whatever email address you like – and keep it forever! Read on to learn how to go about it.



-
- **Domain Name Details: What You Need to Know** E 651/2
 - **Choose and Register Your Domain Name** E 651/5
 - **Set Up Forwarding to Your Personal Email Address** E 651/10
 - **Update Your Email Program to Use Your New Address** E 651/15
 - **Quick Tips: Deal with Renewals, Avoid Scams, and More** E 651/18
-

Domain Name Details: What You Need to Know

An email address could be lost...

There are two problems with email addresses. The first is that an address given to you by your ISP is likely to be lost if you switch to a different ISP. For obvious reasons, most ISPs won't continue to supply you with an email address when you stop paying them and take your custom elsewhere (although some will let you pay a nominal fee to keep your address, at least for a while.)

...and it might be hard to remember

You might have skirted that problem by using a webmail account – Gmail or Outlook.com perhaps. You can keep that address forever and it won't be affected in the slightest by a switch of ISP. But you won't necessarily have skirted the second problem: the address is long, complicated, and hard to remember!

Email addresses often have to include numbers

If your name were John Smith and you wanted to set up a Gmail account, for instance, you'd probably like to be 'john.smith@gmail.com'. But an awful lot of other John Smiths have got there before you, and you'll end up as something like 'john.smith20894@gmail.com'. Or perhaps you'll have so much trouble finding anything without numbers that desperation leads you to become 'nubbly.ferret@gmail.com'.

The solution: your own domain name

Domain name explained

A domain name is the part of an email address that comes after the @ sign, and the part of a web address that follows the www. As an example, you can email us at editorial@windowsadvisor.co.uk and you can visit our website at www.windowsadvisor.co.uk. You can tell by looking at either of these addresses that we have the domain name windowsadvisor.co.uk.

Yours for a few pounds a year

A domain name can be yours for as little as £8 pounds a year, and it remains exclusively yours for as long as you continue

paying for it. Once you have your domain name, you can use it to set up email addresses, or a website, or both.

I'm not going to explain how to set up a website in this article; that's a very different – and very big! – subject. However, if you do decide to register your own domain name, you always have the option to use it as the address of a website you set up in the future.



How does a domain name help to simplify your email address? Let's go back to the 'John Smith' example. Wanting a snappier address than the one he got from his ISP and the ones that are available at webmail services, Mr Smith decides to register the domain name **smiths.co.uk**.

Register a simple domain name

Having done that, he can create as many email addresses as he likes which end with that domain name. He might decide to be **john@smiths.co.uk** or **js@smiths.co.uk** (or both, using one address for business and the other for personal messages). His wife can be **jane@smiths.co.uk**; the kids can be **james@smiths.co.uk** and **janet@smiths.co.uk**.

Create all the email addresses you want

How do your email messages reach you?

Once you've registered your domain name, there's something else you have to do, and that's to set up 'email forwarding' for this domain name.

In a nutshell, you're redirecting email for this domain name to your old email address, so whenever someone sends a message to one of your snappy new email addresses, it will be passed on to your old email address where you'll receive it in the normal way.

Email is 'forwarded' to your usual address

In effect, this is much like the service you can get from the Royal Mail when you move house, redirecting all your post to your new address. In this case, though, it's



free and it continues for as long as you have the domain name, rather than for just a few months.

Keep the domain (and email addresses) forever

An email address for life

This highlights another great benefit of having your own domain name. If you do ever switch to a different ISP, and thus have a change of email addresses, there's no problem: you just edit this 'forwarding' to send all your messages to the address your new ISP has given you.

As far as all your contacts are concerned, nothing has changed: they keep emailing you at the address they've been using, and they neither know nor care where their messages get forwarded to.

Create new addresses at the drop of a hat!

Instant new email addresses to guard against spam

Yet another benefit is that you can invent and use new email addresses whenever you like, and that gives you a very useful way to avoid junk mail. For example, our friend Mr Smith finds himself at a website named Widget where he has to sign up and give an email address, so, without any advance planning needed, he gives his email address as `widget@smiths.co.uk`.

Quickly cut off an address that gets mistreated

The 'forwarding' ensures that all messages sent to that address will be forwarded to him, but he'll always see exactly which address they were sent to. So – and here's the nifty bit! – if he finds that Widget are bombarding him with junk messages, or they seem to have passed his address on to other people who do the same, he can set up a simple message rule in his email program to auto-delete messages sent to that address.

Is your preferred name still available?

Choosing your domain name: can you get what you want?

Our friend John Smith might be keen to have the domain name 'smiths.co.uk', but he's out of luck: someone already

has that name. Domain names are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and if the one you want has been snapped up by someone else, you'll have to pick something different.

On the bright side, you're not limited to the .co.uk ending (known as a 'top-level domain', or TLD). There are many other TLDs available now, so our friend might be able to get `smiths.uk` or `smiths.org.uk` or `smiths.me.uk`, or something more exotic like `smiths.club` or `smiths.guru` or `smiths.london`. Some of these TLDs cost more per year, but there are now so many available that you stand a good chance of finding an acceptable combination of name and TLD.

Pick from a huge variety of 'top-level domains'

Choose and Register Your Domain Name

If you like the idea of having your own domain name, keep reading (and I recommend reading to the end of this article before doing anything, so that you know in advance how it all works!).

Before we start, I should explain that I'm going to take you to one particular company – named Fasthosts – to register your domain name. I plumped for this company because they're reasonably cheap and they offer a few features I believe are worth having.

We'll use Fasthosts to register...

However, there are many other companies who can sell you domain names, and as a general rule they can all sell you the same names: if the name you want is available from one, it's available at others, possibly cheaper. A search online for 'register domain name' will lead you to them, but I'll have to leave you to find your own way around any other seller you choose!

...but many other companies could sell you the same names

Right, let's get started. Have a bit of a think about what domain name you'd ideally like and then follow these steps:



Type your choice of name

1. Start your favourite web browser and visit the Fasthosts website at www.fasthosts.co.uk.
2. In the large box in the middle of the page, type your preferred choice of name (without TLD) **(1)** and click the **Go** button **(2)**. Your domain name can include hyphens (as long as it isn't the first or last character) and numbers if desired, but otherwise no other characters but lowercase letters.



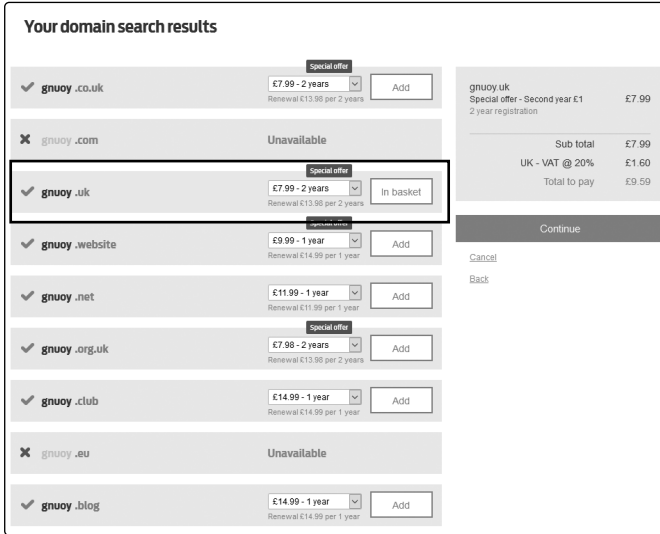
For illustrative purposes, I'm looking for some-thing using the name 'gnuoy' (my surname backwards) – a terrible choice if I were going to keep it and use it, but I'm not, so I saw no point in thinking too hard about it! I'm sure you'll come up with something far better for your own use!

See which domain names are still available

3. This leads you to the page below which lists domain names with the name you entered and their prices excluding VAT. You may well see that some names are unavailable (rather remarkably, as you can see below, I'm too late to register 'gnuoy.com' or 'gnuoy.eu'). However, at the bottom of the list there's a **Show more domains** button you can click (and click again, and again) to see all the more-exotic combinations of your chosen name + TLD.



If the exact domain name you want isn't available, and you're not prepared to accept it with a different TLD, you can click your browser's 'Back' button to return to step 2 and try entering a different name.



- Let's assume one of these domain names is what you want. Look to its right and you'll see a drop-down list showing its price (usually for 2 years, and possibly as a 'Special offer' that gives you the second year very cheaply). If you choose to, you can open that drop-down list and select a different period. If the domain you're choosing is noted as a 'Special offer', have a look at the grey text below the box which tells you the renewal price after your initial year (or two) has passed.
- I've decided to pick 'gnuoy.uk', at £7.99 (plus VAT) for the first 2 years. When you've made your own decision, click the Add button to the far-right of the name. It will change to an 'In basket' button to indicate it's now in your 'shopping basket' and you'll see a panel at the right showing the name and price.

Choose your preferred registration period

Add the domain name to your basket



The price may or may not show VAT at this stage. In my screenshot above it does, but that seems to be because the site has recognised me from an earlier visit and signed me in. In other tests, even if the option to **Show UK VAT** pricing is enabled (which you may have noticed at the top of the first page), I've just seen the words 'No Tax' which is incorrect – VAT does have to be added at 20%.

No more needed?
Time to move on

Domain privacy:
keep your contact
details secret

6. You could add other combinations of your chosen name and TLD to the basket while you're here, but I'll assume one is enough and you're ready to move towards paying for it. Click the wide **Continue** button shown below the price.
7. Next you'll come to an offer of 'Domain privacy', a service you can add at an extra price, which needs a quick explanation. Every domain name must have a published name, address and email address to allow its owner to be contacted. Normally that would mean your own contact details would be publicly available, and that can leave you open to junk email and scam attempts (as I'll explain on page 20). By taking this 'Domain privacy' option, Fasthosts will publish this information using its own contact details rather than yours. It's not a cheap option (at the time of writing, £2.99 for the first year and renewing at £5.99), but you might like to take it up – even if just for a year and then consider it again. If you would, you can click the **Add** button beside your domain name, just as you did before, and

SPECIAL OFFER

Protect your personal information

Avoid email spam and protect your personal information with domain privacy.

- Hides your personal information from the publicly accessible Whois database
- Protects against identity theft
- Reduces the risk of nuisance sales offers, calls and letters
- Reduces the risk of email spam
- Reduces the risk of unwanted domain transfers

WHOIS (IP) can only mask your address when in public WHOIS databases. Domain Privacy masks all your details private.

Domain privacy £2.99 per domain for the first year ex VAT @ 20%

Normal price £5.99 per year ex VAT @ 20%

Terms and conditions apply

Add to 1 domain

you'll see its price and details added to the panel to the right of the page. (Again, remember that VAT will be added to this 'Domain privacy' service too, even if it isn't yet noted.) Whether you've chosen to include this privacy option or not, click the wide **Continue** button on the right to move on.

If you see any offers of 'web hosting', ignore them. Some people do need those, but you definitely don't! All you want to do at this stage is register your chosen name and, possibly, use the 'Domain privacy' option mentioned above. Otherwise, there's nothing else you need, and certainly nothing else you should pay for.



8. You'll arrive at a form where you provide your contact details and sign up for an account with Fasthosts. There are no particular surprises here: the form wants your name, a note of whether you're using Fasthosts for personal or business purposes, your current email address and your postal address. Lastly you have to choose a password of at least 8 mixed characters. Be sure not to forget this password (or the email address you gave, which will function as your username): you'll need these details to log into Fasthosts in future and make changes to your domain, renew it, cancel it, and so on.
9. After filling in the form, you'll click a **Continue to payment details** button at the bottom. At this point you may have to complete a 'Captcha' – a test to ensure you're a human being and not a robot – such as clicking pictures in a grid which show cars.
10. Having done that, you'll arrive at a 'Payment details' page and this should now display the correct total

Set up an account with Fasthosts

Complete the 'Captcha'

Pay for your domain name

price, including VAT. Here you choose whether to pay using a credit/debit card or by PayPal. Pick whichever option you prefer and provide the necessary details.

11. Finally, review the Terms & Conditions and tick the box below them to accept them, and click **Confirm & pay now**.
12. That's it – you've just bought your own domain name! Close your web browser and you've finished.



Actually, there is a little more to do, but there's no rush to do it. Your domain name will take about 24 hours to 'propagate' around the Internet and become accessible worldwide, and that process has already begun.

This is the Domain Name System (DNS) at work: over the next day-or-so, all the DNS servers around the world will be notified that any email messages being directed at your newly-created domain name should be sent to Fasthosts. Our next step will be to determine what happens to those messages once they reach Fasthosts, but there's obviously no urgency to do that!

Set Up Forwarding to Your Personal Email Address

Log into your
Fasthosts
account...

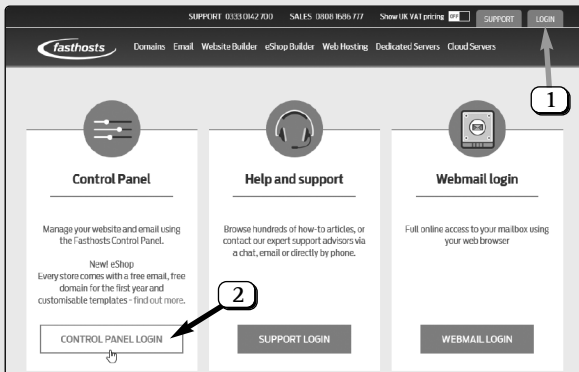
...and set up
forwarding

The other reason I suggested closing your browser a moment ago is to show you how to log into Fasthosts and reach the 'Control Panel' for your domain name. That's something you'll need to do at least occasionally, so it's useful to know how.

This time we need to do it in order to set up your email forwarding, so that messages sent to your new domain are redirected to your own email address (and/or the email addresses of your family). Here's what to do:



1. Start your web browser and visit www.fasthosts.co.uk again. When you arrive, click **Login** (1) at the top of the page and then **Control Panel Login** (2).



2. Enter the email address and password you gave for your Fasthosts account and click **Log in**.
3. On the next page, among other things you'll see a row of square items beginning with 'My Account' (which in future will be useful to check and update your payment method for renewals, and so on). For now, in the 'Website Hosting' box, click on **Add Web Hosting** (3).



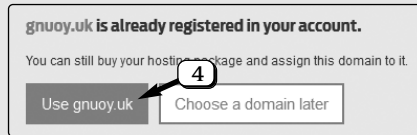
4. On the next page there's a collection of larger boxes offering a variety of options. In the 'Web & Email Forwarding' box, click on **Add Forwarding**.
5. On the next page you'll see a search box for domain names. Type your new domain name (in my case, **gnuoy.uk**), making sure you've spelt it correctly, and click the **Search** button to its right.
6. You should arrive at a page saying [Domain name] is already registered in your account. (If you don't,

First we have to add a free 'hosting package'

Type your domain name

Click the **Use...** button

it suggests you've made a typing mistake in the previous step, so go back and try again!) That's exactly what we want to hear: click the button that says Use [domain name] **4**.



Incidentally, don't be put off by the line that says 'You can still buy...' – you're not paying anything more. As you might have noticed a few steps ago, the forwarding option we need is free.

No charge
for this!

Go to the Email
settings for your
domain name

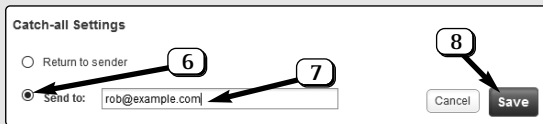
We'll start with
'catch-all
forwarding'

7. Once again you'll see some terms and conditions, with a checkbox below which has to be ticked to indicate your agreement. You'll also see a 'Confirm & pay now' button, but – as it shows at the top of the page – the price of this is £0.00. Click on **Confirm & pay now** and you'll see a simple page thanking you for your order. Click the wide button that says **Go to your control panel dashboard**.
8. On the next page, move your mouse to **Hosting** at the top and click **Email Accounts** on the pop-up panel. This leads to a page showing your domain name at the left with 'Web', 'Email' and 'Remove' buttons further to its right: click the **Email** button.
9. First we'll set up what's known as 'catch-all forwarding'. As the name suggests, this catches every email message sent to your domain name and passes it on to the email address provided by your ISP (or, of course, any other email address you choose). This

allows you to put whatever you like before the @ sign to create a new email address. I tell Amazon my email address is `amazon@gnuoy.uk`, and tell Microsoft it's `microsoft@gnuoy.com`, and so on, but their messages will always be passed on to my main email account, the one provided by my ISP, where I'll automatically receive them each time I check for new messages. To set this up, look for the words **Catch-all: Return to Sender** and click the word **Change** beside them (5).



- In the pop-up box that appears, click the circular option button beside **Send to** (6) and then, in the box to its right (7), type your usual email address – the one where all your email currently goes – making absolutely sure you type it correctly! (If you set this to the wrong address, you won't get any email at all from your new domain!) After checking what you've typed, click **Save** (8).



- This may be all you need to do. If you're happy for every email message sent to your domain to be passed onto this one email address, you can regard the job as finished, click **Logout** in the top-right corner of the page and close your browser.

But there's another possibility: perhaps you'd like to give your 'other half' his or her own email address? As an example, our friend John Smith might like his wife Jane to have the address `jane@smiths.co.uk`.

Type the address to which your email should be forwarded

Finished?

Or do you need some addresses to be forwarded elsewhere

Add an individual email forwarder

At the moment, the catch-all forwarding we've just set up would mean that all messages for smiths.co.uk would get sent to John, so he'd want to make an exception for **jane@smiths.co.uk** to have all those messages passed to Jane's usual email address, not his. To do that, click the **Add a Forwarder** button (which you can see in the first screenshot on page 13).

- Now you'll see the form below, where it's the first and last boxes that are the truly important ones. In the first box (9), type the name of the new email address you're creating – the name that should come before the @ sign. (Our friend Mr Smith would be typing **jane** here, creating **jane@smiths.co.uk**). In the next three boxes, type the person's name as they'd like it to be displayed in email messages forwarded to them, and then their first and last names. In the last box (10), type your other half's usual email address – the address at which all her messages are currently received. Again, be sure to type this correctly, otherwise messages sent to her new address will just go missing! After checking what you've typed, click **Create Forwarder** (11).

Go back to your Email Overview

- This takes you to a page showing the new email address you've just created and the other details you've just supplied above. You can change these if you spot a mistake. Otherwise, near the top of the page, click the small words **Email Overview** to return to where you were in step 11.

14. Are there other family members who'd like their own address on your domain, also forwarding to their own current email addresses? If so, click **Add a Forwarder** again and go back to step 12 to add another. You can add as many email addresses as you like in this way. When you've finished (for now), click **Logout** in the top-right corner of the page and close your browser.

More individual forwarders needed?

If you realise you've forgotten someone else who needs their own email address, you can get back here more quickly in future since you won't have to go through the initial steps of adding the ability to forward messages. Just visit Fasthosts and log in to your Control Panel, move the mouse to **Hosting** at the top and click **Email Accounts**, then click the **Email** button to the right of your domain name. You're then in the right place to change or switch off catch-all forwarding, change or delete any individual forwarders you've set up, and add new email addresses and their forwarders.



Update Your Email Program to Use Your New Address

About 24 hours after registering your domain name, try sending yourself an email message to test it. Using your email program, or a webmail service online, address a new message to **someone@yourdomain**. The someone can be anything at all if you opted to use catch-all forwarding, or one of the names you set up in steps 12 and 13 above if you didn't.

Send yourself a test message

You can obviously send yourself as many test messages as you like, so if you enabled catch-all forwarding as well as setting up some pre-defined addresses, you should test all the pre-defined addresses by sending a message to each, and

Check individual forwarders were set up properly too!

send a test message to some random string of characters – like `qwertyuiop@yourdomain` – to make sure the catch-all forwarding is working.

Did your test message(s) arrive?

If all the messages arrive where they should, you know you're ready to roll: your domain name has propagated around the Internet (at least sufficiently for these messages to arrive), and you didn't make any typing mistakes in the addresses you created or the addresses to which they forward. Therefore, you can let all your contacts know your new email address and ask them to use it in place of your old one.

Set your new address as your 'Reply to' address

The final thing to do is to make a small change to the account settings of your email program (or your webmail service), so that whenever you send someone an email message and they reply to it, they're replying to your new email address. Most email programs and services have a setting named **Reply address** or **Reply to** in the settings for your email account – usually left blank – but we need to find that setting and type your new email address into it. (And, if you've set up addresses for members of your family too, they'll want to find the equivalent setting in their email program or service and put their new email address in that 'Reply address' or 'Reply to' box.)

Exactly where you find this option varies from one program and service to another, but here's a quick run through the procedure for the most popular of them:

Windows Live Mail

- **Windows Live Mail:** go to the **Accounts** tab on the Ribbon and click **Properties**. In the box labelled **Reply address**, type your new email address, then click **OK**.

Microsoft Outlook

- **Microsoft Outlook:** click the **File** tab at the far-left of the Ribbon, click the **Account Settings** button, then **Account Settings** on the menu. Make sure your main email account is selected in the dialog that appears (it's quite likely your only email account) and click the **Change** button just above it. In the next dialog that opens, click the **More Settings** button near the bottom-right: a third

dialog appears in which you type your new email address in the **Reply Email** box and click **OK**. Click **Cancel** in the 'Change Account' dialog, then **Close** in the Account Settings dialog.

- **Mozilla Thunderbird:** click the menu button (three horizontal lines) at the far-right of the toolbar, move the mouse to **Options** and click **Account Settings**. In the box labelled **Reply-to Address**, type your new email address and then click **OK**.
- **Outlook.com:** after signing into your account at www.outlook.com and arriving at your **Inbox**, click the cog-shaped icon at the top-right followed by **Connected accounts**. Below the 'Email aliases' heading, click the words **Manage** or **choose a primary alias**. On the next page, click **Add email address**, then select the option **Add an existing email address as a Microsoft account alias**, type your new email address into the box below it and click the **Add alias** button. Microsoft will send an email message to this address, and you'll have to click the link it contains to prove you own it. Having done that, go back to Outlook.com and again click the cog icon followed by **Connected accounts**. This time, below the 'From address' heading, click the words **Change your From address**. Open the drop-down list and choose your new address, then click the **Save** link at the top-left of the page.
- **Gmail:** after signing into your account at www.gmail.com, click the cog-shaped icon near the top-right of the page followed by **Settings**. At the top of the page, click the **Accounts and Import** tab. Alongside **Send mail as** you'll see your current Gmail address: to the far-right right of this, click the small words **edit info**. In the pop-up box that opens, click **Specify a different "reply-to" address**, type your new email address in the box that appears and then click **Save Changes**.

Mozilla
Thunderbird

Outlook.com
webmail

Google Gmail
webmail



From now on, whenever you send an email message (or reply to one or forward one), the hidden details in the message will still show your old address as the 'From' address, but there will be an extra detail – a 'Reply-to' address – containing your new address. Any email program or service that receives your messages should use this 'Reply-to' address rather than the 'From' address when the recipient composes a reply to you.

All set up
and working!

Quick Tips: Deal with Renewals, Avoid Scams, and More

By the time you've worked through to this point in the article, everything should be going swimmingly. You've got a catchy domain name (like 'gnuoy.uk', but better!), you've chosen the email address you're primarily going to use for yourself (such as 'rob@gnuoy.uk') and you've entered that as your email program's 'Reply to' address. You've probably started letting your contacts know you'd like them to start using this address from now onwards.

There are just a few extra things worth knowing, or considering, or being wary of, so let's run through those to finish.

Catch-all
forwarding
provides great
flexibility

Using catch-all forwarding? Take full advantage!

If you have opted to use catch-all forwarding and you decide to stick with it, make the most of it. Keep the primary address you've chosen (for example, **rob@gnuoy.uk** in my case) as private as possible, for use by trusted friends and relatives, and give out unique new addresses for everything else: **tripadvisor@gnuoy.uk**, **google@gnuoy.uk**, **adobe@gnuoy.uk** and so on. That way, you can quickly shut down an address that's suddenly receiving a lot of junk mail just by setting your email program to auto-delete messages sent to that address, without impacting any of the other addresses you've given out.

The benefit of catch-all forwarding is that you can invent and use email addresses without any advance planning. If I'm at a website that won't let me continue until I've given it my email address, I can just type `WebsiteName@gnuoy.uk`, knowing that the catch-all forwarding will ensure this website's messages reach me, but in a way that lets me distinguish them from everyone else's messages.

Pick different names for each website

It's a good idea to keep a simple list of the email addresses you've given out. That way, if you ever want to switch off catch-all forwarding, you'll know which addresses you need to add individual forwarders for (by following steps 12 and 13 on page 14) to ensure that you don't cut off any legitimate sender's ability to email you.



To renew or not to renew?

Remember that you don't actually 'buy' a domain name – it's more of a rental. You've just paid to use it for a year or two, and after that it will be up for renewal. If you don't renew it, you lose it: after a short grace period, during which you could buy it back if you'd honestly forgotten about it, it goes back in the pot for anyone to register. Even during that grace period, however, you won't receive any email sent to your domain.

Up for renewal after a year or two

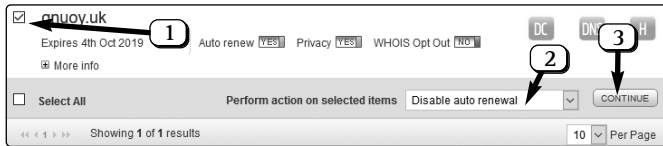
Like most domain sellers, Fasthosts sets your domain to be auto-renewed, so if you do want to keep it, you don't have to worry about remembering. You'll get notifications that it's about to be renewed or has just been renewed when the time comes, with a note of the renewal fee, but otherwise it all happens automatically.

It should be renewed by Fasthosts automatically

If you decide you don't want to renew, you can log into your Control Panel at Fasthosts, move the mouse to **Domains** at the top of the page and click **Manage Domains**. Tick the box beside your domain name (1) then choose **Disable auto**

Domain name no longer needed?

renewal from the drop-down list (2) and click **Continue** (3). Your domain (and email addresses) will continue to work until renewal date; just ignore the renewal reminders you receive.



Since you registered your domain at Fasthosts, only Fasthosts can renew it for you! Ignore messages from any other company telling you your domain is expiring or offering you services that look like renewal offers. Scammers do contact people as their domain names near renewal time to try to fool them into parting with large sums which they believe are renewal fees. Any message about your domain name that doesn't come from Fasthosts isn't to be trusted!

Keep your forwarding addresses up-to-date!

Change of ISP?

Remember that the smooth-running of your email relies on your messages being forwarded to the correct email addresses. If you change your ISP, for example, the address to which your messages are being forwarded will probably cease to exist.

Update the addresses that receive your forwarded messages!

Be sure to return to your Fasthosts Control Panel and change the address for your catch-all forwarding and/or for individual forwarding to an address that does still exist, so that you can still receive your email. This sort of change should take an hour (at absolute most) to take effect, because it's just a matter of Fasthosts noting that it has to send your messages somewhere different from where it was sending them before.