BrightEdge Point of View:
Non-www - Is it time to drop the www?

Marketing, engineering, and SEO teams are likely to have differing opinions on whether or not www adds value in a web address. Before getting to the answer, we should first address the reason that the www even exists. The www references the World Wide Web, which is the foundation of the Internet as we know it today. In an effort to be more technically accurate, the World Wide Web is only a portion of the Internet. It's the part of the Internet with which we typically interact, using web browsers like Chrome, Firefox and others. Since the early 1990s, prefixes like www, ftp, and others were used to indicate the type of content being delivered. For example, ftp.domain.com sets the expectation that it's an ftp file server, mail.domain.com is a mail server and www.domain.com is the website itself.

Why are some websites eliminating www?

Technically, the www is optional. In print materials, the www takes extra space, which affects layouts, font sizes, and design aesthetics. As Internet addresses have become ubiquitous across most of the world, domain extensions, like .com, effectively communicate the presence of a company's web address. As new domain extensions gradually become more popular, some would argue that a single dot (.) connecting two words, in the right context, is sufficient to communicate a website address – such as domain.info, domain.xyz or domain.me. As organizations evolve in their online and offline marketing, some have opted to eliminate the www in their online presence. While that decision isn't necessarily bad, it is not optimal.

Is www better than non-www?

For the website itself, yes. Using www provides more flexibility when it comes to cookie management across mobile and international versions of the site. Privacy laws will continue to grow in their complexity as the Internet matures. Therefore, it is our view that this privacy-related benefit is enough to declare www as the winner in this battle – for the website itself. That said, there's more to the story.

Consistency is vital and redirects are essential

Whether you agree with our view that it is better to use www or not, it is vital to select one or the other. Allowing pages to be viewed with both the www and the non-www version of a domain is bad for SEO – it weakens domain and page equity, and creates "duplicate content." Users should be able to enter a non-www address and be routed to the correct www page. For example, if a user enters the address domain.com/foo/bar/, the website should automatically redirect to www.domain.com/foo/bar. Do not redirect all non-www traffic to the site's homepage; doing so will frustrate users and confuse search engines.

What about domains in marketing materials?

For marketing purposes, drop the www. As noted above, consumers no longer need the www to comprehend that they are looking at a web address. The www unnecessarily consumes space in print materials and email footers– it's now just noise. Eliminating the www makes it easier to use larger fonts and be more declarative in layouts.

Also eliminate the www for the sake of brand image. Some consumers will interpret the presence of www in marketing materials to be condescending, while others will perceive that the company who includes the www as less Internet-savvy. Consider the world's largest brands. When was the last time you saw the www in marketing materials for your preferred retail outlet?

The Takeaway

The answer to this question comes in three parts. While it may seem inconsistent, this is the approach used by the world's largest brands – and it works.
1. Use www on the website
2. Redirect non-www to www of the appropriate page
3. Drop the www in marketing materials

If you would like to discuss the topic, please call your Customer Success manager or call us at 800-678-8023.

About BrightEdge

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