

The Empowered Builder: Digital Identity in the Age of AI

May 2026

Contents

Overview
Insights
Key Findings
Conclusion
Methodology

A Letter from Sammy Ahmed

General Manager, name.com

To Our Partners and Customers,

The world is getting more complex, and clarity matters more than ever. AI is reshaping how we interact with the internet, but progress requires more than speed. It demands thoughtful decisions and meaningful context.

From our perspective as a domain platform, we've witnessed significant shifts in market behavior. In 2025 alone, .dev registrations grew 8x and .app, .codes and .software also saw notable growth, reflecting increasing demand for domain names that communicate purpose and expertise. These domain extensions are also riding the vibe coding wave. As AI-assisted development lowers the barrier to building, a new generation of non-technical founders is launching apps and reaching for domain extensions that say something about what they've made.

Meanwhile, AI has quietly crossed a threshold. Websites that once took days or weeks to build can now be created in minutes. Code is generated, deployed, and discarded just as quickly, what we call "disposable code," fundamentally changing how we think about digital presence and ownership.

In an era where anyone can quickly create a site, the domain name has become an essential marker of trust and digital identity. This report explores that shift. It examines how AI is acting as a force multiplier for individuals and small teams, and uncovers key trends shaping the future of digital presence: near-zero production costs, the rise of niche business and the move toward an identity-first online presence. It makes the case that while AI has lowered the barrier to building and scaling at unprecedented speed, the domain remains the one thing that can't be automated.

Our goal is to provide practical insights, offering a clear guide to help you navigate these changes and make confident decisions in this evolving landscape.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

In 2025 alone, .dev registrations grew 8x and .app, .codes and .software also saw notable growth, reflecting increasing demand for domain names that communicate purpose and expertise.

Overview



For the last two decades, the internet has been defined by social media dominance, the era of Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. We are now entering a transformative expansion: the Agentic Web.

In this new era, information journeys begin in Generative AI Search, and the barrier to creation has collapsed. We are witnessing the rise of the Empowered Builder. This narrative report explores how AI functions as a force multiplier for individuals and small teams, and why, in an era of “disposable code” the domain name has emerged as the essential beacon of trust and digital identity.

“The way we interact with the internet is undergoing yet another transformative expansion. Search, social and now AI are all key drivers of information and innovation. For partners and builders, success today means ensuring your digital identity is robust enough to serve as a beacon of trust across all these evolving discovery channels.”

– Kobi Gamliel, VP Partnerships & AI Ecosystem, Wix

Insights



The internet is moving into the **Agentic Web**, where information journeys begin in Generative AI Search and the barrier to creation has collapsed.



The market is moving toward an **identity-first online presence**, with driving demand for descriptive domain extensions that communicate purpose and expertise.



AI is fostering the rise of the **Empowered Builder**, acting as a force multiplier that allows for the explosion of highly profitable, one-person businesses (“Solopreneur Unicorns”) and niche growth.



The creation process has entered the **Era of Disposable Code**, where a website can be launched in as little as ten minutes, fundamentally shifting the core asset from proprietary code to the Domain and Digital Identity.



Trust has become infrastructure: 77% of professionals surveyed anticipate the importance of a good domain name will increase due to AI, as a branded domain is the essential beacon of authenticity for AI agents citing sources.



The domain name is critical because it drives **attention**, control (over content and audience), and provides the infrastructure to **start building fast** while establishing credibility.

Key Findings

1.

The Rise of the Empowered Builder

AI is fundamentally changing who builds and how they do it. The technical gatekeeping that defined the previous decade, with long development cycles and steep cost barriers, is giving way to a more fluid, democratic environment.

The Design Engineer: Developers are evolving from manual implementers to system-level orchestrators. Professionals with liberal arts and social science backgrounds are finding renewed leverage as prompt quality and orchestration become competitive skills.

“The ideas guy is coming back.”

– Jeff Burke, VP, Replit

The Solopreneur Unicorn: One of AI’s most compelling promises is the explosion of profitable, one-person businesses. AI functions as a virtual team of collaborators or a technical co-founder available on demand. Small teams can now solve niche problems that Big Tech may not. If 2026 is the year of the Agents, participants interviewed see 2027 and beyond as the year of the niche. Successful founders will find ways to address these markets in efficient, low-capital ways and create lasting value (almost like the pre-internet era of business).

“We are now seeing the rise of the one-person billion-dollar company. This new AI technology can allow people to have an idea and just do the idea.”

– Sam Saliba,
Industry Advisor, saliba.ai

Key Findings

1. The Rise of the Empowered Builder

Industry leaders are predicting the following dynamic changes in tools that support the Empowered Builder:

- ◆ The intent interface is a new design category: tools don't require the user to understand what they're doing (prompt driven vs. hand-coded).
 - ◆ A new class of tooling will emerge around auditing and securing AI-generated codebases.
 - ◆ AI tools natively supporting multilingual markets will become a growth unlock, not an afterthought.
 - ◆ Domain registrations will become a leading indicator of new small business formation, especially in Latin America and Asia-Pacific.
-

Key Findings

2. The Era of Disposable Code

The economics of web creation have shifted. The phrase “disposable code” reflects a reality where a website can be a near-zero cost to build. When the cost of production collapses, so does the fear of throwing something away.

- ✦ **Software as Content:** Software is moving from a long-term capital asset to limited lifetime use. We are seeing the rise of “event-driven software,” tools built for a single event or a spontaneous business need.
- ✦ **The Build-Validate-Discard Loop:** Builders can create a landing site in as little as 10 minutes to validate a problem. If it doesn’t work, they discard it and rebuild.
- ✦ **Coordinators of Chaos:** The risk of this era is “unmaintainable” code shipped by builders who may not understand the underlying architecture. This creates a new role for “coordinators of chaos” to ensure security and compliance.

Feature	Before	AI Era
Development Cycle	Long (Quarters/Years)	Short (Minutes/Days)
Cost of Production	High	Near Zero
Default Logic	Build, Maintain, Iterate	Build, Validate, Discard
Core Asset	Proprietary Code	Domain & Digital Identity

Key Findings

2. The Era of Disposable Code

Instead of recruiting web developers based on traditional credentials and years of experience, companies are prioritizing energy, curiosity, and demonstrated problem-solving.

“The best engineers today aren’t just writing code. They’re thinking about the product, the user, the infrastructure, and what breaks at scale.”

– **Chris Lubkert, Co-Founder,**
Extendify

“You can spend a weekend on whatever vibe coding platform you want. You can create a landing site in 10 minutes. You can validate a problem with a real solution. Because of that, it’s easier to throw away.”

– **Andrew Homeyer, Co-Founder,**
Landingsite

Key Findings

3. Trust as Infrastructure in an AI-First World

We're in the greatest era of digital building the world has ever seen. AI is lowering the barrier so almost anyone can ship a product, launch a brand, or publish an idea. But when everything gets built, it becomes increasingly difficult to be heard. What breaks through is verifiably real and credibly owned. Domains provide that infrastructure.

- ◆ **Verifiable Identity:** 77% of respondents expect the importance of a good domain name to increase due to AI.
- ◆ **AI Search & Discoverability:** 40% of professionals surveyed are betting on keyword-rich domains to perform best in LLM-generated answers, while 19% believe descriptive industry TLDs will outperform traditional options.
- ◆ **Credibility Paradox:** 65% of respondents trust AI-recommended websites, yet 30% cite misinformation and fake websites as their top concern. A branded domain acts as a beacon of authenticity for AI agents citing sources.

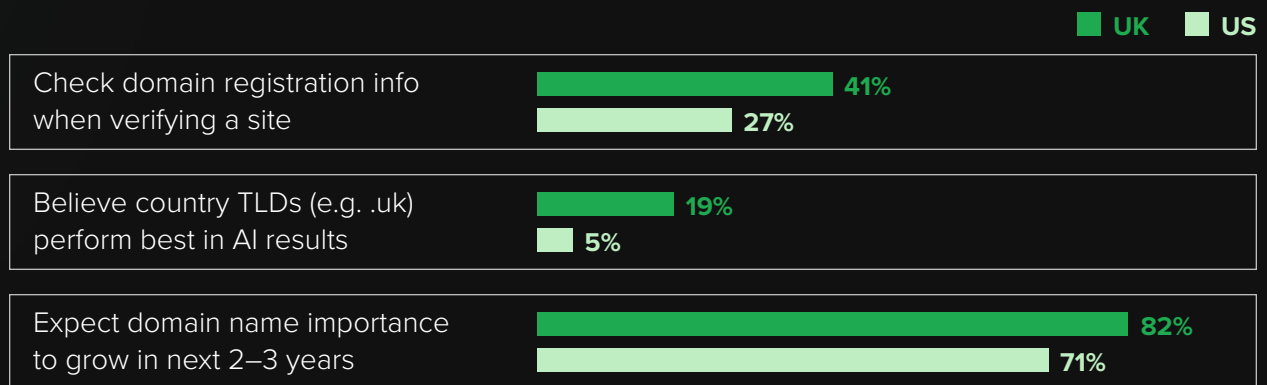
“I love the joy people get from getting their domain. They get a lot of joy from branding something. Owning something with your name or product name legitimizes something a lot more.”

– Elliot Dauber, Senior Software Engineer, Vercel

Key Findings

3. Trust as Infrastructure in an AI-First World

Of note, UK and US audiences sometimes vary in their approach and perceptions of domains in relation to AI.



“It’s essential for people to claim their presence online more than ever before, because if you don’t, someone else will.”

– Reuben Gomez, Graduate Fellow,
Michigan Institute of Technology

Conclusion

We are entering the **Golden Age of Digital Identity**. While AI has made coding easier than ever, it has also made the landscape louder. In an era where AI tools endlessly remix content, a domain name stands as one of the few things a builder can truly control.

Why the Domain Matters Now

1

Discoverability

A branded domain name may boost discoverability from both AI systems and humans.

2

Control

A domain allows you to have more control over your audience and content regardless of how AI or social platforms evolve.

3

Credibility

It provides the immediate infrastructure to launch fast while establishing trust and credibility from day one.

With a domain name, everyone can build a solid foundation for success. The question is no longer whether digital identity matters, but how clearly you define yours.

“Ideas are the most valuable thing in the world right now.”

– **Ana Guillén, VP Marketing & Communications, Stability AI**

Methodology

Research Methodology

Research findings are based on a survey and 1:1 interviews in partnership with a third party research firm. The survey included 1,120 decision-makers across the US and the UK who actively manage domains, websites, or digital products. Respondents were predominantly Millennial (53%) and Gen X (24%). The 1:1 interviews consisted of 12 thought leaders in the AI, domains, and internet culture spaces. Research was conducted jointly by name.com and Identity Digital.

About name.com

name.com is the domain platform that makes building simple at any scale, serving entrepreneurs, developers, and business leaders. As the first AI-native registrar, we're modernizing domains for the era of agentic AI with a simple, fast, and modern domain API. We also offer an all-in-one launchpad for small businesses, enable development teams to integrate domains in days, not months, and help creators manage their entire online presence with transparency and confidence. Visit www.name.com for more information.