Who should own your domain, hosting and website files?

You should own your domain, hosting account, and website files yourself. No third party, including the company that built your site, should be listed as the owner or registrant on any of these assets. If you do not control them, you do not truly own your website.

Many business owners discover this only when they try to move to a different provider or update something important. The domain registrar may refuse a transfer because the original developer is recorded as the registrant. The hosting company may require the original account holder to release the site. The CMS admin credentials may have been lost or never handed over. By then, the relationship has often soured, and the business is left without its online presence. Understanding website ownership from the start prevents these scenarios.

Why ownership matters

Your domain name is your address on the web. If you do not own it, you cannot move it, renew it, or point it elsewhere. Your hosting account holds all your site files, databases, and email. If you do not own the account, you cannot access those files or change the hosting provider. Your website source code, CMS files, and any custom development belong to you under the terms of the project, but if you never receive a copy or the admin credentials, the practical value is zero.

When a web design company sets up everything under its own name for convenience, it can create a serious dependency. Even a well-intentioned developer might go out of business, change their email address, or simply stop responding. At that moment, the site becomes stranded. The domain cannot be renewed, the hosting bills go unpaid, and the site goes offline. Recovering control can take weeks and involve legal steps.

What you should own and control

Here is a practical checklist of items that should be in your name or under your exclusive control:



- **Domain registrar account**, You should register the domain using your own email and contact details. The account should be in your company's name, or at least in the name of an individual you trust who works for you.
- **Hosting account**, The hosting plan should be billed to you and set up with your credentials. The web design company may have administrative access for support, but the primary account holder should be you.
- **Source code and website files**, You should receive a complete copy of all source code, theme files, images, scripts, and databases after the project finishes. This copy should be stored somewhere you control, like a cloud drive or a local computer.
- **CMS admin credentials**, You should have a user account with administrative privileges in your content management system (WordPress, Drupal, etc.). The password should be known only to you and your staff.
- **Analytics account and Search Console**, Google Analytics and Google Search Console should be set up under your own Google account, not under the developer's. If that was done incorrectly, request a transfer of ownership or create new properties and point them at the same site.

How to check your current situation

If you already have a live website and are unsure who owns what, here are the steps to verify each layer.

Domain ownership

Look up your domain in any public WHOIS tool. The registrant name, organisation, and email should match yours or your company's. If they show the web design company or an individual developer, you need to request a registrant change. This is a simple administrative process at most registrars, but the current registrant has to initiate it or approve it. Some registrars also allow you to change the registrant through a form, but the existing registrant must confirm the change via email.

Hosting account

Log into the hosting control panel. The account owner name and billing details should be yours. If you cannot log in because the developer set it up under their own account, ask them to create a sub-account for you with full administrative rights, or better, transfer the whole account to a new plan in your name. If you pay the hosting bill but the account is in someone else's name, you are effectively renting space on their credit. That is a risk.

CMS access

Check the users list in your CMS. There should be at least one administrator account that you control. If the only admin is the developer, create a new admin user for yourself and then reduce the developer's role to something like editor or custom role that limits their access. Do not delete their access entirely if they still provide support, but ensure you have full control.

Who should have access

Ownership and access are not the same. You can own the account and still grant the web design company the access it needs to build and maintain the site. The difference is legal control. For example, a reliable Web Design Company Dubai | NetSoft will usually ask you to create the domain and hosting accounts yourself, then provide them with a separate user account or temporary credentials to work on the site. They do not need to be the owner. A professional team will also hand over all source code, admin credentials, and data export files at the end of the project without being asked.

If the company insists on being the registrant or the primary account holder, ask why. There are legitimate reasons, such as when the client has no technical background and the company manages everything as a managed service. Even in that case, the domain should still be registered in the client's name, with the developer added as an authorised contact. The hosting account can be set up with the developer as the primary contact only if the client retains the ability to take over the account at any time. A clear written agreement about who owns what and how to transfer control if the relationship ends is essential.

What to do if you do not own your assets

If you discover that your domain, hosting, or CMS access is not in your name, act promptly. Start a conversation with the current owner. Most developers are reasonable and will transfer ownership if asked politely and given a clear reason. For domains, the process involves unlocking the domain, obtaining an authorisation code, and initiating a transfer to a new registrar if needed, or simply changing the registrant contact within the same registrar. For hosting, you may need to export the site files and database and import them into a new account under your name. For the CMS, you can ask the current admin to create a new admin user for you and then remove their admin role once you confirm you have full access.

If the current owner is unresponsive or refuses, you may need to involve legal counsel. At a minimum, document all your attempts to contact them and keep copies of any contracts that state you own the work product. For domains, if the registrant is not you and the current registrant will not cooperate, you may have to wait until the domain expires and try to register it yourself, but that is risky and could result in losing the domain altogether. Prevention is far easier than cure.



Long-term maintenance and data export

Even after you secure ownership, ongoing maintenance matters. Keep your domain registrar and hosting account contact details current. Set up auto-renewal on your domain so it does not accidentally expire. Regularly export your site files and database as a backup. Store those backups in at least two separate locations, such as a cloud service and an external hard drive. If you ever need to switch providers, having your own copy of the site makes the migration smooth.

A professional web design company will also provide you with a data export when the project finishes. This export should include all source code, media files, database dump, and any configuration files. If they use a CMS, they should also give you the admin credentials or at least a way to reset them yourself. A trustworthy Web Design Company Dubai | NetSoft will include these deliverables in the project scope from the start, so there is no ambiguity.

Summing it up

Website ownership is not a technical detail you can delegate. It is the foundation of your online presence. Without it, your business is vulnerable to service disruptions, lost data, and costly recovery efforts. By ensuring that the domain, hosting, and website files are in your name from day one, you keep control of your digital assets. The companies you work with should support that principle, not resist it.