THEDOMAINROBOT / FIELD GUIDE 01

Expired-domain due-diligence checklist

Before we bid, we need evidence—not a promising score. Use this worksheet for one candidate, then document a buy, hold or pass decision. Free to use. No signup, accounts or paid tools required for the worksheet.

Start with identity, legal risk and total cost. Stop early for a critical concern. For every check, keep the evidence URL, date and finding in the companion CSV or your notes. Account-only reports may remain unknown.

This is a research aid, not legal clearance, a penalty detector or a promise of rankings, traffic or transferable SEO value.

Candidate domain

Reviewer / review date (with timezone)

Intended use / target countries

Maximum all-in spend / currency

Finding key: Pending = not checked · Clear = no issue found in evidence reviewed, not certified safe · Concern = investigate · Unknown = unavailable or inconclusive · N/A = explain why in notes.

CHECK 01 / 06

Identity & purchase route

01-01 · Define the actual project

Finding 01-01

Write the audience, country and useful service/content you will build. Would we still want this name without any SEO benefit?

Keep: Intended use; audience; countries.

Pending

01-02 · Check the exact name

Finding 01-02

Copy the full domain and TLD from the registrar. Check spelling, lookalike characters and any internationalized/punycode version before bidding.

Keep: Exact domain; registrar listing URL.

Pending

01-03 · Confirm status, not a countdown

Finding 01-03

Read current registration data and EPP codes. Expired is not the same as available. A hold or transfer restriction needs an explanation. [9]

Keep: Timestamp; registrar; expiry; raw status codes.

Pending

01-04 · Identify the acquisition route

Finding 01-04

Distinguish available registration, auction, backorder and private sale. Read delivery, cancellation, refund and previous-owner renewal terms. [10]

Keep: Seller/registrar terms; deadline and timezone.

Pending

01-05 · Check TLD-specific rules

Finding 01-05

Read the registry and registrar rules for eligibility, reserved names, transfer limits and renewal. Do not apply a generic gTLD timeline to every ccTLD. [4] [9] [10]

Keep: Applicable policy URL; unresolved restrictions.

Pending

Section evidence / concerns / next action

CHECK 02 / 06

History & reputation

02-01 · Sample the history over time

Finding 02-01

Pending

Open early, middle and recent Wayback captures, plus dates around obvious changes. Note the actual capture dates, not just the calendar markers. [1]

Keep: Capture URLs; date; topic; language.

02-02 · Inspect more than the homepage

Finding 02-02

Pending

Review archived about/contact pages and several old deep URLs. Look for abrupt topic switches, impersonation or injected content. [1] [7]

Keep: Deep-page URLs; observations.

02-03 · Mark archive gaps honestly

Finding 02-03

Pending

Record missing years, failed captures and unavailable pages as unknown. Missing archive content is not evidence of no prior use. [1]

Keep: Coverage periods; gaps; failed URLs.

02-04 · Search the name and reputation

Finding 02-04

Pending

Search the quoted domain and former brand names with scam, phishing and complaint terms. Read the underlying pages and distinguish allegations from corroborated facts.

Keep: Query; date; original page; confidence.

02-05 · Separate a name from old assets

Finding 02-05

Pending

Do not assume domain acquisition includes old articles, logos, customer records or accounts. Record what is explicitly included and what permissions need checking.

Keep: Sale scope; asset permissions; open questions.

Section evidence / concerns / next action

CHECK 03 / 06

Trademark & dispute risk

03-01 · Search exact and similar marks

Finding 03-01

Search USPTO and relevant national/regional trademark registers. Include similar spelling, sound and meaning, not only the exact domain text. [2] [3]

Keep: Search terms; jurisdictions; record IDs.

Pending

03-02 · Compare the intended market

Finding 03-02

For plausible matches, read status, owner and goods/services. Compare our intended use and audience; a different spelling alone is not clearance. [2]

Keep: Matches; goods/services; overlap.

Pending

03-03 · Look beyond registered marks

Finding 03-03

Search business names and real-world use. A dead registration or no database match does not settle risk from unregistered rights. [3]

Keep: Web searches; ongoing use; unresolved matches.

Pending

03-04 · Review disputes and policies

Finding 03-04

Search WIPO domain cases for the name/former brand, and check the TLD dispute policy. No matching case does not mean no legal risk. [4]

Keep: Case/policy URLs; relevant findings.

Pending

03-05 · Make an explicit legal stop

Finding 03-05

Hold if there is a credible brand conflict, impersonation concern or unclear right to use the name. Seek qualified advice before committing; this checklist is not legal advice or clearance. [2] [3] [4]

Keep: Issue; decision owner; advice needed.

Pending

Section evidence / concerns / next action

CHECK 04 / 06

Links & search limitations

04-01 · Build an evidence sample

Finding 04-01

Pending

Collect referring-page URLs from public search and any freely available data. Record coverage limits. If legitimately provided, Search Console Links data is still only a sample. [5]

Keep: Source/tool; date; URLs; coverage limits.

04-02 · Open the referring pages

Finding 04-02

Pending

Manually inspect an editorial/relevant sample and suspicious outliers. Check that the link exists, its context, anchor, destination and redirects; record dead or inaccessible pages.

Keep: Referring URL; anchor; target; live status.

04-03 · Look for manipulation patterns

Finding 04-03

Pending

Flag paid-link offers, repeated exact-match anchors, unrelated link networks and hacked pages. These are investigation signals, not a definitive score or Google penalty diagnosis. [7]

Keep: Observed pattern; examples; uncertainty.

04-04 · Use search results as clues

Finding 04-04

Pending

Try site:domain.tld and quoted-name searches. Record queries and results. Few or no site: results do not establish a manual action or prove the domain is safe. [8]

Keep: Queries; date; result URLs.

04-05 · Record account-only unknowns

Finding 04-05

Pending

If authorized access is available, inspect Search Console Manual actions and Security issues separately. Without access, mark unknown. Public tools cannot certify no Google penalties; no manual action is not a ranking guarantee. [6]

Keep: Report/date/access scope or unknown.

Section evidence / concerns / next action

CHECK 05 / 06

Costs & delivery

05-01 · Price the acquisition in full

Finding 05-01

Pending

Record currency, bid/purchase price, buyer premium, mandatory registration/transfer charges and taxes. Check which fees are already included to avoid double counting.

Keep: Dated checkout/fee schedule; all-in quote.

05-02 · Check recurring costs

Finding 05-02

Pending

Obtain the renewal quote for this exact name, including premium renewal if applicable. Record term length, auto-renew terms and any optional extras separately. [10]

Keep: Renewal quote; currency; term; fees.

05-03 · Set the walk-away budget

Finding 05-03

Pending

Use one currency. First-year cash outlay = acquisition + mandatory fees + taxes + first-year running costs not already included. Add a contingency; set a maximum all-in spend before bidding.

Keep: Itemized costs; FX/date if needed; budget.

05-04 · Understand the lifecycle risk

Finding 05-04

Pending

Typical gTLD deletion can include 30-day redemption then 5-day pendingDelete. Registrar timing and prior-owner renewal can affect availability. Do not treat an expiry date as a guaranteed release or delivery date. [9] [10]

Keep: Current status; official terms; delivery uncertainty.

05-05 · Verify delivery and control

Finding 05-05

Pending

Read how the name reaches our registrar account, any transfer locks, payment protections and failure/refund terms. After delivery confirm account control, expiry, contact details and renewal settings. [9] [10]

Keep: Delivery method; restrictions; receipt; control checks.

Section evidence / concerns / next action

CHECK 06 / 06

Decision & first actions

06-01 · Write the useful-content plan

Finding 06-01

Explain the visitor benefit. Do not buy mainly to repurpose a former site into low-value ranking manipulation; Google calls this expired-domain abuse. [7]

Keep: Project plan; old/new topic fit.

Pending

06-02 · Reject metric-only reasoning

Finding 06-02

Record age and third-party scores only as context, never a purchase justification on their own. Do not budget on inherited rankings, traffic or link value; none is promised by this worksheet.

Keep: Evidence versus assumptions; independent business case.

Pending

06-03 · Resolve critical unknowns

Finding 06-03

List what cannot be checked before purchase, especially legal risk, account reports, delivery and renewal cost. Unknown is not clear; do not average away a critical concern.

Keep: Unknown; consequence; next step; owner.

Pending

06-04 · Choose buy, hold or pass

Finding 06-04

Buy only within budget with no unresolved critical issue; hold for missing evidence; pass for unacceptable risk or poor fit. These are our suggested decision rules, not an automated safety rating.

Keep: Decision; reasons; accepted residual risk; date.

Pending

06-05 · Plan a controlled launch

Finding 06-05

Keep evidence and receipts; secure the registrar account; review old DNS before setup. Do not collect former-owner mail or reuse content without permission. Recheck applicable Search Console reports after legitimate verification. [6]

Keep: Owner; next action; recheck date; rollback notes.

Pending

Section evidence / concerns / next action

DECISION RECORD

Evidence first. Decision second.

We suggest a hold whenever a critical unknown could change the purchase decision. A completed checklist is not a certificate of safety.

Decision: buy / hold / pass

Decision date / owner

All-in acquisition / first-year total / currency

Next renewal quote / date / term

Strongest evidence for the decision

Critical issues / accepted residual risks

Next action / owner / due date

Recheck trigger / walk-away condition

Before paying: recheck availability, final price, terms and unresolved conflicts. If the facts changed, revisit the decision rather than relying on an old worksheet.

REFERENCE DESK

Sources & scope

Source review: November 13, 2026. Our checklist order and decision rules are editorial guidance, not an official scoring system. Sources explain the limits; they do not approve a particular purchase.

1. Internet Archive: Using the Wayback Machine
   Archive gaps and inaccessible captures are not a clean-history certificate.
   https://help.archive.org/help/using-the-wayback-machine/
2. USPTO: Likelihood of confusion
   Similarity includes sound, appearance and meaning; related goods/services matter.
   https://www.uspto.gov/trademarks/search/likelihood-confusion
3. USPTO: Federal trademark searching
   Database searching is not definitive clearance; unregistered rights can matter.
   https://www.uspto.gov/trademarks/search/federal-trademark-searching
4. WIPO: Domain Name Dispute Resolution
   UDRP and country-code policies; check the actual applicable policy.
   https://www.wipo.int/en/web/amc/domain-name-disputes/index
5. Google: Links report
   Search Console link data is a sample, not a full backlink census.
   https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9049606?hl=en
6. Google: Manual actions report
   Account report for manual actions, not a public penalty checker or ranking guarantee.
   https://support.google.com/webmasters/answer/9044175?hl=en
7. Google: Spam policies
   Expired-domain abuse, link spam and hacked content.
   https://developers.google.com/search/docs/essentials/spam-policies
8. Google: Site search operator
   site: results are not exhaustive or a penalty diagnosis.
   https://developers.google.com/search/docs/monitor-debug/search-operators/all-search-site
9. ICANN: EPP status codes
   Interpret transfer/hold/deletion codes; do not extrapolate a guaranteed drop time.
   https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/epp-status-codes-2014-06-16-en
10. ICANN: Renewal and expiration FAQs
    Registrar renewal terms and typical gTLD deletion sequence; not universal ccTLD rules.
    https://www.icann.org/resources/pages/domain-name-renewal-expiration-faqs-2018-12-07-en

Free workflow: public registration data, registry/registrar terms, archived pages, public web search and trademark registers. No paid backlink subscription is necessary. Record missing coverage rather than upgrading assumptions into facts.
