

Domain Forwarding

(Have your Cake and Eat it Too!)

by Thornton and Marty Gale

Note – This article is a summary of the topic of domain forwarding. Domain forwarding is very useful to access a free genealogy website such as provided by Rootsweb.com's FreePages services using a proper domain name. For a complete explanation of creating a genealogy website, see the book "Getting Started on Your Genealogy Website" available from the www.genealogyhosting.com website.

In this article, we will explain the technical topic of domain forwarding. Domain forwarding is a standard feature provided by any domain registrar such as www.genealogyhosting.com to forward all network messages from a domain name to an existing website. So let's start by asking what is a domain name? Domain names are the monikers that a website will be known as. For example, the genealogist George Kirkland has the website www.kirkland3.info to hold his genealogy research on his Kirkland family. The domain name is the last two nodes or "*kirkland3.info*" in this example. The domain name is used to form the URL of a website. The URL of George's website is <http://www.kirkland3.info>. The URL is the network identifier which visitors enter (or click) in their web browsers to access a web page.

Domain names must be unique throughout the world so they are registered with a domain name registrar. When you register a domain name, you pay a small yearly fee and continue to own the domain name as long as you pay the fee. Domain names are like any other asset and can be bought or sold or passed down to your heirs.

Genealogists often select a domain name that corresponds to their family surname. Notice that George Kirkland had to use a serial number of "3" appended to "Kirkland" to obtain a unique domain name that had not already been registered by somebody else in the world. This is a fool-proof way of obtaining a domain name of a popular surname.

Note – we have included a detailed explanation of domain names in the article "Stake your Claim with a Domain Name!" available on the www.genealogyhosting.com web site.

A second good question is why would you want to use domain forwarding anyway? In other words, why would you want to cause the forwarding of network messages from a domain name to the URL of an existing website? Also, what are these network messages that are being forwarded?

This article will address these questions in detail but for now we can answer them quickly: You would use domain forwarding because you have just purchased a domain name for your family genealogy but you already have a family genealogy website (e.g., a free website) which you want to continue using but access it with your new domain name. The network messages which are forwarded are the web page requests and

responses to access web pages to or from the forwarded (existing) website. In other words, domain forwarding “wraps” the existing website in a new name. At the same time, the website can still be accessed by its old name.

Domain Names and Free Websites

The bread-and-butter use of domain forwarding is to access an existing free genealogy website under a proper domain name. Thousands of genealogists have already taken the plunge into genealogy websites with their own genealogy websites. An easy way to have a genealogy website is to take advantage of those free websites offered by many internet service providers. These services provide free websites in exchange for putting some advertising on the web pages of the websites. In the world of genealogy, the “Freepages” service from *Rootsweb.com* is a good example. You may already have a free genealogy website from Rootsweb or one of the other service providers.

The problem with these free services is that the free website’s URL is complex and difficult to remember! With a free service such as Rootsweb.com, the URL of your genealogy website is of the form “*http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~familyname*” (i.e., complex and difficult to remember) This problem is solved completely with your own domain name coupled with domain forwarding. That is, you select and purchase a domain name for your family genealogy. Then you setup domain forwarding to access your free genealogy website using your new domain name.

For example (Figure 1), let’s say that the genealogist Margaret Schmidt already has a free genealogy website of “*http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~schmidtgen.*” She has spent considerable time on her free website and is happy with it for the time being. However, whenever she gives her fellow genealogists and family members the URL of her free website, there is often problems with them accessing it. Mistakes are made entering the complex URL of her free genealogy website and it is difficult for people to remember. To remedy these problems she wants to access her free genealogy website with a meaningful domain name using domain forwarding.

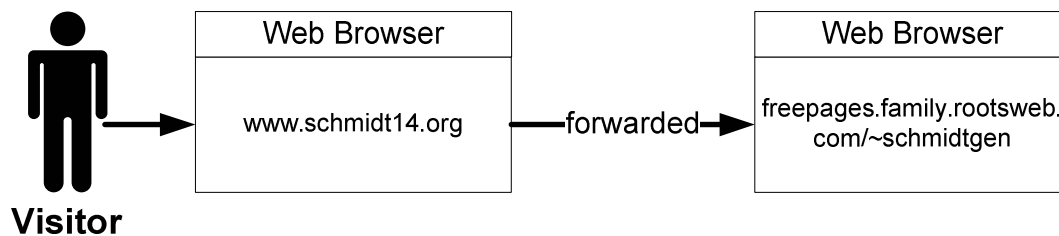


Figure 1 - Domain Forwarding

Let’s say she purchases the domain name of “*Schmidt14.org*” (i.e., using the fool-proof strategy of appending a serial number to a popular surname). She sets up domain forwarding so that whenever the URL of “*http://www.schmidt14.org*” is entered in a web browser (entered in the address bar or clicked on a web page), then her existing “*http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~schmidtgen*” is accessed. In other words, visitors can get to her free website easily (which is the whole point of domain names).

Domain names are dirt cheap and many authors will register several variations of their base domain name. This would be done to control their domain name. For example, Margaret Schmidt might also register not only her "*schmidt14.org*" but also "*schmidt14.name*," "*schmidt14.info*," "*schmidt14.us*," "*schmidt14.com*," etc. Each of these variations of her base name can be forwarded to her base website of *www.schmidt14.org*. In this case, only one website is being set up but several domain names point to it using the same techniques of domain forwarding.

Advantages of Domain Forwarding

Many genealogists who have a free genealogy website want more control of the technical environment and so plan on someday having their own genealogy website under their own hosting plan. That is, instead of relying on the vendor's free website features with their inherent limitations, some genealogists long for a standard website in which they can use the full capabilities of website technology. Also, with their own standard genealogy website, they are not dependent on a proprietary service for the important function of housing their genealogy information. This situation is where domain forwarding really shines.

Note - We have presented complete details of how to create a genealogy website in the book "Getting Started on Your Genealogy Website" available from the *www.genealogyhosting.com* website.

You receive a free, fully functioning, standard website (our "Economy" Hosting Plan) that is advertising supported when you register a domain name at *www.genealogyhosting.com*. This means you can jump into a standard genealogy website very cheaply. However, it will take time to plan, design, and build your standard genealogy website. Domain forwarding allows you to convert your old free website slowly to your new permanent genealogy website. During the potentially long project time for the construction of your permanent genealogy website you can continue to use your old free genealogy website but now under the domain name of the new genealogy website. Then once your standard genealogy website is complete, you can switch your domain name so that it accesses the new website instead of the old. That is, you would remove the function of domain forwarding for your domain name so that network messages are no longer forwarded and would instead be routed "normally" to the new website. At this point, your old free genealogy website would no longer be needed and could be discontinued or repurposed.

Setting Up the Physical Plumbing for Domain Forwarding

Once you have purchased a domain, you use your Account Manager at *www.genealogyhosting.com* to set up domain forwarding. When you setup domain forwarding, you are causing all network messages which are directed to any URL with the implied domain name to be redirected to the specified URL that you set up.

The folder structure of the URL is honored in the forward. The rule is if “abc” is forwarded to “xyz” then “abc/mno” is forwarded to “xyz/mno”. For example, let’s take our example above, of the domain “schidt14.org” being forwarded to <http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~schmidtgen>. Then a URL of <http://www.schmidt14.org/images/frederickSchmidt.jpg> will be forwarded to <http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~schmidtgen/images/frederickSchmidt.jpg>.

Also, when you setup domain forwarding, you can specify the meta-tags which search engine spiders such as Google will use to index the website under its forwarded domain name (e.g., “Schmidt14.org” in this case).. In this way, when visitors enter the search terms (e.g. using Google) of the meta tags then, in this example, the www.schmidt14.org website will appear in the search results.

Before You Begin Make Sure Your Domain Name can be Forwarded

Obviously, if you want to forward a domain name then you can’t already have a website associated with that domain name. You must delete any website with that domain name – otherwise you can’t forward the domain name. Follow these procedures to remove a website from your domain name at www.genealogyhosting.com:

Warning: This step will delete any files associated with any existing website hosted by www.genealogyhosting.com whose domain name you wish to forward. Make sure you have a backup copy of any existing website at www.genealogyhosting.com that will be forwarded.

- Log on to your www.genealogyhosting.com Account Manager.
- Select “Hosting Account List” This will present a list of your websites
- Check the box of the website to be deleted then click the “Cancel Account” button.`

Also, before a domain name can be forwarded, it must be “parked.” This is a designation which means there is no website associated with the domain name (yet). When you first purchase a domain name, it’s status is “parked” and it can be forwarded. However, if the domain name has previously had a website associated with it at www.genealogyhosting.com and you want to now forward it, then it must be manually parked. To park your domain name (which will not be necessary if it has never had a website) follow these procedures:

- Log on to your www.genealogyhosting.com Account Manager.
- Select “Manage Domains.” This will present a list of your domain names.
- Click the box for the domain name in question then click the “Nameservers” icon on the top menu bar.
- Click the radio button for the “Default Parked Nameservers” then click “OK.” It may take several hours up to 24 hours for this change to be effective on the general internet. However, you can proceed with the following.

Setting up Domain Forwarding

You would set up domain forwarding using the following procedures:

- Log on to your *www.genealogyhosting.com* Account Manager.
- Select “Manage Domains.” This will present a list of your domain names.
- Click the “Domain Forwarding” from the list of functions on the left.
- A list of your domain forwards will be presented. The list will show you what domain forwards you have already set up (if any) for all your domain names in your account as well allow you to change your domain forwards . Click on the domain in question. In this example, Margaret would click “schmidt14.org.”
- This will display the “Domain Forwarding” Account Manager web page (Figure 2). Proceed as followings referring to the numbers in the figure:
 1. In the text box labeled “Details,” the domain to be forwarded will be prepopulated in the text box. In this example, Margaret would see her domain of *Schmidt14.org*.
 2. In the text box labeled “Forward To,” enter the exact URL of your free website to which you want this domain name to be forwarded. For example, Margaret would enter the URL of her free website of *http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~schmidtgen* ”
 3. In the “Type” radio buttons, click the “301Moved Permanently” button which will tell search engine spiders that this change is permanent (i.e., instead of just a few days, etc.).
 4. Click the “Enable” radio button then the “OK” button (not shown in the figure). This will cause the domain forwarding request to be executed.

Setting up Masking and the Search Engine Meta Tags

Click the “Masking” tab (Figure 2, 5) which will display the masking and search engine spider settings (Figure 3). These settings will be used to create meta tags for the forwarded domain (e.g., *www.schmidt14.org*) which will be used by search engine spiders to build their search indexes.

6. Check the “Mask Domain” box. This will make the forwarding transparent to visitors so that the URL of your domain name (e.g., *www.schmidt14.org*) remains in the address bar of the visitor’s web browser (i.e., instead of changing to the forwarded URL).
7. You can also enter a “Masked Title” which will be used to construct the title meta tag. The title meta tag is probably the most important tag used by search engines spiders and should be no more than 80 characters including spaces. It will appear in the address bar of the visitor’s web browser.

8. The “Masked Description Meta Tag” will be used by search engines for the short description of the website presented on the search results page.
9. The “Masked Keyword Meta Tag” will be used to construct the keyword meta tag and should be a consolidated list of keywords and phrases that you consider important to your website. Unfortunately, industry experts say that the keyword meta tag is used less and less by search engine spiders.

Once all the fields are filled in then click the “OK” button (not shown in the figure).

Later when your new genealogy website is ready and you no longer need your old free website, then you can disable the domain forwarding to your old free website. This will restore the domain name so that it can then be used to access your new genealogy website normally.

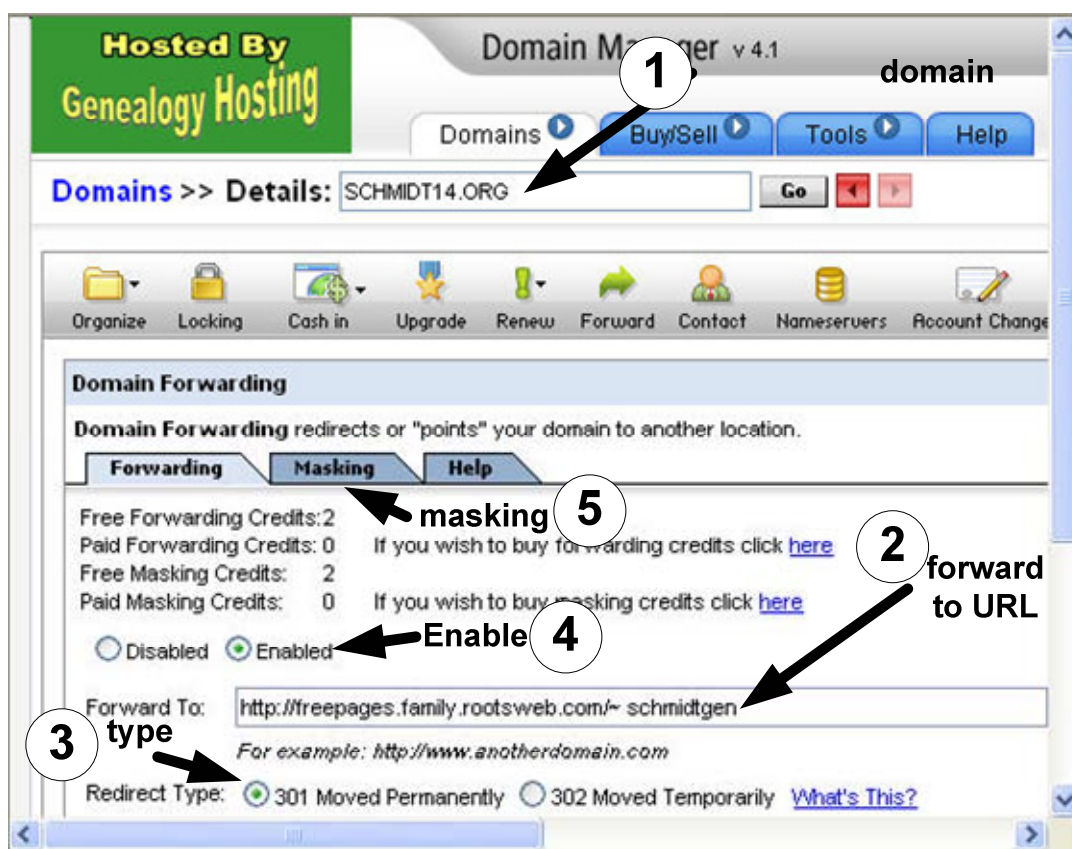


Figure 2 – Setting Up Domain Forwarding

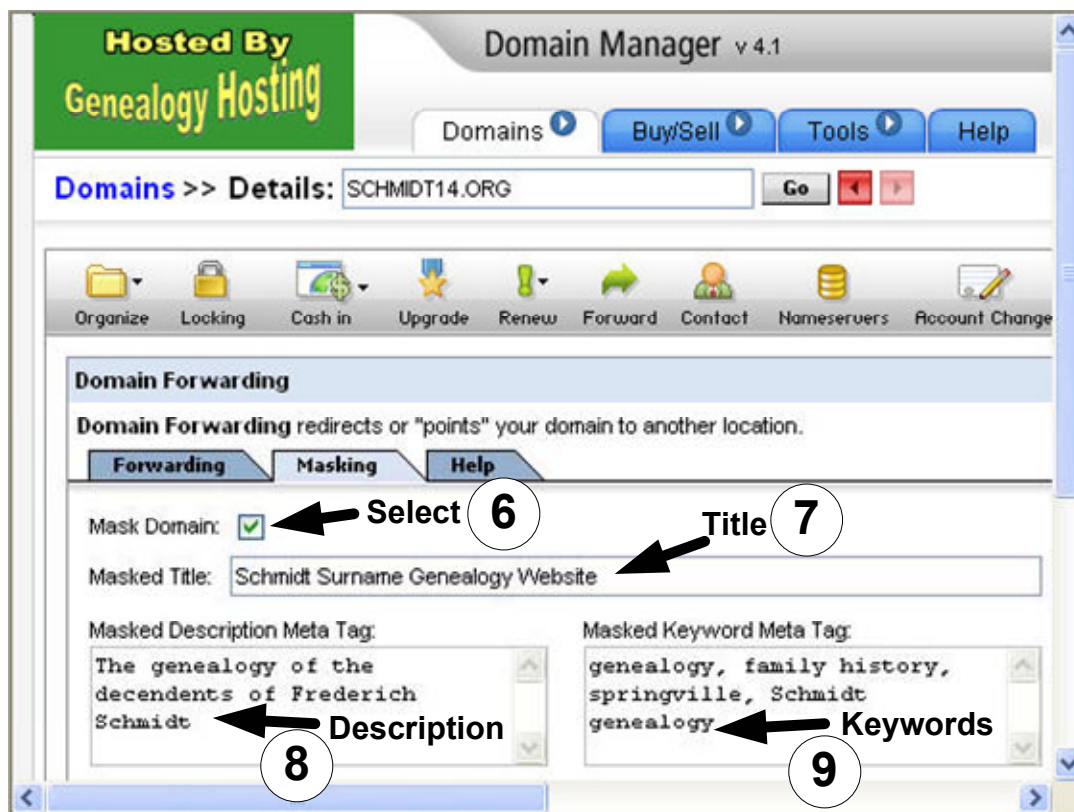


Figure 3 –Setting Up Masking and Search Engine Spider Data