

## Digital Security in the Contractor Supply Industry: A Wake-Up Call

Over the past 15 years of working in digital marketing for the Construction Supply Industry, I've encountered countless stories—only half of which are positive. Writing this article was a challenge because I know many of you will immediately recognize these issues in your own businesses. The contractor supply business is already complex enough—managing deliveries, employee training, securing accounts receivable, inventory, and just-in-time manufacturers. Now, you also have to navigate the digital world, with its passwords and hidden traps.

A few years ago, many of us quickly grabbed the domain name that best represented our company and added ".com" to it—often at the suggestion of a younger employee or a friend. We snatched up the URL, but then did nothing with it. We didn't know what to do next, or we didn't fully understand the importance of the digital infrastructure we were building. At the time, we didn't realize that securing a domain was just the beginning—and that securing the accompanying information was just as crucial.

The good news? We bought our domains for five years. The bad news? We didn't know where the domain was hosted, what the password was, or where the DNS records were kept. These are all vital pieces of information when it comes time to build or update your website.

Here's a real-world example. A company owner purchased the domain at the suggestion of a warehouse manager, who had a friend build a basic website. Fast-forward three years, and the company wanted to add products and expand its online presence. They hired a professional web development firm to take over, only to find themselves stuck. No one knew who had the login credentials. The warehouse manager had moved on, but a little detective work located him—albeit in the middle of a family emergency. The project was delayed. The story goes on, but I'm sure some of you can relate to this scenario.

### First Things First: Do You Know Your Domain Name?

I know it sounds simple, but I've lost count of how many times I've been asked, "What's our domain name?" I often hear, "I think I know it, but I'm not sure." While this was common several years ago, it's still important today to ensure someone in your company has the correct information.

Now let's get to the heart of the matter: **Who in your company has access to all the critical information about your website?** And more importantly, **do they have all of it?** If only one person has the information, what happens if they leave, or worse, if something happens to them?

You've probably heard the expression, "What happens if I die?" Well, what happens if the "gatekeeper" of your digital world suddenly disappears? A few months ago, I was contacted by a company owner with a website emergency. The call started with, "Hey Rik, my website's down—can you help me?" After investigating, I discovered that one of the partners had passed away 18 months prior. He was the sole person who had access to the domain and all website credentials. The domain had expired, and the provider was demanding \$2,500 to release it. It's a digital nightmare, and unfortunately, this kind of situation is more common than you'd think.

### **Security is Key**

I've seen employees take control of company domain names and hold them hostage when they leave. While some employers win in court, it's a lose-lose situation. The best way to avoid these problems is to ensure that the company, not an individual, is the owner of the domain. And if you're the owner, you need to store the information securely. Don't just keep it on your PC, as I've heard too many times, "My computer crashed, and I lost all the passwords and website information."

### **Don't Forget About Credit Cards and Auto-Renewals**

Here's another issue many companies overlook. It's common to use company credit cards for auto-renewing digital services. While it might seem convenient, it can quickly get out of hand, especially if services are no longer in use. If your credit card expires or is canceled, the associated services could stop, and you may not even realize it until it's too late. Some providers will update your payment information automatically, but many won't. If the renewal for your domain name doesn't go through and you're not the designated contact person, you could lose your website overnight.

### **Social Media Accounts: Who Has the Keys?**

Social media platforms like Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook have been slow to generate direct revenue for the construction supply industry, but some areas have seen serious sales growth. Who has access to your social media accounts? If you don't know, it's time to find out. I once ran into an issue when I was preparing for an overseas trip. I needed to contact my cell phone provider to change my plan, only to realize that an ex-partner was still the account manager. Without the necessary login credentials, it was impossible to make the changes I needed.

**Critical Information You Need to Secure:**

- Domain provider account credentials
- Domain renewal notices
- Social media account logins and passwords
- DNS records and hosting information
- Email provider passwords
- Bank account and credit card credentials
- Payment information for other digital services

The digital world is full of potential pitfalls, but with the right precautions, you can safeguard your company's online presence. Don't let digital distractions take you off course—secure your company's digital assets today.