

# THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

## TO SUBDOMAINS V E R S U S SUBFOLDER/SUBDIRECTORIES AND STAND-ALONE DOMAINS

SEO  
SAMBA  
SINCE 2008

or how an early decision can  
make or break your emerging  
brand Internet growth



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# Why should you care as a Franchise?

Contrary to what you may think, architecting your franchising presence on the Internet is NOT a decision you should leave to IT or a franchise marketing consultant, no matter how well rounded they may be.

In fact, it will determine whether size and growth becomes an ally. Whether you accelerate and garner more local sales for your franchisees, and also more investor leads in the process, while establish a dominating brand in your market segment. Otherwise size and growth become an hindrance, possibly resulting in failure.

So if you have not yet made a decision, please read on.

If you have decided but hear things like, “franchisees needs more local leads” or “we can’t generate affordable qualified investor leads in quantity,” then read on, too, because all hope is not lost. You can still change course of action.



# Understanding conceptual differences using real-estate as an analogy

Imagine that you're a real-estate developer.

Websites become buildings, and website hosts become your building's location.



## The corporate site is your flagship tower

It doesn't have to be golden in color, but it always begins with just a single building on a piece of land, or the initial franchising brand or corporate website. Over time the franchise grows and there is need to push the walls to make room for an increasing number of franchisees.

## How do you push these walls?

Franchise and multi-site organizations have three main different types of franchisee/location website setups that they can choose from: dedicated domains, subdomains and subfolders. Which one is the best? How do they differ, and what makes them so strategic?



# About SeoSamba: The Franchise Digital Marketing Specialist

**SeoSamba** serves thousands of small businesses around the world with service centers in the United States and Europe. Its software is private-labeled by large media companies, and available in 14 languages.

SeoSamba's Hub & Spoke technology **amplifies marketing effectiveness** as companies scale their brand's footprint.

You also enjoy **mechanical incremental benefits** in your franchise recruitment efforts from participating franchisees while they **generating more leads** in local markets.

SeoSamba offers both **turn-key franchise recruitment** and **local lead generation** packages.



# Build additional floors, or subfolders (aka subdirectories)

Every time a new franchisee joins your brand, you simply add one or a small set of pages to your corporate site that you tuck into a new directory.

Or in our analogy, you would expand your tower by building new floors.

For instance, <https://locations.dennys.com/CO/DURANGO/246058>

## Benefits

They are two major benefits to using subdirectories:

1. Building new floors facilitates uniformity. In other words you can easily achieve consistent branding across your location pages.
2. And the location is already familiar to folks, including tourist guides. Everyone can easily take the elevator and visit new floors in your building. In other more technical jargon, Google is the tourist guide, and will reliably distribute the full authority from your corporate domain to these new pages. This will help your location pages rank higher with Google and be indexed quickly, next time Googlebots spiders your website.

## Disadvantages

They're often overlooked, but there are a number of elements to consider, which can be organized in two parts:

### Risks:

You have one building, hence everyone in the building shares an identical fate in the event of a catastrophe.

In other words, your site is physically hosted in one place, shares one address, and this has very real implications you should be aware of.



1. In the event that one web page goes down, is hacked, defaced or compromised, then all your franchisees are immediately affected and so are you.
2. Also, if a franchisee decides to build and improperly promote their own page or a mini-site they could be penalized by Google. As with the defacing of the site, this penalty is shared with all of the franchisees and the franchisor.
3. Another big problem with this method is that software such as WordPress multisites that power these setups have not been built for flexibility. As a result, it sets up franchisees to build their own rogue websites because they can get easily frustrated with the one-size fits-all-template provided by the franchisor. Rogue sites are a problem because they are not managed by the franchisor. They have different marketing, different looks and feels, and may not appear like a part of the franchise.



## Opportunity costs:

1. Subfolders have a very limited scope, making it difficult to compete with other local businesses. It becomes hard to provide franchisees with any additional resources or tools to help them promote and market their website. This can be very frustrating for a franchisee and prove to be quite the headache for a franchisor.
2. Subfolders cannot be geolocated, making it impossible to geo-locate individual websites for best local and mobile searches.
3. A few additional pages on a domain is always better than not, but there is no multiplying network effect associated with this approach. You might already have or plan to have 500 locations, but on the Internet you can only leverage a single domain asset with this approach.

## Our take on subdirectories for franchises

They help customers find the closest franchise to them with a zip code locator/online location directory going to a few franchisees pages.

A subdirectories only setup is not nearly enough to gain ground on your competition, since they don't let you leverage scale to your advantage.

Combine this setup with a full fledged website hosted on fully qualified domains.

### Key takeaways:

- All your eggs are in the same basket: If a franchisee directory is penalized, everyone gets penalized. If a domain fails, everyone fails.
- Can't adapt to different franchisees needs.
- There's no marketing network effect with subdirectories.



# New buildings on the same land:

## Subdomains



### Benefits

There's only one benefit of using subdomains, which is also offered by subfolders;

1. You can usually achieve consistent branding across your location pages by using the same type of software: WP multisite support deployments to multiple subdomains.

## Disadvantages

### Risks:

There are fewer risks in being next to each other. You still share a compound address but each building is fairly independent as far as reputation is concerned. So what's rather a plus in this section is also a minus in the next.

1. A big problem with this method is that it usually relies on the same kind of software, like WordPress multi-sites as the subfolder setup. As previously mentioned, this software is not very flexible. As a result, frustrated franchisees start building their own independent sites. Let's remember that rogue sites are a problem, as they undermine brand's cohesiveness.

### Opportunity costs:

Subdomains only add disadvantages when compared to the subfolder option. Namely;

1. All opportunity costs disadvantages listed in the subfolder section above.
2. There's no guarantee these subdomains will perform as well as the primary domain. It might, or might not, based on Google's algorithm reading of your merits.
3. In all cases, **backlinks from these subdomains to the main domain will be discounted by Google** as being an internal vote. Less ranking means less traffic, which means less franchisee leads and recruitment opportunities.

## Our take on subdomains for franchises

Would we trade tangible benefits to avoid potential future issues? We believe that option is hardly satisfying. Don't do it.

### Key takeaways:

- Same disadvantages found in subfolders
- In addition, subdomains offers less benefits than subfolders

# Building on new land: Dedicated (or fully qualified) domain.

Think of this like a new building built on new local land for each franchisee. The server is geolocated in their territory with their own IP.



The independent buildings are the franchisees and are added on their own local ground. An example of this would be a website like <http://houston-autoappraiser.com/>

## Benefits

For a dedicated domain there are many advantages. First, all of your eggs are not placed in the same basket.

## **Lesser risks**

This is important because if one page becomes compromised by hacking, defacing or performance, it doesn't represent a total failure to your network of franchisee websites. Many clients have told us about how they wished that they had started with this method once a site became compromised.

## **No reason to go rogue**

Another advantage to using dedicated domains is the you can provide franchisees with powerful marketing or website management tools. These tools can be adapted to your franchisee's sophistication level. Therefore, you manage all of the franchisee sites and don't have rogue web pages that may not have the look and feel that you want your brand to convey. As an added benefit, you can easily perform controlled experiments and leverage trailblazing franchisees rather than fighting them.

## **Ready for global expansion**

With dedicated domains each site is hosted close to the franchisee territory, which helps to geo-target for the best possible performance on Google's local and mobile searches. As a result, the same architecture is simply extended to new countries, so when the time is right you aren't starting over from scratch. Your digital marketing formula is already globally proven.

## **Powerful network effect**

Dedicated domains strengthen your business from an SEO perspective. As your domains gain authority, they further help others that are part of the network. We call this the wikipedia effect. You can read more about it here:

[www.seosamba.com/seoblog/how-the-webs-rich-get-richer-1400594818752.html](http://www.seosamba.com/seoblog/how-the-webs-rich-get-richer-1400594818752.html)

## **Multiplied assets, value and flexibility**

Domains are assets. They have monetary value that can be quantified with the proper analytics, and can be sold or re-assigned, adding flexibility to your digital footprint and assets. Independent domains give you all the leeway to change your business model and resell assets piecemeal, for instance.

## Disadvantages

There are only two potential disadvantages:

1. It will take longer for your new franchisee domains to rank. You can mitigate this with a proper planning strategy.
2. You need a purposely built platform to centrally manage and search optimize disseminated websites in an efficient and economical way.

## Our take on stand-alone domains for franchises

It's the only way to build a meshed network that turns scale to your advantage. This is a decisive factor in building unstoppable momentum on the Internet. Consider using stand-alone domains for full-fledged franchisee presences combined with a simpler franchisees presence on the corporate site.

### Key takeaways:

- All your eggs are NOT in the same basket: Much less risk
- Only approach that takes advantage and compounds franchise footprint
- Adaptable to franchisee needs
- Helps build assets

# Pros and Cons

|            | Pros   | Cons  |
|------------|--|---|
| SUBFOLDERS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent branding across locations</li> <li>Full authority inherited from global website</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher risk of network-wide hacking/failure</li> <li>Mishandling and penalties on single pages impact all locations</li> <li>Lack of content flexibility encourages rogue franchisee websites development</li> </ul> |
| SUBDOMAINS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistent branding across locations</li> <li>Technical conformity across domains with multi site software</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of software flexibility encourages rogue franchisee websites development</li> <li>No benefit from backlinks</li> <li>Inconsistent performance across sub-domains</li> </ul>                                     |
| DOMAINS    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower risk of network-wide hacking/failure</li> <li>No incentive to develop rogue franchisee websites</li> <li>Ready for geo-targeting, and international expansion</li> <li><b>Network-wide authority benefits</b></li> <li>Increased flexibility</li> <li>Increased value for online properties/assets</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased time to achieve premium ranking on search engines for individual locations</li> <li>Necessity of centralized marketing/SEO software to ensure consistency across network</li> </ul>                        |

Share the Subdomains vs subfolder/subdirectories and stand-alone domains Pros and Cons table with your friends



## Final words

Search engines like it when content is segmented across a number of domains—links spread across root domains is a sign of quality (think Wikipedia). Franchise networks, therefore, are well positioned to amass outstanding search performances if they can leverage their footprint.

Beware of fake distributed architecture (WordPress multi-sites for instance...) that shares identical servers, IP blocks, and as a result does not yield any of the associated benefits. Only SeoSamba's hub and spoke architecture scales efforts across multiple, geographically disseminated, domains while permitting central management.

Look into deploying franchisee profile pages in subdirectories, and full-fledged websites in stand-alone domains across territories as required by the business case instead of dictated by technical constraints.

Get your FREE gap analysis



**+1 877 450.9894**

2140 S Dupont Highway, Camden, DE 19934

**SEOSAMBА.COM**

