

17 AUGUST 2026

PHONETIC FLUIDITY IN THE AGENTIC ERA

A FRAMEWORK FOR EVALUATING DOMAIN NAMES FOR VOICE, AI AND CONVERSATIONAL INTERFACES

Prepared by domainAlot Research

PHONETIC FLUIDITY AUDIT (PFA) RESEARCH SERIES

AUGUST 2026

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Methodology: Phonetic Fluidity Audit (PFA)

PFA CERTIFICATION RESEARCH PAPER

VERSION 1.0

The domain name has traditionally been evaluated primarily as a visual, linguistic and commercial asset. Length, keywords, memorability, scarcity, historical use, search relevance, extension and comparable transactions have all played roles in how domain names are assessed.

The environment in which domain names function, however, is changing.

Search engines and conventional websites remain fundamental to the internet, but users increasingly interact with digital services through natural-language interfaces, voice assistants, conversational AI and emerging agentic systems. In these environments, a brand or domain name may be encountered through speech before it is ever seen in written form.

This creates a different requirement for a digital name.

A domain may be visually distinctive yet difficult to reproduce accurately when heard. Conversely, another domain may have a comparatively direct relationship between its spoken and written forms.

This paper introduces **Phonetic Fluidity**, a framework for considering that distinction, and presents the **Phonetic Fluidity Audit (PFA)** as a structured methodology developed by domainAlot.com to evaluate it.

PFA examines multiple characteristics of a domain name, including structural composition, phonetic relationships, vowel and consonant patterns, character sequences, linguistic anchors, domain length and other defined characteristics. These observations are combined into a standardised score and five-tier classification.

PFA does not claim to predict traffic, sales, brand success, AI behaviour or the eventual market price of a domain. Nor does a PFA classification constitute a guarantee that a particular voice assistant or AI system will correctly interpret a domain.

Instead, PFA proposes that phonetic and structural suitability represents a distinct and increasingly relevant dimension of domain-name evaluation, particularly as digital interaction becomes more conversational.

The purpose of this paper is to establish that framework, explain its underlying rationale, define its scope and limitations, and identify the empirical research required to further validate it.



1

INTRODUCTION

THE LANGUAGE OF DOMAINS IS CHANGING AND SO MUST THE WAY IN WHICH DOMAIN VALUE IS EVALUATED.

A domain name is usually encountered visually.

- It appears in a browser.
- It is printed on a business card.
- It appears beneath a logo, within an advertisement or on a website.

For much of the history of the commercial internet, this visual relationship has shaped how domain names have been created, selected and evaluated.

A name could be unusual, and certainly with increased scarcity, creatives began to use increasingly diverse methods to make use of popular terms when keywords in their purest forms were already registered. What emerged over time was a series of domains containing:

- Abbreviations.
- Numbers that replaced characters.
- Unconventional spelling with characters removed to shorten names.
- Hyphens to truncate longer domains to aid in legibility.

The language of domains was visually dominant, and because of this, when the written form was visible, the user could simply look at it and decipher a brand, a word, or expression even if the domain name itself contained multiple visual anomalies. In other words, the interface itself supplied the information necessary to reproduce the name.

Speech changes that relationship.

When a person hears a domain during a conversation, podcast, telephone call, presentation, advertisement or voice interaction, the written representation is absent, and the listener has to reconstruct it.

A name that is immediately obvious when seen may therefore be less obvious when heard.

That creates a question that has historically received less formal attention in domain evaluation:

How easily can a domain name move from sound to recognition to accurate reproduction when the written form is not simultaneously available?

The Phonetic Fluidity Audit (PFA) was developed to provide a structured way of examining that question.

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THE CHANGING INTERFACE

NATURAL LANGUAGE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DOMINANT AS A MEANS OF NAVIGATING THE WEB.

The emergence of conversational AI does not mean that traditional search has disappeared. To the contrary:

- Search engines remain important.
- Websites remain important.
- Visual interfaces remain important.

However, the more meaningful change is that **additional interfaces are becoming available**.

Users can increasingly communicate with systems through natural language rather than relying exclusively on menus, links and traditional search queries.

AI systems can interpret requests, retrieve information and increasingly perform actions on behalf of users. Microsoft, for example, describes the emerging AI web as an environment in which AI systems increasingly participate in discovery, decision-making and action rather than merely displaying information.

Microsoft Research has similarly explored increasingly autonomous web agents capable of navigating websites and performing tasks on behalf of users.

Microsoft's NLWeb project is another example of the movement toward natural-language interfaces being incorporated directly into websites, allowing both people and AI systems to interact with web content conversationally.

None of this makes the traditional web obsolete.

It expands the environments in which a digital identity must function.

A domain can therefore be:

- **Seen.**
- **Typed.**
- **Searched.**
- **Spoken.**
- **Heard.**
- **Interpreted.**
- **Recommended.**
- **Or potentially acted upon by an agent.**

That broader environment now creates a reason to examine characteristics of domain names that may have been less important when the dominant interaction was visual.

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FROM VISUAL RECOGNITION TO SPOKEN RECOGNITION

WHY SOUND IS INHERENTLY DIFFERENT TO SIGHT.

The difference between visual and spoken communication is straightforward.

Consider a domain containing:

- A hyphen.
- An abbreviation.
- A numerical substitution.
- An unconventional spelling.
- An ambiguous character sequence.
- A difficult consonant structure.

When the domain is displayed, the user can inspect the exact spelling.

However, when it is spoken, the listener must infer the spelling.

This creates a potential gap between **phonetic representation** and **written representation**.

For example, a listener hearing a domain may need to determine :

- **Was that "x" or "ex"?**
- **Was that "q" or "cue"?**
- **Was that "8" or "ate"?**
- **Is there a hyphen?**

- **Is that an abbreviation?**
- **Is the word spelled conventionally?**

The greater the uncertainty, the greater the potential need for clarification.

This does not automatically make such a domain a poor brand, but it does mean is that its **visual identity and spoken identity are not equivalent**.

This discrepancy lies at the heart of the Phonetic Fluidity Audit, and why PFA is designed to make that distinction observable and comparable.

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WHAT IS PHONETIC FLUIDITY?

THE EASE OF PRONUNCIATION.

For the purposes of this framework:

Phonetic fluidity describes the relative ease with which a domain name can move between its spoken and written forms without requiring unnecessary clarification, reconstruction or spelling assistance.

A highly fluid domain tends toward a straightforward relationship:

Sound → Recognition → Recall → Reproduction

A domain with greater phonetic friction may introduce additional steps:

Sound → Interpretation → Uncertainty → Clarification → Reconstruction → Reproduction

The concept is therefore concerned with the relationship between **what a domain looks like** and **what it sounds like**.

There are many aspects involved in the creation of a successful brand, and phonetic fluidity is not intended to represent every characteristic of one.

A domain can have substantial visual impact and still exhibit phonetic friction.

Likewise, a domain can be highly fluid and still have limited commercial relevance.

These are separate dimensions.

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THE RESEARCH BASIS

STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES OF LANGUAGE.

The premise that phonetic characteristics can influence how names are processed is not new.

Research into brand naming has demonstrated that phonetic characteristics can influence consumer associations, perceptions and preferences. Studies of sound symbolism have identified recurring relationships between phonetic features and dimensions such as evaluation, potency and product-related associations.

Research has also examined the relationship between name fluency and commercial or financial outcomes. Work examining company names has found associations between pronunciation fluency and measures including recognition, ownership breadth, trading activity and valuation. Such findings do not establish causation, but they demonstrate that name fluency can be operationalised and studied quantitatively.

Phonotactic structure is also an established area of linguistic research.

Studies have demonstrated that the structural relationships between consonants and vowels influence lexical processing and speech perception. Recent research examining **CVC** and **CVCV** structures, for example, found that phonotactic structure influences the relative processing of consonant and vowel information.

Research has additionally demonstrated that phonotactic probability influences spoken-word learning and recognition.

These findings do not validate the PFA scoring formula by themselves, but they do establish something narrower and important:

The phonetic and structural properties of language can be measured and can influence human linguistic processing.

PFA applies that broader research principle specifically to domain names.

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SPOKEN NAMES AND MACHINE RECOGNITION

SPEECH SIMILARITIES AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS.

The relevance of phonetic fluidity extends beyond human listeners.

Automatic speech recognition systems face particular challenges when processing rare, unfamiliar or context-specific entities.

Research into pronunciation-aware speech recognition has specifically addressed the difficulty of recognising infrequent personalised words, including names and places. Such work demonstrates that contextual and pronunciation information can improve recognition of rare entities.

Research into proper-noun recognition similarly identifies names as a particular challenge for speech-recognition systems because proper nouns can be rare, unfamiliar or acoustically similar to other words.

This does not mean that a particular domain will fail in a particular AI system, primarily because speech-recognition performance depends upon many factors, including, but not limited to:

- Speaker.
- Accent.
- Speed of delivery.
- Language.
- Acoustic conditions.
- Background noise.
- Pronunciation.
- Contextual information.

- Model architecture.
- Vocabulary.
- Personalisation.

The research therefore supports the **existence of the recognition problem**, not a predetermined relationship between a PFA score and the performance of an individual AI system.

That distinction is central to the PFA methodology.

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PHONETIC FRICTION

METRICS IN MEASURING BOTH STRUCTURAL AND LINGUISTIC PROPERTIES.

PFA uses the term **phonetic friction** to describe characteristics that may increase difficulty in moving between spoken and written representations.

The current methodology evaluates a range of structural and linguistic characteristics.

These include:

CHARACTER FRICTION

Certain characters and combinations can introduce greater ambiguity between pronunciation and spelling.

NUMERICAL CHARACTERS

Numbers can create differences between what is visually represented and what must be communicated verbally.

HYPHENS

Hyphens are visually explicit but require interpretation when a name is communicated orally.

CONSONANT STRUCTURE

Sequences of consonants can create greater phonetic complexity than simpler alternating structures.

PLOSIVE AND LIQUID RELATIONSHIPS

PFA evaluates defined relationships between particular consonant classes across phonetic boundaries.

DIGRAPHS

Recognised sequences such as **sh**, **ch**, **th**, **ph** and other combinations are evaluated as linguistic structures rather than simply as independent characters.

CONSONANT CLUSTERS

PFA identifies certain consonant runs as potential sources of additional friction.

LENGTH

Longer names introduce additional structural material and therefore additional opportunities for ambiguity or recall difficulty.

The important point is that PFA does not treat any individual characteristic as universally negative.

Characteristics are considered **within the context of the complete name**.

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LINGUISTIC AUTHORITY AND POWER DOMAINS

CORRELATING BETWEEN PHONETIC CHARACTERS AND LINGUISTIC COMPONENTS.

Phonetic fluidity does not exist independently of meaning.

A domain may possess both strong phonetic characteristics and recognisable linguistic components.

PFA therefore identifies defined **Power Words** and **Authority/Liquidity Tokens**.

These characteristics allow the framework to distinguish between names that may have similar lengths and phonetic structures but different linguistic qualities.

This is important because domain evaluation cannot reasonably be reduced to:

Shorter = Better

or:

Easier to pronounce = More valuable

A name may be short but semantically weak.

Another may be longer but contain a highly recognisable commercial term.

PFA therefore evaluates multiple characteristics rather than relying upon a single naming variable.

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LIQUIDITY

VOWEL, CONSONANT AND SYLLABLE STRUCTURE.

PFA also incorporates a defined concept of **linguistic liquidity**.

Within the current methodology, liquidity is determined using structural relationships including vowel proportion and consonant clustering, with certain recognised linguistic characteristics able to influence the classification.

Liquidity should therefore be understood as a **PFA-defined characteristic**, rather than a universally accepted linguistic category.

This distinction matters because PFA is an applied methodology.

Its definitions are operational definitions designed to make a particular property measurable, and future empirical research may confirm, refine or alter those definitions.

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THE PFA METHODOLOGY

CREATING A VALID AND RELIABLE ASSESSMENT OF PHONETIC QUALITY.

The current PFA framework begins with a theoretical score of 100.

The domain is then examined through a sequence of structural, phonetic and linguistic assessments.

The methodology considers characteristics including:

- Domain structure.
- Length.
- Numerical characters.
- Hyphens.
- Vowel structure.
- Consonant structure.
- Phonetic friction.
- Digraphs.
- Consonant clusters.
- Linguistic anchors.
- Authority characteristics.
- Liquidity.
- And other defined relationships.

These characteristics contribute to a standardised final score.

The purpose of the score is **comparability**, not false precision.

The framework is intended to answer:

How does this domain compare with another domain when evaluated using the same defined characteristics?

It is not intended to answer:

What will the market definitely pay for this domain?

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THE FIVE PFA CLASSIFICATIONS

A MEANS TO CORRECTLY QUANTIFY RESULTS.

When a phonetic fluidity audit is run, the resulting PFA determines a final score, that score is translated into one of five PFA Tiers.

SCORE	TIER	CLASSIFICATION
90–100	Tier 1	Ultra-Fluid
80–89	Tier 2	High-Authority
70–79	Tier 3	Balanced Brandable
60–69	Tier 4	Literal & Long-Tail
0–59	Tier 5	Visual Only

The tiers are **classifications within the PFA framework**.

They should not be interpreted as universal rankings of commercial value.

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WHY TIER 5 DOES NOT MEAN "BAD"

PHONETIC QUALITY AND MONETARY VALUE ARE NOT NECESSARILY LINKED DIRECTLY.

This distinction is particularly important.

A domain classified as **Visual Only** may still have substantial value as a visual brand.

A name may look excellent in or as:

- A logo.
- Advertising.
- Packaging.
- Signage.
- Social media.
- A website.

The issue arises when the same name is encountered without its written representation.

A name containing a hyphen or unusual spelling may require explanation when spoken.

A visually distinctive name can therefore coexist with substantial phonetic friction.

PFA does not attempt to eliminate that distinction. Moreover, it makes the distinction explicit.

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THE SPELLING TAX

THE HIDDEN COST OF AMBIGUITY AND CONFUSION.

The concept of the **Spelling Tax** provides a practical way of describing the communication burden associated with phonetic friction.

Consider a customer being told a brand name verbally and then asking:

"How do you spell that?"

Or:

"Is that with an X?"

Or:

"Does it have a hyphen?"

Or:

"Is that the number 8?"

Each question introduces another communication step and clarification requirement that may or may not easily be resolved.

The term **Spelling Tax** describes this additional burden.

It does **not** represent a fixed percentage of lost traffic.

It does **not** establish a predetermined monetary loss.

It does not claim that every instance of clarification produces a measurable commercial consequence.

It is a conceptual framework for understanding the additional communication effort that can arise when the relationship between sound and spelling is less direct.

The concept can, however, become empirically testable.

Future research could examine whether domains with higher PFA friction actually produce higher rates of first-hearing spelling errors, clarification requests or recognition failures.

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DOMAIN LENGTH AND STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

VALUABLE METRICS OUTSIDE OF PHONETIC AND LINGUISTIC PROPERTIES.

PFA treats domain length as one component of the overall assessment.

This is not because longer domains are inherently bad.

Length increases the amount of information that must be processed, remembered and reproduced.

Research into naming fluency has found relationships between name length, pronunciation ease and processing outcomes.

PFA therefore incorporates length into its scoring architecture while allowing other characteristics to influence how strongly length affects the overall and final assessment.

This in itself reflects a broader principle:

Length, as a tangible metric, should be evaluated in context rather than in isolation.

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PHONOTACTIC PATTERNS AS A RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

STRUCTURES THAT MAY IMPACT RECOGNITION AND FUTURE CLASSIFICATION.

Phonotactic structure represents an especially promising area for future PFA research.

The current PFA framework evaluates vowel and consonant relationships, but additional pattern analysis can also provide a more detailed research opportunity.

Short brandable structures can be described using consonant-vowel notation.

For example:

- **CVCVC**
- **VCCVC**
- **CVCCVC**
- **VCCVCC**
- **CVCVCVC**

These structures provide a way of describing recurring phonological patterns without relying upon semantic meaning.

PFA does not currently claim that one such pattern is universally superior to another, or indeed that one pattern will provide or otherwise guarantee a higher score and eventual tier classification.

Instead, these patterns represent **testable hypotheses**.

Future experiments could investigate whether particular structures correlate with:

- First-hearing transcription accuracy.
- Human recall.
- Pronunciation consistency.
- Speech-recognition accuracy.
- Recognition under noise.
- Cross-speaker performance.

This creates a path toward refining the PFA methodology through evidence rather than assumption.

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PFA AND THE AGENTIC ERA

VOICE-FIRST SEARCH, VOICE ASSISTANTS, AND THE RISE OF AI INTERACTION.

The term "agentic era" refers here to a broader shift toward systems that can interpret natural language and perform actions on behalf of users.

The significance for domain names is not that every AI agent currently interacts with domains through speech.

It is that the interaction chain that exists between:

Human → Language → AI system → Digital entity → Web destination

is becoming increasingly important.

An example of this can be seen through the use of voice assistants.

A domain name may therefore participate in a communication process in which the written spelling is not the first representation encountered.

This creates a legitimate reason to examine phonetic characteristics alongside traditional domain characteristics.

PFA was developed within that context.

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WHAT PFA DOES NOT CLAIM

DETERMINING THE SCOPE OF THE PFA FRAMEWORK.

PFA does not claim that a high score guarantees:

- Successful AI resolution.
- Successful voice-assistant resolution.
- Greater traffic.
- Greater conversion.
- Greater brand recognition.
- Greater revenue.
- A successful business.
- A domain sale.
- A particular market price.

PFA does not claim that traditional domain valuation methods are inherently invalid.

It does not claim that keywords, historical data, search relevance, scarcity or comparable transactions are irrelevant. Neither does it claim that phonetic fluidity is the only important characteristic of a domain.

Instead:

PFA isolates and evaluates one specific dimension of domain quality that becomes increasingly relevant as digital interaction becomes more conversational.

That is the appropriate scope of the methodology.

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PFA IS A MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK, NOT A PREDICTION ENGINE

A QUANTITATIVE ASSESSMENT CANNOT PREDICT MARKET VARIABLES.

This distinction is fundamental.

A measurement framework defines characteristics and produces a consistent assessment.

A predictive model attempts to estimate future outcomes.

PFA currently functions primarily as the former.

- Its score represents the result of applying the PFA methodology to a domain.
- It does not represent a probability that an AI will correctly resolve the domain.
- It does not represent a probability of sale.
- It does not represent predicted traffic.

Future research may determine whether PFA scores correlate with any of these outcomes, but until that research exists, PFA makes no such claim.

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FROM METHODOLOGY TO EVIDENCE

CORRELATING BOTH PFA CLASSIFICATION AND EVENTUAL CERTIFICATION WITH REAL-WORLD OUTCOMES.

The most important future question is therefore empirical:

Does PFA correlate with measurable differences in how humans and machines recognise domain names when the names are encountered through speech?

This question can be tested.

A controlled research programme could compare domains with different PFA scores while controlling for:

- Length.
- Semantic familiarity.
- Speaker.
- Accent.
- Background noise.
- Speech rate.
- Audio quality.
- Language.

Possible outcome measures include:

HUMAN FIRST-HEARING TRANSCRIPTION

Can participants correctly reproduce a domain after hearing it once?

CLARIFICATION RATE

How often does the listener request spelling clarification?

RECALL

Can the participant reproduce the domain after a delay?

ASR TRANSCRIPTION

How accurately does a speech-recognition system transcribe the spoken domain?

ENTITY RESOLUTION

Can an AI system correctly identify the intended domain or brand from the spoken input?

These experiments would provide a basis for evaluating whether PFA characteristics correlate with real-world outcomes.

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FROM HYPOTHESIS TO STANDARD

AN EVOLVING FRAMEWORK.

A credible standard should be capable of being challenged.

PFA should therefore evolve according to evidence.

If a particular PFA characteristic proves strongly correlated with recognition performance, that evidence should strengthen its role.

If a characteristic proves weak or irrelevant, its weighting should be reconsidered.

If new research identifies an important variable that the methodology currently omits, it should be evaluated for inclusion.

This means that PFA should not be treated as a finished theory.

It should be treated as a **developing measurement framework**.

Its strength should ultimately come not from claiming certainty, but from demonstrating consistency and progressively accumulating evidence.

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WHY RELATIVE MEASUREMENT MATTERS

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS THAT PROVIDES INVALUABLE RESULTS.

One of the practical benefits of PFA is the ability to compare domains using the same framework.

Consider two seven-character domains.

Both have the same length.

Traditional length-based analysis therefore treats them similarly on that dimension.

However, **PFA can examine additional characteristics.**

One may contain a balanced vowel structure, straightforward syllabic relationships and limited friction.

The other may contain greater consonant complexity, ambiguous spelling or difficult transitions.

The resulting scores can therefore differ.

The importance is not that one score represents an objectively measurable amount of money.

The importance is that the difference is **explainable within the framework.**

This creates a basis for comparative analysis.

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PFA CERTIFICATION

AN ASSESSMENT THAT PROVIDES INVALUABLE INSIGHT INTO THE EXPECTATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH DIGITAL ASSETS IN THE MODERN AGENTIC ERA.

A **PFA Certification** represents the application of the PFA methodology to an individual domain.

The certification communicates the outcome of the assessment through:

- PFA score.
- PFA tier.
- Classification.
- Additional relevant explanatory characteristics.

The certification does not guarantee commercial performance.

It does not represent a market appraisal.

It **represents the result of a defined methodological assessment.**

The objective is to give domain owners and prospective buyers another piece of information when considering a domain.

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PFA AND DOMAIN VALUATION

DOMAIN VALUATION IS THE RESULT OF NUMEROUS, OFTEN SUBJECTIVE FACTORS.

PFA and monetary valuation should remain conceptually separate.

A domain's PFA score answers one question:

How does the domain perform under the PFA phonetic and structural framework?

A valuation framework answers another:

What monetary floor might reasonably be recommended given the domain's characteristics?

And the market answers a third:

What will a willing buyer actually pay?

These three questions should never be presented as interchangeable because a domain can have:

High PFA and **Limited market demand**.

Similarly, a domain can have:

Lower PFA and **High strategic value** to a particular buyer.

A recommended floor can therefore never be presented as a guarantee of transaction price, but should be seen rather as an indication of what a domain would be expected to achieve at a minimum. Additional market variables such as demand, branding necessity and perception, all impact on the final monetary value of any eventual sale.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF HONEST BOUNDARIES

AVOIDING THE DECEPTIVE VALUES OF AUTOMATED APPRAISALS.

The credibility of any methodology depends partly upon its willingness to identify what it does not know.

PFA therefore deliberately distinguishes between:

MEASUREMENT

What the framework directly evaluates.

CLASSIFICATION

What the resulting score means within the PFA system.

INTERPRETATION

What those characteristics may imply for spoken and conversational use.

PREDICTION

What remains unproven until tested against real-world outcomes.

This distinction is particularly important in a field where automated numerical valuations can create an impression of precision that exceeds the certainty of the underlying market.

PFA seeks to avoid that problem by keeping its claims within the boundaries of its methodology.

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CONCLUSION

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHONETIC AND STRUCTURAL FLUIDITY AS A DIMENSION OF DOMAIN NAME QUALITY.

The internet is not becoming purely conversational.

Search engines remain important.

Websites remain important.

Visual branding remains important.

But the number of ways in which people interact with digital services is increasing.

Voice, natural-language interfaces, conversational AI and emerging agentic systems introduce environments in which a name may be heard, interpreted and reproduced before it is ever seen.

That creates a new question for domain evaluation:

How well does a domain name function when the visual representation is removed?

Phonetic Fluidity Audit provides one framework for asking that question.

- PFA does not claim to predict the future.
- It does not claim to determine market value.
- It does not claim to guarantee AI performance.
- It does not attempt to replace the many legitimate methods already used to evaluate domain names.

Instead, it proposes that **phonetic and structural fluidity should be considered as a distinct dimension of domain-name quality**, particularly as digital interaction becomes increasingly conversational.

The current methodology provides a structured way to evaluate that dimension, and it is important to recognise that the ultimate purpose of PFA is therefore not to tell a domain owner what they want to hear, but to provide another way of understanding an increasingly important characteristic of a digital name.

Ultimately, in the modern agentic era, a domain is not only something that can be seen. It is something that can be spoken, heard, remembered and interpreted. PFA exists to examine what happens when the screen is removed and to provide domain owners, potential buyers, and those assessing comparison, a quantitative means and framework by which to do so.

APPENDIX A

KEY TERMINOLOGY RELATED TO THE PFA FRAMEWORK.

The following provides an overview of key terminology related to the PFA framework and the measurement of phonetic fluidity and/or friction.

TERM	WORKING DEFINITION
Phonetic Fluidity	Relative ease of moving between a domain's spoken and written forms.
Phonetic Friction	Characteristics that can introduce difficulty between sound, recognition and reproduction.
Radio Test	Practical test of whether a listener can reproduce a domain after hearing it without seeing it.
Spelling Tax	Communication burden created when a name requires spelling clarification, correction or additional explanation.
PFA Score	Standardised numerical output of the PFA methodology.
PFA Tier	Classification assigned according to the final PFA score.
Liquidity	A defined PFA characteristic based on structural and linguistic criteria.
Ultra-Fluid	PFA classification indicating an extremely strong phonetic structure that possesses high natural cadence that can be seen as optimal for voice resolution.
High-Authority	PFA classification that indicates highly memorable, distinctive names maintaining strong intuitive pronunciation.

TERM	WORKING DEFINITION
Balanced Brandable	PFA classification indicating pragmatic balance of high semantic value or category relevance with minor phonetic compromises.
Literal & Long-Tail	PFA classification that indicates a highly descriptive, often functional domain seen to prioritise explicit clarity over brevity or audio aesthetics.
Visual Only	PFA classification indicating substantially greater phonetic/structural friction of an asset optimised primarily for digital, written, or visual channels, not necessarily absence of commercial value.
Power Domain	A domain containing a recognised linguistic/semantic anchor under the PFA methodology.
High-Value Outliers	A term used to refer to domains that are seen as strategic and/or institutional assets or domains that may be used for defensive purposes to protect existing assets and possess perceived value beyond phonetic means.

APPENDIX B

THE PFA TIER INDEX.

The PFA Tier Index translates the numerical PFA score into five classifications.

The classifications describe the **phonetic and structural characteristics of a domain under the PFA methodology.**

The PFA Score and the PFA Tier classification should not be interpreted as universal rankings of commercial value, brand quality or market price.

Each tier within the PFA framework is defined and described as follows:

TIER 1: ULTRA-FLUID

PFA SCORE: 90–100

Description: The Gold Standard

DEFINITION

A PFA classification indicating an exceptionally strong combination of phonetic and structural characteristics. These domains are intended to represent the upper end of the PFA spectrum, with a comparatively direct relationship between spoken and written form and strong natural cadence.

TYPICAL PHONETIC PROFILE

Tier 1 domains may exhibit:

- Short overall length.
- One or two relatively straightforward syllabic units.
- Direct sound-to-spelling relationships.
- Balanced vowel and consonant structures.
- Limited phonetic friction.
- Absence of significant ambiguity between common pronunciation and spelling.

PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

A highly fluid domain is designed to minimise the need for spelling clarification when communicated verbally.

The PFA classification does **not** guarantee successful recognition by a particular listener, speech-recognition system or AI system.

POTENTIAL COMMUNICATION ADVANTAGE

Where a domain has a close relationship between its spoken and written forms, it may require less verbal clarification than a domain with substantially greater phonetic ambiguity.

TIER 2: HIGH-AUTHORITY

PFA SCORE: 80–89

Description: The Brandable Tier

DEFINITION

A PFA classification indicating a highly memorable and distinctive domain that maintains strong intuitive pronunciation despite greater complexity than a Tier 1 domain.

TYPICAL PHONETIC PROFILE

Tier 2 domains may include:

- Two or three syllables.
- Familiar words or word combinations.
- Recognisable compounds.
- Familiar suffixes or linguistic constructions.
- Modest stylistic abstraction.
- Generally predictable syllable transitions.

PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

The spoken and written forms remain relatively closely related, although the domain may require slightly more processing or clarification than a Tier 1 asset.

The domain may therefore retain strong suitability for spoken brand communication while allowing greater linguistic and structural complexity.

TIER 3: BALANCED BRANDABLE

PFA SCORE: 70–79

Description: The Pragmatic Middle

DEFINITION

A PFA classification indicating a domain that balances phonetic characteristics with semantic, category or brand relevance, while exhibiting identifiable areas of greater friction.

TYPICAL PHONETIC PROFILE

Tier 3 domains may include:

- Compound names.
- Synthetic or invented names.
- Moderate consonant clustering.
- More complex syllable structures.
- Minor spelling ambiguity.
- Greater length than higher-tier domains.

PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

A Tier 3 domain may remain highly usable as a brand while requiring occasional verbal reinforcement or clarification.

Its additional phonetic or structural friction may be offset by other valuable characteristics. These may include but are not limited by:

PHONETIC FLUIDITY IN THE AGENTIC ERA

- Strong semantic relevance.
- Category alignment.
- Memorability.
- Distinctive branding potential.

This is why PFA does not equate increasing phonetic friction with decreasing commercial value.

TIER 4: LITERAL & LONG-TAIL

PFA SCORE: 60–69

Description: Clear, But Heavy

DEFINITION

A PFA classification indicating a highly descriptive or functional domain that prioritises explicit meaning and clarity over brevity and phonetic economy.

TYPICAL PHONETIC PROFILE

Tier 4 domains may include:

- Longer names.
- Multiple words.
- Three or more syllables.
- Descriptive phrases.
- Exact-match or highly literal constructions.

The domain may be relatively easy to understand once seen, while its length or structure makes repeated verbal communication less economical.

PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

The principal source of friction may be length and structural complexity rather than spelling ambiguity.

A listener may understand exactly what the domain refers to but still find the complete name cumbersome to remember or reproduce.

Tier 4 therefore represents a different form of friction from Tier 5.

TIER 5: VISUAL ONLY

PFA SCORE: 0–59

Description: The Text-First Domain

DEFINITION

A PFA classification indicating substantially greater phonetic and/or structural friction, with the domain's characteristics being more naturally suited to visual, written or directly displayed environments.

TYPICAL PHONETIC PROFILE

Tier 5 domains may contain characteristics such as:

- Unusual or otherwise difficult spelling.
- Ambiguous character combinations.
- Numerical substitutions.
- Hyphen(s).
- Substantial consonant complexity.
- Unconventional phonetic relationships.
- Long or structurally complex constructions.

PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION

The domain may resolve and perform more naturally when its written form is visible. However, when communicated solely through speech, severe friction can occur.

Verbal communication may therefore require additional spelling or clarification.

It is important to recognise that, "Visual Only" does not necessarily mean "commercially worthless" and that these two metrics are not interchangeable or prove correlation.

A Tier 5 domain may still possess:

- Strong visual branding potential.
- Strategic value.
- Defensive value.
- Historical value.
- Category relevance.
- Direct-navigation potential.
- Search or advertising utility.
- Institutional value.

The classification describes the domain **within the PFA framework**, not its total economic or strategic value.

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS.

In addition to PFA Tiers, additional classifications exist within the PFA framework.

HIGH-VALUE OUTLIERS

A **High-Value Outlier** is not a sixth PFA tier.

It is a separate designation for a domain whose potential strategic, institutional or defensive value may substantially exceed what would be inferred from its phonetic characteristics alone.

Examples may include domains that:

- Protect an existing corporate brand.
- Correspond to an important institutional term.
- Possess exceptional strategic relevance.
- Have defensive importance to an existing asset.
- Have unusual historical or category significance.

This distinction is fundamental to the PFA philosophy.

PFA measures phonetic and structural characteristics.

It does not claim to capture every possible source of economic value.

Consequently, a domain with a lower PFA classification may still represent a valuable strategic asset.

Conversely, a highly fluid domain is not automatically a valuable commercial asset simply because it performs strongly under PFA.

APPENDIX D

A FRAMEWORK BASED UPON RESEARCH.

The central research question arising from this framework is:

Can measurable phonetic and structural characteristics of domain names predict meaningful differences in human recall, speech-recognition accuracy and machine-mediated entity resolution?

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

DOMAINALOT

domainAlot.com is an independent domain marketplace and research platform focused on providing transparent information, education and tools for domain owners and prospective buyers.

Unlike conventional domain marketplaces, domainAlot does not charge membership fees or take commission from domain sales or leases.

The company developed the Phonetic Fluidity Audit (PFA) as a framework for evaluating phonetic and structural characteristics of domain names in the context of increasingly conversational and agent-mediated digital environments.

domainAlot's objective is to provide domain owners and buyers with information that enables better-informed decisions rather than relying solely upon automated valuations or optimistic pricing expectations.

PFA is intended as an evolving methodology. Its assumptions and conclusions should remain open to empirical testing, independent scrutiny and future refinement.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SCOTT HARVEY

Founder of domainAlot.com.

Scott Harvey is the founder of domainAlot and the creator of the Phonetic Fluidity Audit (PFA). His background is in branding, marketing and communications, with a particular interest in the relationship between names, identity and digital communication.

PFA and the PFA Certification originated from his observation that traditional approaches to domain evaluation tend to emphasise characteristics such as keywords, historical data and comparable sales, while giving comparatively little attention to how a domain behaves when encountered through speech.

His objective in developing PFA was to create a structured and transparent framework for evaluating that dimension of domain quality and to provide domain owners with information that can help them make more informed decisions.



PFA RESEARCH & METHODOLOGY

OPEN RESEARCH. INDEPENDENT METHODOLOGY. CONTINUOUS VALIDATION.

“The Phonetic Fluidity Audit (PFA) is an evolving methodology developed by domainAlot to examine the phonetic and structural characteristics of domain names in an increasingly conversational digital environment.

PFA is intended to be transparent about both what it measures and what remains unknown. We welcome constructive criticism, independent research, alternative interpretations and empirical testing of the methodology.”

For more details please visit: <https://www.domainalot.com/pfa-research/>