

Highlights of "Domain Names 101"

How many URLs does one organization need to be found on the internet today? How do you choose between .com, .biz, or .inc? The following is a review of the Domain Name 101 seminar presented by Andrew Holland of IMG at the Sept. 20 meeting of the SLA and ASIS NEO chapters.

A Little History to Level the Playing Field

The URL or mnemonic web address (e.g., whitehouse.gov) that maps to a numeric IP address (198.137.241.43) was created in 1971 by Peggy Karp to meet the growing demands of the ARPA net, (the Dept. of Defense's wide area network). By 1985, there were 1,809 registered domain names (only 5 were .com's), supported by 13 root servers around the world. Today, *those same 13 root servers* support the explosion of domain names, making for a very delicate and somewhat inefficient internet system. Any given internet page request can bounce up to all 13 servers to find the correct route.

Up until now, the United States has consistently followed the same URL structure: ServerName.DomainName.TopLevelDomain (e.g., server1.company.com), with six (6) generic top level domains: .com, .org, .net, .edu, .gov, and .mil. International domain names use 341 country code top level domains, which are monitored by individual governments

And up until 1999, InterNIC was the registrar of these domain names. But in 1999, the government decentralized the registration process, assigning 75 agencies with the task. Network Solutions (now part of VeriSign) is the original agency, with registration fees of \$35/year/name. Several organizations are offering lower fees, but as Andrew Holland of IMG warns, you have to read the fine print. The lower fees typically mean you *don't own* the name; rather, you have permission to *use* the name.

Domain Names vs. Trade Names

The fun really started when companies began registering trade names as domain names. Trade names were designed to protect consumers against fraud, but also build equity for companies through branding. The trade name laws are flexible, allowing for concurrent use of the same name under different conditions. However, domain name service cannot provide the same flexibility; thus, a collision between trade names and domain names has occurred. The Anti-Cybersquatting Protection Act of 1999 helped companies to protect their trade names from being used by squatters, who rushed to register trade names under their ownership with the intent of selling them at huge profits.

The overwhelming majority of domain disputes were due to a small group of cybersquatters. To create uniformity and low cost in resolving the disputes, the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) was adopted from a WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) proposal. Complainants have won 98 percent of the cases, with contested cases resulting in complainant victory in 80% of the cases.

ICANN or ICANNT?

Realizing the limits in using just 6 top level domain names, ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) conducted an open submission process for new top level domain names. Proposals had to be submitted with a check for \$50,000 to be considered. After 6 days reviewing 44 proposals, seven (7) new top level domains were selected: .aero, .biz, .coop, .info., .name, .pro, and .museum.

Definitions:

- .aero - for the airline and aerospace industry
(Does this industry really contribute to our GNP more than any other industry?)
- .biz - an alternative to .com
(Another guessing game for customers to play)
- .info - for individuals and companies to post information
(Isn't everything on the internet 'info'?)
- .pro - for professionals (MD, JD, CPA, etc.)
(What about degreed professions, or even knighted individuals?)
- .coop - for cooperatives
(Why not also .retail, .wholesale, and .groceries?)
- .museum - for museums
(Shouldn't we also have .zoo, .aquarium, and .library?)
- .name - for personal names, on a first come, first serve basis
(You only get to own your first name; the last name is owned by the registrar!)

Many have questioned the results. Since ICANN is directed by the Internet Society (ISOC) which has heavy corporate investment, formal complaints have been filed with Congress, and users are urged to keep an eye on www.icannwatch.com.

The fees to be incurred for the proposed .biz domain have also raised eyebrows. The .biz domain is expected to cost \$2,000/year. In addition, a pay per view service for owners to monitor the names has been suggested.

New Ideas from IdeaLab

It doesn't take a librarian to figure out that this system of categorization is fraught with problems. Fortunately, New.net, an IdeaLab start-up which partnered with Earthlink and Excite@Home, has come up with their own system of top level domains, including these well-understood domains:

.kids	.law	.game	.inc	.love
.shop	.med	.xxx	.gmbh	.school
.sport	.free	.mp3	.club	.golf
.family	.travel	.video	.soc	.auction
.hola	.tech	.chat	.ltd	.arts

They already have a following of 16 million users. And New.net is awarding registrars on its own. To include these domain names in your internet searches, change the configuration on your domain name server per the instructions found at New.net. A whole new internet world awaits you.

An alternative to traditional URLs is offered by RealNames, which registers *unique* keywords, such as company names and brand names (e.g, Barbie or Red Roof Inn or Coke). (*They don't accept generic words, such as cars or banks.*) Keywords (*similar to AOL Keywords*) replace long, complicated URLs and work in any language or character set. RealNames Keyword Technology is integrated into the leading browsers, Internet search engines, and directory service environments. Cost is \$49/year/country. (*Try it out by typing in Barbie or Red Roof Inn or Coke in your browser location text box. It works!*)

Whose naming system will prevail only time will tell. If New.net gets critical mass, ICANN may disappear. Or more fragmentation could occur....

Words of Caution

The Federal Trade Commission has issued a Consumer Alert on the selling or pre-registering the ICANN domains, such as .biz, calling it a scam.

Network Solutions reports that they return an average of 10,000 domain names to the open pool daily. Knowing first-hand that Network Solutions does not always reconcile their billing records with the technical records, I would suspect that many of these domain names get lost in their system. In light of this, the following recommendations should be followed in managing domain names:

- 1. Create role-based, generic email addresses for billing, admin, and technical roles (e.g., webmaster@company.com) to ensure that someone will check the email if the responsible individual leaves the organization. Usually one gets 10 days to reconcile a deactivation notice or else your website will disappear off the face of the internet.**
- 2. If you order or renew online, check your credit card statement in a few days to make sure that each and every domain name was charged. If it wasn't, your name was not registered or renewed.**
- 3. Don't believe the records posted publicly in Network Solutions website. Just because the technical process updated the record does not mean that their billing process updated their system.**
- 4. Try to establish a single account for all of your domain names, rather than allow individuals to order them ad hoc. They will be much easier to manage.**
- 5. Always indicate the registrant (i.e, the owner) to be your organization, not the consultant who registered the name for you. And use the identical organization name (no variations in spelling) for each record.**
- 6. When using registrars with lower cost fees, read the fine print on ownership. And remember that the ICANN proposed domain names have not become standard yet so be aware of pre-registration scams.**

Written by Linda Hashlamoun, Knowledge Services Leader, Noveon, Inc.