



Beginner's Guide to
DOMAIN NAMES



THIS IS ONE OF A SERIES OF GUIDES ABOUT ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO INTERNET USERS. EDUCATING NEW USERS ABOUT INTERNET ISSUES IS PART OF ICANN'S MISSION TO ENSURE A STABLE, SECURE, GLOBALLY INTEROPERABLE INTERNET. ICANN PREPARED THIS GUIDE AT THE REQUEST OF THE AT-LARGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE, THE VOICE OF THE INDIVIDUAL INTERNET USER AT ICANN. WE SINCERELY HOPE YOU FIND IT HELPFUL.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Domain Names	3
1 What is a domain name and how does it work?	3
2 How do I register a domain name?	3
3 How do I select a domain name to register?	4
4 What is a registrar and how do I select one?	5
5 How do I find out if the domain name I want is available?	6
6 What is the registration process like?	6
7 Why is there such a wide difference in the cost of domain names?	7
8 If I buy a domain name, does that give me a website? Can I immediately start receiving email to that domain?	7
9 The domain name I want is taken, but when I go to it there's no content. If it's not in use why can't I get it?	7
10 How can I protect my personal information?	7
11 Can I register a domain name in languages other than English, or using characters other than the Latin character set used in the English language?	8
12 What are my rights and obligations as a domain name registrant?	8
13 How do I renew a domain name that I have already registered?	9
14 What happens if I forget to renew my domain name?	9
15 How do I transfer a domain name that I have already registered?	10
16 Can I buy and sell a domain name?	12
17 Where do I go for help with domain name problems?	12
18 How do I handle domain name disputes?	12
19 What is the UDRP (Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy)?	13
20 How can I help protect myself from spam, phishing and other Internet fraud?	13
21 What do I need to remember about my domain name registration?	14
Additional Information	15
Glossary	15

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, few people outside the technical community knew what a domain name was, much less how to obtain or use one. With the dramatic expansion of the Internet as the medium of choice for instant, global communications, many more people today are aware that domain names help users direct email traffic, locate websites and establish an online identity.

A domain name—such as “icann.org”—is essentially the address of a person or an organization on the Internet. It is where other people can find you on line, and can also become your online identity. For example, businesses typically register domain names with their company name and sometimes also register their product names. Individuals often register family names or other names that have personal meaning. Although they are a big part of the Internet, understanding what these names are, how they work, and how to obtain and maintain them can be mystifying at first.



This Guide provides basic information about what a domain name is, how an Internet user can obtain and maintain one, and related information of interest. It draws on publicly available information from the ICANN and InterNIC websites, as well as materials prepared by consumer protection authorities in several countries (see Additional Information). This Guide focuses primarily on domain names registered under generic top-level domains (such as .COM, .NET, and .ORG) rather than names registered under country code top-level domains (such as .DE, .CN, .JP, and .UK).

Two important points should be emphasized at the start. First, the advice in this Guide is intended to assist Internet users, particularly new users. We plan to update it from time to time to reflect technological and policy changes and other developments. You can help us keep this publication as up-to-date and useful as possible by sending any suggestions, comments or updates you might have to publications@icann.org. We will be sure to take your feedback into account in any of the Guide's revisions.

Second, this Guide provides a summary of key aspects related to obtaining and using a domain name. Because domain name policies and procedures evolve, it is always important to check www.icann.org or www.internic.net for current and authoritative information. While we have taken care to ensure the accuracy of the information in this Guide, users must exercise their own judgment in making decisions about registering and using domain names, and seek professional advice as appropriate. All responsibility for use of this Guide for any purpose rests with each reader.

We hope you find this Guide useful. We look forward to hearing about your experience using it, and any suggestions for subsequent versions.

DOMAIN NAMES

1

What is a domain name and how does it work?

Every computer on the public Internet has a unique numeric address—similar to the uniqueness of a telephone number—which is a string of numbers that is difficult for most people to remember. This string is called the “IP address.” IP stands for “Internet Protocol.”

To make it easier to find a given location on the Internet, the Domain Name System, or DNS, was invented. The DNS translates IP addresses into unique alphanumeric addresses called domain names that are easier to remember. If, for example, you would like to visit the ICANN website, would you rather remember the IP address 192.0.34.163, or type “www.icann.org”? By associating a familiar string of letters—the domain name—with an IP address, the DNS makes it much easier for Internet users to remember websites and email addresses. In the example above, the “icann.org” part of the address is called the domain name. The “www.” part identifies to your browser that you are looking for the World Wide Web interface for that domain name.

Domain names can also be used to send email. Whether you are sending business or personal communications, you want to be certain that your message is directed to the intended addressee. To borrow an analogy from the phone system, when you dial a number, it rings at a particular location because there is a central numbering plan that ensures that each telephone number is unique.

The DNS works in a similar way. Both the domain name and the IP address behind it are unique. The DNS enables your email to reach the intended recipient (guide2dns@icann.org, for example) and not someone else with a similar domain name. It also enables you to type “www.icann.org,” without having to enter a lengthy IP address, and get to the right website. Without this uniqueness, both the DNS and the telephone systems would be less predictable and reliable.

A domain name can remain unchanged even if a website is moved to a different host computer or server because the DNS can be told to point an existing domain name to a new IP address. This is just like a household or a business moving its location—the family or business name stays the same, even if the street address changes.

2

How do I register a domain name?

To register a domain name, you must complete the following steps:

- ▶ **Choose the top-level domain (also called the extension) and your second-level domain (also called the label)** (see Question 3)
- ▶ **Select a registrar or reseller with which to register** (see Question 5)
- ▶ **Check the availability of your choice** (see Question 4)
- ▶ **Decide on the length of registration** (read further in this section)
- ▶ **Complete the registration procedures, including payment** (see Question 6)

The first step in registering a domain name is to select the top-level domain (TLD) and the second-level name you would like to register in that domain.

Domain names have two parts: the characters that follow the last dot in the domain name and the characters that come after it. The part following the last dot is called the top-level domain (TLD), or the extension. The part to the left of the dot is called the second-level domain, or the label. It is this part of a domain name that users are most likely to associate with your website or email address. Together, the “icann” and the “.org” parts of “icann.org” are the domain name.

The next steps are to select your registrar (see Question 4) and decide the number of years for which you would like to register. Most registrars offer registration periods of from 1 to 10 years, often with discounts for longer periods. A multi-year registration means more of an initial financial commitment than a single year, but it reduces how often you have to renew your registration before it expires. Many



There is no authoritative list of gTLD domain resellers, as these entities are not accredited by ICANN and may have business relationships with multiple registrars. A reseller could be a web hosting company or a Provider with whom you may already have a relationship. It is important to note that there is an accredited registrar of record for every registered domain name, even if you performed the registration transaction via a reseller.

The list of current
ICANN-accredited
registrars can be found
at <http://www.Internic.Org/regist.Html>.

registrars also offer discounts on each year of a multiple-year registration. Some people make their initial registration for one year, and, if they find they are indeed using the domain name, then renew it for a longer period.

Next, you should see whether the name you want is available (discussed in Question 5). In the case of a gTLD, if the domain name is still available, you can register it directly with a registrar or through a reseller that has a relationship with a registrar (see Question 6). The list of current ICANN-accredited registrars can be found at <http://www.internic.net/regist.html>.

If the domain name you want is not available, you could modify the second-level part of the domain name by trying a different way to describe the same idea (for example, try "icannndns.org"). The search tools on registrar websites often have features that suggest variations on a name that might be available when the primary name selected is not (more information on this is in Question 5). Alternatively, if you are trying to register "icann.org," you could change the top-level domain and try one other than ".org." There are now nearly two dozen generic TLDs, although some have eligibility requirements. Some of the unrestricted TLDs are .COM, .INFO, .ORG and .NET. For a complete list of gTLDs and any restrictions, see <http://www.icann.org/en/registrars/accredited-list.html>.

If the domain name that you are seeking is already registered, you may be able to acquire the right to register it from the current registrant (in other words, from the person or company that registered it most recently and owns the rights to use the domain). Some registrars and other companies offer services related to the reselling of domain names, which could involve a bidding or auction process. However, the process may be time-consuming and complex. You can find out the registrant of the domain name you want by using the Whois database. One way to search Whois across all generic TLDs is available at <http://www.internic.net/whois.html>.

The final step is to complete the registration procedures with the registrar or reseller that you have selected.



3

How do I select a domain name to register?

In selecting a domain name, you should consider:

- ▶ *Do I want my domain name to say something about myself, my organization or my business?*
- ▶ *Do I want a distinctive domain name that sets itself apart from others?*
- ▶ *Do I want a descriptive domain name that imparts important information?*
- ▶ *Do I want a second-level domain or top-level domain that is easy to remember?*
- ▶ *Do I want to register in a restricted gTLD (such as .COOP, explained further in the following paragraphs)? And if so, do I meet its eligibility requirements?*

For the TLD part of a domain name, there are nearly two dozen generic TLDs to choose from. While this Guide covers only gTLDs, there are also more than 250 country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs), which are two-letter extensions that correspond to countries or territories around the world. The extensions .US, .DE and .JP, for example, correspond to the United States, Germany and Japan, respectively. Some of these domains also have restrictions on who can register in them. You can find a list of these at <http://www.iana.org/domains/root/db/index.html>.

The gTLDs in which anyone can register include .COM, .INFO, .NET, and .ORG. Three other gTLDs (.BIZ, .NAME and .PRO) have certain eligibility requirements (for example, .BIZ is intended for businesses).

There are additional gTLDs in which registrations are restricted to persons or entities that belong to a defined community. These gTLDs include .AERO, .ASIA, .CAT, .COOP, .EDU, .JOBS, .MUSEUM, .MOBI, .TEL and .TRAVEL. Some of these gTLDs tell Internet users about the qualifications of its registrants (for example, to register in .COOP, an entity must be a verified cooperative). Other gTLDs tell users about the kind of content they will find under the extension (that is, .MOBI registrants have pledged to provide content in

a form suitable for mobile devices). It may be more expensive to register in one of the restricted gTLDs, in part because there could be verification costs associated with the registration process. On the other hand, registration in a restricted gTLD may be useful to you, as it could help demonstrate that you have a certain qualification that has been verified by an authoritative source.

Some gTLDs are newer than others, and thus may be less familiar to Internet users. As a result, newer gTLDs might provide more availability for a domain you wish to register. With time and greater usage, this is likely to change.

ICANN is also preparing to introduce new gTLDs, so that Internet users will have more options to consider when registering domain names. This will also enable Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) to be available at the top level, so that the domain extension can contain non-Latin characters from many languages around the world (for example, Arabic or Chinese). More information about ICANN's work on introducing new gTLDs is available at <http://icann.org/en/topics/new-gtld-program.htm>.

For both gTLDs and ccTLDs, the entity that maintains the authoritative record of all registrations for the TLD is called the registry.

For the second-level part of a domain name (the characters before the last dot in the domain name), you might have many choices, depending on what others registrants have already registered. As noted earlier, you might consider whether your primary goals are to have your domain name establish an online identity or brand, be distinctive, be descriptive or be easy to remember. Many registrants seek a second-level domain name that is descriptive and easy for others to recall and type. It may be easier to find your first choice still available in a new gTLD rather than in an established one, such as .COM. Or you may decide on a different domain name to register in an older gTLD.



4

What is a registrar and how do I select one?

A registrar for a gTLD domain is an ICANN-accredited company that processes your registration for the desired domain name, if it is available. The registrar does this through the registry, which is the entity that maintains the authoritative database for the domain name that you have selected.



Domain names today can be registered through many different companies, which compete with one another on the basis of price, value-added services and customer service, among other factors. The ICANN-operated InterNIC website www.internic.net provides general information about Internet domain name registration services.

Although ICANN requires each registrar to provide a Whois search service, many Internet users find using the InterNIC website's Whois search tool (<http://www.internic.net/whois.html>) to be more convenient. In addition to using this website to search through the Whois database for the availability of domain names, you can find registrar contact details in the [Accredited Registrar Directory](#). You can search the directory of registrars alphabetically ([Alphabetical Listing by Company/Organization Name](#)), by location of registrar ([Listing by Location of Registrar](#)), or by the language(s) that are supported ([Listing by Language Supported](#)). ICANN also provides a table listing all registrars, their locations and the various TLDs that they may support at <http://www.icann.org/en/registrars/accredited-list.html>. It is also possible to register a domain through a reseller, which has a business arrangement with a registrar. ICANN does not maintain a listing of domain resellers, as it has no contractual relationship with them.

ICANN's Stability and Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), in cooperation with Consumer Reports WebWatch, has created a top ten list of questions to think about when choosing a registrar. You can find this list online at <http://www.consumerwebwatch.org/pdfs/domainname.pdf>.



5

How do I find out if the domain name I want is available?

Most domain names are available on a first-come, first-served basis. As of October 2010, for example, there were roughly 90 million domain names registered in the .COM TLD. If you have a particular name you would like to register, you should do so as soon as possible. You can check the availability of the name you have chosen on the website of the registrar you wish to use. You do this by searching your desired domain name to see if it is available; many registrars' search systems will also allow you to search across many TLDs—both generic and country code—to see whether the domain name you want to register is available in any or all TLDs. Some registrars have services that allow you to try to acquire the domain name you want from the current registrant; it is also not unusual to have the search system propose names that are similar to the name you have chosen if the name you have searched is not available.

If you are interested in registering a domain name in a country code top-level domain (ccTLD), such as .MA for Morocco or .PE for Peru, you can check the database of top-level domains at <http://www.iana.org/domains/root/db/> for the appropriate registration authority.

6

What is the registration process like?

The registrar that you select will ask you to provide contact and technical information, some of which is required by ICANN. The registrar will keep records of the contact information and submit the technical information to the entity, known as the registry, that maintains the central directory for that TLD. Each top-level domain has only one authoritative registry, which provides other computers on the Internet with the information necessary to send you email or to find your website. The Public Interest Registry, for example, operates the .ORG registry.

As part of the registration process, you will be required to enter into a contract with the registrar that you or the reseller has selected. That contract sets forth the terms under which your registration is accepted and will be maintained. Once you have successfully completed the registration process, you become the registrant of your new domain name.

We advise you to avoid any domain name registration service that purports to guarantee availability of any particular domain names, or preferential treatment in registering any name in any gTLD. We also suggest that you use caution when doing business with any unknown person or entity that sends you unsolicited faxes or emails inviting you to register or renew a domain name, regardless of the offer. See What's Dot and What's Not: Domain Name Registration Scams, at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt084.shtm>. As noted in Question 10, once you register a domain name, your fax number could be publicly available as a result of the Whois service the registrar is required to provide. See also Question 20, titled How can I help protect myself from spam, phishing and other Internet fraud?, which describes several steps that you can take to help protect yourself from other Internet scams.

See *What's Dot and What's Not: Domain Name Registration Scams*, at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/pubs/consumer/alerts/alt084.shtm>.

7**Why is there such a wide difference in the cost of domain names?**

Some sources offer domain names for what seem to be very low prices, while others offer names for what seem to be very high prices.

ICANN-accredited registrars are allowed to set their own prices for domain name registration services. Some price differences are due to the level of customer support offered by each registrar. For example, a registrar that offers a 24x7 helpdesk may charge more than a registrar that offers only an email support address. Registrars may also offer domain name registrations packaged with other services, which could result in a higher price. Choosing the lowest-price offer may mean you do not get all the features you want, while choosing a higher-priced offering may mean you are paying for features that are not important to you. An extremely high price can indicate that the domain name is being offered by a sales channel that focuses on names it has determined to be premium or high-value. You should consider price and what is included in the price when you register a domain name.

8**If I buy a domain name, does that give me a website? Can I immediately start receiving email to that domain?**

Registering a domain name means only that you have obtained certain rights to use the name for the registration term. Website hosting or email service will not be available unless you have specifically arranged for those services in relation to the domain name. As an analogy, the purchase of a piece of land does not automatically result in a house being built on it.

Creating a website involves a number of steps, such as obtaining hosting services and publishing content. Creating email service also involves certain set-up steps. Many registrars offer packages that can include these services along with the domain name registration. However, these services can also be set up separately, by you or by other service providers you engage.

9**The domain name I want is taken, but when I go to it, there's no content. If it's not in use, why can't I get it?**

An entity who registers a domain name is not required to use it for any purpose (for example, creating a working website) within any particular time period. The registrant can choose whether, how and when to use a registered domain name. If you enter a particular domain name in your browser and it turns up a blank page, it could mean that the registrant is holding the name in anticipation of future use, or is holding it defensively (to keep anyone else from obtaining it) or is not making active use of it for other reasons. A registrant can also choose to use a domain name for email purposes only, without developing a website.

If you think that the current registrant is not using the domain name, you can attempt to contact the registrant to see if it might wish to sell or transfer the name to you. However, the registrant has no obligation to do so.

10**How can I protect my personal information?**

For most gTLDs, information about the registrant of each domain name is publicly available in each registry's Whois database, which is used to facilitate the resolution of technical problems and to enforce consumer protection, trademark and other laws. Two notable exceptions are the .COM and .NET registry Whois services, which list the registrar responsible for maintaining the domain registration record. Information about who is responsible for these domains can then be found by accessing that registrar's Whois database.

As part of the registration process, you must provide your registrar with accurate and reliable contact details and promptly correct and update these details as necessary. This information includes your full name, a valid postal address, email address, voice telephone number and fax number (if available). As noted in Question 12, the willful provision of inaccurate or unreliable information, or a willful failure



to update information provided to a registrar, can be the basis for cancelling your registration and the loss of any right to use the domain name.

Given growing concerns about identity theft and other criminal activity, many individuals are legitimately concerned about having their personal data publicly available on the Internet. One option for registrants is to use a valid postal and email address from their business or place of employment. Another option is to use privacy protection or proxy services, sometimes for an additional fee. Some registrars make these services available through a third-party proxy service that allows you to provide the required contact information to your registrar, and the proxy service becomes the registrant of record. You agree that the proxy service can disclose your personal data to respond to requests from law enforcement or conflicts related to infringements on legal rights of others or when presented with evidence of actionable harm.

Another option is to register through an intermediary, such as an Internet Service Provider (ISP) or web-hosting company, which then becomes the registrant of record. With this arrangement, you should be aware of which rights you have and which rights the intermediary has in regard to the domain name.



11

Can I register a domain name in languages other than English, or using characters other than the Latin character set used in the English language?

At present, domain names in gTLDs can be registered using the 26 letters of the basic Latin script (A to Z), and can include the numbers 0–9. They can also include a hyphen “-”, although not as the first or last character of the domain name.

This set of characters is often referred to as ASCII, which stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange. Domain names can be a total of 63 characters long, not including the extension; that is, for example, 63 characters followed by .COM.

Internationalized Domain Names, or IDNs, are domain names containing characters from non-Latin scripts, such as those used by the Arabic or Chinese languages.

If you are interested in IDNs, one place to start learning more is in the Policy Issue Brief on IDNs, found at <http://www.icann.org/en/policy/briefs/>.

Today it is possible to register the second level of a domain name, such as the “icann” part of “icann.org,” in different language scripts. You should check with your chosen registrar to see whether it supports that kind of registration. If not, another registrar should be able to help you. As mentioned in Question 4, What is a registrar and how do I select one?, it is possible to search for a registrar by the language(s) it supports (see [Listing by Language Supported](#)).

With some registrars, such support is limited to providing registration assistance in another language, while with others it means that you can also register a non-Latin script domain name.

ICANN has begun making IDN gTLDs and ccTLDs available at the top level (that is, after the last dot in a domain name). As of November 2010, 33 countries and territories representing 22 different languages have applied for IDN country code top-level domains and that number is constantly growing. A complete list can be found on ICANN’s web site at: <http://icann.org/en/topics/idn/fast-track/string-evaluation-completion-en.htm>.

Although it may be possible to register a domain in certain non-Latin scripts, it may not be possible to use the domain name for email because the technical standard for IDN email is not yet finalized.

12

What are my rights and obligations as a domain name registrant?

As the licensed holder of a domain name for its registration period, you have the right to use that name during that period, consistent with certain terms and conditions, as well as applicable laws and regulations.

As a registrant, among other things, you are required to:

- Provide your registrar with accurate and reliable contact details and promptly correct and update them as necessary, including your full name and postal address, as well as the name, postal address, email

address, voice telephone number and, where available, fax number for the technical and administrative contacts you list. The willful provision of inaccurate or unreliable information, or a willful failure to update information provided to a registrar or a failure to respond for over 15 calendar days to your registrar's inquiries concerning the accuracy of this information, constitutes a material breach of your contract with your registrar and can be the basis for cancelling your registration.

- Represent that, to your best knowledge and belief, neither the registration of the domain name nor the manner in which it is directly or indirectly used infringes the legal rights of any third party.
- During disputes concerning or arising from use of your domain name you must submit, without prejudice to other potentially applicable rules, to the laws and authority of the courts where you live and where your registrar is located.
- Agree that registration of your domain name is subject to suspension, cancellation or transfer pursuant to any ICANN adopted specification or policy to correct mistakes or resolve disputes.

Among other things, your registrar is required to:

- Inform you of the intended purposes for which any personal data that it collects from you will be used.
- Take reasonable precautions to protect your personal data from loss, misuse, unauthorized access or disclosure, alteration or destruction. You should understand, however, that all registrars are required to make the Whois information for each generic top-level domain name registration publicly available. You can review this Whois information by checking a Whois service, such as the one available on the InterNIC website at http://reports.internic.net/cgi/whois?whois_nic=icann.org&type=domain.
- Take reasonable steps to correct inaccurate registration data that it learns about.

13

How do I renew a domain name that I have already registered?

You must contact your registrar before the expiration date of your domain if you intend to renew the registration, unless you have signed up for any automatic renewal services offered by your registrar. When you first register a domain, you are given a choice of selecting a one-year, or longer, registration period. You should keep track of the expiration date, and if you intend to renew your domain name, do so before that date. Your registrar can also send you renewal notices as long as your contact data remains accurate. This makes it easier to renew on time. You should be certain to check that a renewal notice is actually from your registrar of record, and not from a reseller or another registrar seeking to attract your business away from your current registrar.

Generic top-level domain names under contract with ICANN can be registered for a maximum of 10 years at a time and, consistent with these rules, you can increase the period of registration at any time. If you expect to use of your domain name for a long time, you should consider registering or renewing it for more than one year.

Some domain registrants decide to transfer a domain to another registrar when it is time to renew a registration. As the domain name registrar marketplace is highly competitive, a new registrar may offer better terms for renewal if you decide to transfer your registration.

Finally, ICANN's Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) has produced an advisory, titled *Renewal Considerations for Domain Name Registrants*, which is available at <http://www.icann.org/en/committees/security/renewal-advisory-29jun06.pdf>.

14

What happens if I forget to renew my domain name?

It used to be that if you forgot to renew your domain name before your registration expired, you were out of luck if someone else immediately registered it. In the past few years, however, there were complaints about registrants losing the rights to their domain names as the result





of error, inadvertence or fraud. To address these concerns, some, but not all, registrars have instituted a redemption grace period for expired domain names, sometimes referred to as the RGP.

Under the RGP, deletion of a name—whether intentional or not—results in a 30-day Deleted Name Redemption Grace Period. The domain name is placed on registry-hold. Once in registry-hold, your domain name will not function, and you cannot send or receive email from the domain that has been put on hold, which should alert you to the fact that your registration has lapsed. As long as you are within the 30-day period, you can retrieve your registration through your registrar if it offers the RGP service. Your registrar can then redeem the domain name from the registry by paying the renewal fee and a service charge, for which it will charge you. The total fee charged by a registrar offering this service can be many times the standard renewal fee, so we advise you to remember to renew your domain name before its expiration date. If your registrar offers this service, your agreement should contain an explanation of the fees charged and the service itself.

Other registrars have adopted other ways to alert you if you fail to renew your domain name, such as sending email and postal mail notifications to remind you to renew your domain. Refer to your agreement with your registrar to learn whether it has such a policy and, if so, how it works.

We strongly recommend that you carefully review the terms of a registrar's service before you use that service. You also should remember that your registrar may change the way its service works over time, and the longer the term of your registration, the more likely it is that changes in the terms of service will affect your registration. Your registrar is obliged to inform you of changes, but it is only able to do so if it can reliably contact you, so it is important that you keep your personal details up-to-date with your registrar and review the options that are available for being notified by your registrar of changes to its service that affect you.

If your registrar offers services designed to auto-renew your registration (not all do), these services often depend on the registrar having a way to automatically charge you for the renewal. If, for example, that means paying with a credit card, and the card has expired since you last registered your domain name, your registrar will be unable to process the registration. At the same time, if your email address or postal address changes and you do not keep these details up-to-date with your registrar, you may not receive a reminder from your registrar telling you that your domain name is reaching the end of its registration period.

You should also make sure you are familiar with the reminder services that the registrar offers if you intend to rely on your registrar to remind you of the impending need to re-register your domain name, as not all registrars offer reminder services.

In general, we recommend that you personally keep track of your registration details, in particular when your domain name expires. You should go out of your way to make sure that any domain name that you wish to keep is always re-registered before its registration expires.

Some registrars offer email or postal reminders that your domain name registration period is about to expire. Others do not. Or they may not be able to remind you if your email or postal address has changed since you last registered your domain name. Mark your calendar clearly when your registration is about to expire and contact your registrar with plenty of time to renew your registration.

How do I transfer a domain name that I have already registered?

15

You can freely transfer a domain name registered in a gTLD to another registrar as long as more than 60 days have passed since it was registered or previously transferred, and no other exclusions stated in the Inter-Registrar Transfer Policy (IRTP) apply. You can view the IRTP at: <http://icann.org/en/transfers/>. People consider transfers for a variety of reasons, including potential costs savings, value-added service and customer service. You should not, however, try to transfer a name shortly before a registration expires, or the transfer might not succeed. The transfer of a domain name can take five calendar days, and if the transfer fails, you can try again, and that second attempt could also take up to five days. Because of potential delays in the transfer process, we recommend that you transfer your domain name well before its registration is scheduled to expire.

ICANN's approval of a transfer policy is intended to increase your options when registering domain names, and to encourage registrars to compete for your business. The process is designed so that you can confirm that a transfer is requested in a fashion that notifies both the gaining and the losing registrars of your intention, and reduces the possibility of fraudulent transfers.

Each registrar is allowed to develop its own transfer procedures and deadlines as long as they are clear, concise, and meet certain ICANN contractual requirements. You should therefore check the relevant requirements with your current and proposed registrars. Depending on their procedures, you will probably need to initiate the request with the new registrar. Once it has confirmed the request, it will send a transfer request to the TLD registry involved. The registry will then communicate with your current registrar, who may seek to confirm the transfer with you and then send an acceptance or rejection notice back to the registry, which will notify the new registrar.

If your current registrar does nothing, the transfer will proceed. If it denies the transfer, it must give a valid reason for doing so. The new registrar then advises you when a transfer is complete. While this procedure can seem complicated, in practice it works relatively smoothly.

Note that to transfer any registered domain name in any gTLD, the registry requires that you confirm an authorization code (also called an auth code). The auth code is unique to each domain name and is assigned by the registrar when you register your domain name. Check with your current registrar to determine your auth code if you do not know it because you will need to provide it to your new registrar to initiate a transfer. Some registrars will give you access to the auth code via the domain management section of their website.

You should also review whether the domain name you wish to transfer is in a state called registrar lock, which can help prevent inadvertent or fraudulent domain transfers or registration record changes from taking place without your express knowledge.

Your registrar may automatically enable registrar lock for a variety of reasons. In general, however, you should find that there is a way to unlock the domain name in the online interface for managing your registration at your registrar's website.





16

Can I buy and sell a domain name?

A registrant, or person who registers a domain name owns the rights to use that registration during the period of time he or she chose when registering it or renewing the registration. It is possible to change the registration record for a domain to indicate that another person or organization has become the registrant of record for that domain. The registrar may or may not charge by for this process, although depending on whether an auction or aftermarket firm is involved, there may be other fees. The new registrant must establish an account with the registrar of record. To deter fraud, most registrars require some documentation from the current registrant that a registration change is their desire.

Be aware, however, that when you register a domain name, you agree:

- ▶ ***That the registration does not infringe upon or violate the rights of any third party.***
- ▶ ***That you are not registering the domain name for an unlawful purpose.***
- ▶ ***That you will not knowingly use the domain name in violation of any applicable laws or regulations.***

Some countries' laws prohibit registrants from registering specific domain names that they intend to sell to a company or individual that may have intellectual property rights to those names. Under ICANN's Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy, or UDRP, one party can challenge another party's domain name registration on similar grounds. Violation of the UDRP can result in forfeiture of your domain name and, in some cases, also have consequences under domestic law.

You should carefully review the applicable laws and rules if you are considering registering a domain name to resell the registration, or if someone contacts you offering to sell you a registration in a name that seems quite similar to names associated with you, or the identity, goods, services, or website of your organization or business.

17

Where do I go for help with domain name problems?

If you have a problem with your registrar, you should first try to resolve it directly. If you have been dealing with a reseller for a registrar, you should begin by working with the reseller. If the reseller is unresponsive or unavailable, then you should deal directly with the registrar of record for your domain. If you cannot resolve your complaint with your registrar, you should contact the agencies involved in addressing customer complaints or consumer protection authorities in your area, or where your registrar does business. See the Additional Information section of this Guide for references to materials on consumer protection.

While ICANN does not resolve individual customer complaints that fall outside of its contracts with registrars, we do accredit all registrars offering registration services in gTLDs. For this reason, ICANN monitors complaints to discern if there is a trend with respect to a particular registrar. You can submit a complaint about a registrar to ICANN by using the form available at the InterNIC website at <http://reports.internic.net/cgi/registrars/problem-report.cgi>. A copy of the complaint is automatically forwarded to your registrar for review. For further information, please review the [How to Get Help When You Have a Problem with Your Registrar](http://www.icann.org/en/announcements/announcement-06mar07-en.htm) page on the ICANN website at <http://www.icann.org/en/announcements/announcement-06mar07-en.htm>. ICANN also employs staff dedicated to helping ensure that registries and registrars comply with the terms of their agreements with ICANN, including those intended to protect registrants.

18

How do I handle domain name disputes?

If your dispute is with a registrar, see Question 17. If your dispute is with a third party, then the remedy depends on the nature of the complaint. Thousands of cases involving trademark disputes have been resolved by the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP). Question 19 provides more information about the URDP.

19

What is the UDRP (Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy)?

All ICANN-accredited registrars have agreed to follow a Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy to resolve disputes over the registration and use of domain names. During registration, each registrant agrees to abide by this policy. While litigation between the parties remains an option, the use of this procedure to address allegedly abusive registration such as cybersquatting can resolve a dispute without the cost and delays sometimes encountered in court.

To initiate UDRP procedures in a situation in which you believe another party has engaged in an abusive registration, you can file a complaint with one of the *dispute resolution service providers* referred to on *the ICANN UDRP page* at <http://www.icann.org/en/dndr/udrp/policy.htm>. Should you become the respondent or defendant in such a proceeding, you should review these links to learn more information about the procedures complainant's provider, and how you can defend your position. You may also wish to consult with a qualified attorney.

20

How can I help protect myself from spam, phishing and other Internet fraud?

Here are some steps that you can take to help protect yourself from some of the risks of using the Internet.

Watch out for unsolicited offers to register domain names as renewals or new registrations. You should not assume that a renewal notice is from your registrar. It could be from another registrar seeking your business. If you receive such a notice, you should check all the details carefully. For example, does it have the proper name of your website address or domain name? Is the extension identical, or is the sender trying to get you to register the same second-level name in other TLD (or ccTLD) extensions? In some cases, resellers or registrars will send misleading renewal notices that, if paid, will initiate a transfer of the domain name registration to them.

Keep a record of the details of your domain name registration(s), including each registrar of record and each date of expiration.

Check the Whois database periodically to ensure that it reflects accurate information, including your contact data details. Your registrar may offer you the ability to place a lock on your domain name registration, sometimes for an additional fee. A lock prevents changes to your registration record without your express authorization.

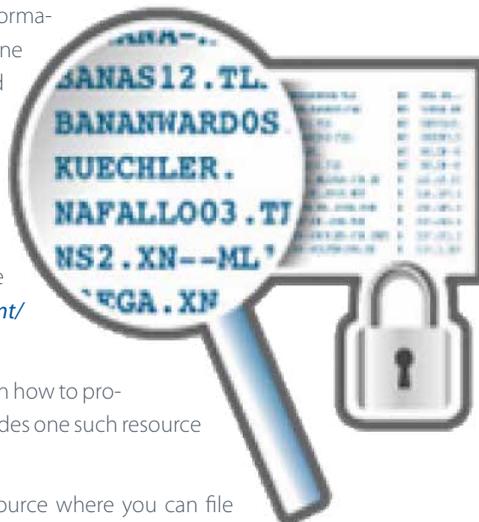
Avoid emailing personal or financial information. If you get an unsolicited email from a company or government agency asking for your personal information, contact the company or agency cited in the email using a telephone number you know to be genuine, or start a new Internet session and type in the Web address that you know is correct.

In addition, you can report spam, phishing and other Internet fraud activities to the consumer protection authorities where you reside.

One publication that contains helpful information is the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's notice on "Domain name renewal/registrations"—published at <http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/54057>.

Consumer groups worldwide often provide comprehensive advice on how to protect yourself and your computer. Consumer Reports WebWatch provides one such resource at <http://www.consumerwebwatch.org/consumer-center.cfm>.

Finally, 21 countries have come together to provide an online resource where you can file complaints about online fraud and other problems. Called eConsumer, the site is available in several languages at <http://www.econsumer.gov/>.



What do I need to remember about my domain name registration?

Here is a checklist reminder of all the information provided in the questions above.



Use valid addresses and contact information for the domain name registration.



Keep the information updated in the domain record should you move or change your email address.



Consider using a lock on your domain registration if your registrar offers it. This can help prevent inadvertent or fraudulent domain transfers or registration record changes from occurring without your express knowledge.



Check Whois information on a regular basis to verify the information presented about your domain.



You will – in compliance with ICANN's rules for registrars – be contacted annually by the registrar of record for your domain (even if you registered your name with a reseller affiliated with that registrar) to verify that the contact information for your domain registration record is accurate.



Keep track of your registration renewal dates to ensure domain name renewals occur before expiration.



Carefully review any domain name registration renewal offers to ensure that they are indeed from your registrar.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The following organizations and websites are among several that contain useful information concerning domain names and the safe use of the Internet more generally:

Australia's Competition and Consumer Commission:
<http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/142>

Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy:
<http://www.dbcde.gov.au/>

eConsumer:
<http://www.econsumer.gov/>

ICANN At-Large (individual Internet user) community:
<http://atlarge.icann.org>

ICANN:
www.icann.org

InterNIC:
www.internic.net

United States Federal Trade Commission:
www.ftc.gov

Comments on and suggested updates to this Guide should be sent to publications@icann.org.



GLOSSARY

DN	Domain Name
DNS	Domain Name System
IANA	Internet Assigned Numbers Authority
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
IDNs	Internationalized Domain Names
IETF	Internet Engineering Task Force
IP	Internet Protocol
ISP	Internet Service Provider
RGP	Redemption Grace Period
TLD	Top-level domain
ccTLD	Country code top-level domain
gTLD	Generic top-level domain
UDRP	Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy
URL	Uniform Resource Locator

About ICANN

To reach another person on the Internet you have to type an address into your computer - a name or a number. That address has to be unique so computers know where to find each other. ICANN coordinates these unique identifiers across the world. Without that coordination we wouldn't have one global Internet. ICANN was formed in 1998. It is a not-for-profit public-benefit corporation with participants from all over the world dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable and interoperable. It promotes competition and develops policy on the Internet's unique identifiers. ICANN doesn't control content on the Internet. It cannot stop spam and it doesn't deal with access to the Internet. But through its coordination role of the Internet's naming system, it does have an important impact on the expansion and evolution of the Internet. For more information please visit: www.icann.org.

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