

Domain names:

The NetNames guide to corporate domain name management



Your name. Our business.

120 million domain names: that's how many are currently registered worldwide. They are used as addresses for websites, for email, to prevent misuse of intellectual property, and to keep tucked away in reserve for new business ideas. And as more people use the Internet – and more domains are made available – this number is certain to grow.

But whilst the importance of establishing and maintaining an online presence is now well understood, those involved in managing a large portfolio of domain names will be faced with a raft of new complexities. Different domains have different registration requirements, different technical considerations and different legal implications, and will often need to be managed using different languages and currencies.

NetNames has helped many of the world's largest companies and best known brands to remove the risk and to simplify the process of managing a portfolio of domain names. This book is designed to provide sound advice and expertise, showing you the fundamental steps that companies need to take to ensure the process is problem-free.

I hope you will find it useful.

Geoff Wicks

CEO NetNames

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A domain name can be one of a company's most valuable assets. It establishes identity on the Internet and is the primary link between the offline and online worlds.

It forms part of the public consciousness and is an integral element of a successful company – whether the majority of its business is conducted online or not. Easier to remember than phone numbers and more personal than postal addresses, a domain name stands on its own as a means to stimulate customer interaction and communication.

What is a domain name?

Just as every telephone connected to an exchange has to have a number, every device connected to the Internet has to have an address.

You may think that because your computer isn't hosting a website, you're surfing the Web anonymously. However, every device connected to the Internet is assigned its own IP (Internet Protocol) address that enables it to communicate with other devices.

For instance, it allows your computer to communicate with web servers so that you can view web pages. If you type 212.53.64.225 into the address bar of your web browser, the NetNames homepage should spring up on your screen. That is possible because your web browser has not only contacted the web server at that address, but also supplied your own IP address, so that the web server knows where to send the information you see displayed.

However, IP addresses are difficult to remember and small variations can cause you to view completely the wrong site. If you want people looking for your company website to find it quickly and intuitively then you need an easier method: the domain name.

In layman's terms, a **domain name** is a string of characters including letters and numbers that enables your web browser to locate the IP address, and thus the location, of the site you wish to visit. For example, www.netnames.com is the domain name that stands in place of the above numerical IP address when typed into your browser.

How do domain names work?

The **DNS**, or the **Domain Name System**, is the means through which a domain name leads a person to a website or routes an email message. The operation and functioning of the DNS is supervised by a not-for-profit organisation known as **ICANN** (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers).

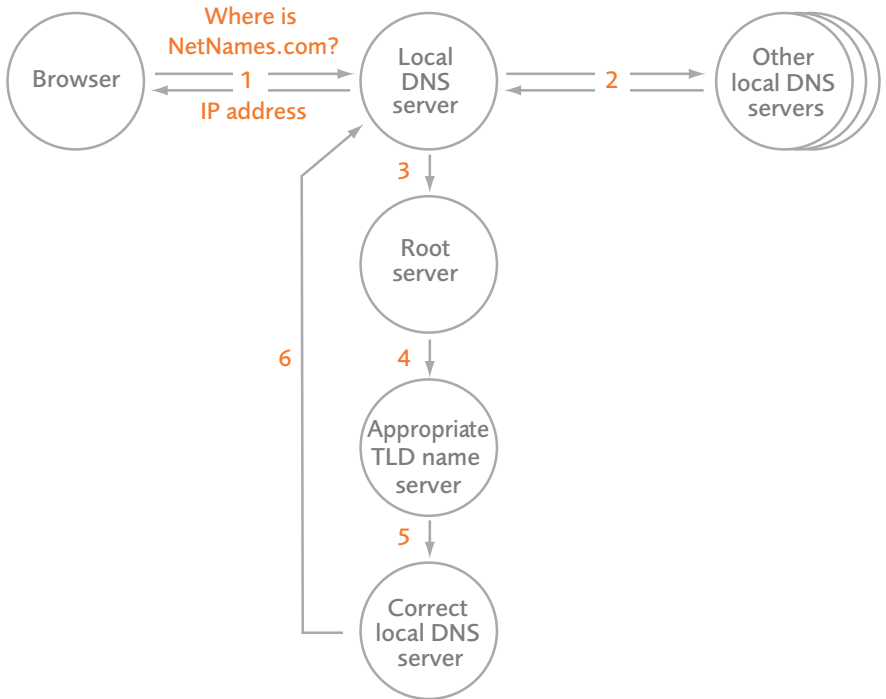
At a technical level, the DNS is what is known as a distributed database. This is a database in which data is stored on multiple computers within a network – in this case, multiple nameservers within the internet. This ensures the DNS can handle the increasing volumes of web and email traffic. If the entire database were to be centralised, it's easy to imagine how large a bottleneck the DNS would create in the internet.

If you look at the **Using the DNS diagram** on page 6 you can see how it works.

The process of looking up a domain name is described below:

1. A user types the domain name of the website they wish to visit into the address bar of their browser. The browser then makes a query to the local DNS server to find the IP address of that website. The local DNS server will then answer the request with an IP address if it already knows (and has cached) the IP address for the domain name.
2. If the local DNS server doesn't know the IP address or the cached information is old, it will then attempt to contact another nameserver to find out the most recent information, a process it may have to repeat many times.
3. If no information is available on nearby nameservers, the local server may need to escalate the request to a root nameserver to determine which primary nameserver contains the website's domain name records.
4. The root nameservers (there are 13 around the world in key locations) do not know the IP addresses for specific domain names, but they do know the IP addresses for the nameservers that handle each and every Top-Level Domain name (TLD, see p. 6 for more information). So the root nameserver will direct the query to the appropriate TLD nameserver.
5. In turn, the TLD nameservers carry a record of every domain name and are therefore able to direct the request to the correct nameserver for the domain name being queried.
6. Nameservers are usually run in pairs so that if one server is busy or not working, the other one is able to respond with the IP address of the domain name being queried. A domain name is said to be delegated to a pair of nameservers when those nameservers contain the authoritative information for the domain name. So one of these nameservers will resolve the query for the original nameserver and provide the IP address of the website requested.

Using the DNS



Different types of domain name

There are, of course, many different types of domain name. The main distinction is the kind of suffix used. In broad terms, domain names can be grouped as follows :

- generic Top-Level Domains (gTLDs), such as '.com', '.net' and '.org'
- country-code Top-Level Domains (ccTLDs), such as '.de' for Germany and '.fr' for France.
- sponsored Top-Level Domains (sTLDs), such as '.mobi', '.travel' and '.asia'.

Each TLD is managed and run according to common technical standards, yet unique administrative processes. The record of which organisations are managed by which TLDs is administered by ICANN in what is known as the IANA (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority) database.

When registering a domain name you need to decide which TLD you wish to use. If you choose a gTLD then you will typically be able to register what is known as a second-level domain name – for instance, 'netnames.com' where 'netnames' is registered directly under '.com'.

However, with ccTLDs things can be slightly less straightforward. Here it is common for registry operators (the organisations responsible for a TLD) only to allow third-level domain names. This is where another suffix is added with a dot before the TLD, for instance, 'netnames.co.uk'.

Whether a name can be registered as a second-level domain name, a third-level domain name or as both is at the discretion of the registry operator or country responsible for managing that particular TLD. Some countries such as Germany only offer second-level domain names directly under the '.de' suffix ('netnames.de'). In the UK, on the other hand, it is not possible to register at the second level, the registry operator only offers third-level domains such as '.co.uk', '.gov.uk' and '.me.uk'.

It is important to note that these circumstances are constantly changing as the operators of TLDs open up domains at the second level and introduce third-level domains on a regular basis. For instance, the Spanish registry introduced third-level domains '.com.es', '.nom.es' and '.org.es'. Prior to this change, '.es' was only obtainable within second-level domain names.

Restricted and unrestricted domain names

Not every domain name suffix is available to everybody. There are many ccTLDs, for example, that require a local presence within a country, although NetNames can help you meet such criteria where necessary.

Moreover, there are what are known as restricted domain names. These are domain names that can only be registered by certain individuals and organisations. For instance, only organisations within the US government can register domain names ending in '.gov'. There are also what are known as sponsored Top-Level Domains (sTLDs), which are only available to members of a particular industry such as .aero and .museum.

Unrestricted domain names can be registered by just about anybody, but many of them are still intended for organisations fitting a certain category. For instance, '.com' was envisaged to be used by just commercial registrants – although, in reality its use has proved to be somewhat different.

Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs)

Internationalised Domain Names, or IDNs, are domain names that use a different character set to that present in languages such as English. Domain names are now available in 39 character sets – supporting the users of around 350 different languages, from Korean to Russian.

Domain name suffixes

At the time of writing, there are more than 240 country-code suffixes. The ten most popular are:

.de (Germany)	.it (Italy)
.uk (United Kingdom)	.ar (Argentina)
.eu (European Union)	.us (United States)
.nl (Netherlands)	.br (Brazil)
.cn (China)	.ch (Switzerland)

Together, .de and .uk represent 38 percent of all ccTLDs.

In total there are 19 gTLDs. Some of the most prominent are:

.com	- Unrestricted (but intended for commerce)
.info	- Unrestricted use
.net	- Unrestricted (but intended for network providers)
.org	- Unrestricted (but intended for organisations that do not fit elsewhere such as not-for-profit organisations and charities)
.biz	- Unrestricted (but intended for businesses)

How does the domain name industry work?

The domain name industry is almost as old as the Internet, and just like the Internet it has evolved from a small system to a business critical industry.

Essentially, the industry has five levels.

Level 1 – Root server managers

At the highest level are root server managers responsible for 13 root servers that are distributed at various locations throughout the world. Their role is essentially an administrative and technical one in maintaining those servers. As someone registering a domain name, you will not have contact with root server managers.

Level 2 – Registry operators

A registry operator is responsible for one or more TLD (e.g. Nominet is the registry operator for '.uk'). Registry operators manage the databases at the TLD level. They fall into two categories: thick registries, whose databases include information on registrants (the end customer) and their domain names, and thin registries who store the minimum information necessary to identify the domain registrant.

Level 3 – Registrars

Registrars are licensed and technically qualified organisations responsible for creating, modifying and deleting the records of gTLD registry operators. ccTLD registry operators use similar organisations for the same function. Nominet in the UK, for instance, uses a system of Registrars or authorised agents to update registry records.

Many companies operate in both gTLD and ccTLD schemes, enabling them to cater for a wider variety of domain names. NetNames, for example, is an ICANN Accredited Registrar and offers domain name registration in all available domain name suffixes world-wide, meaning it has relationships with all the registry operators.

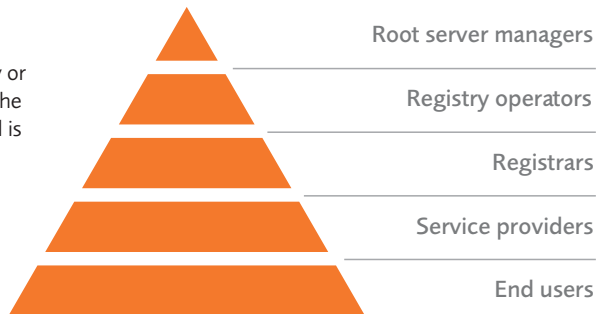
Level 4 – Service providers

Service providers offer a range of services in addition to basic domain name transactions. However, these companies are not necessarily authorised Registrars and many do little more than act as a reseller of a Registrar's services.

Many Registrars will offer services additional to basic domain name transactions and as such can also be classified as service providers. For instance, NetNames is a Registrar providing professional domain name services for large corporations and intellectual property professionals.

Level 5 – End customer

The end customer is the company or individual 'leasing' or registering the domain name (i.e. the owner) and is known as the 'registrant'. To register a domain name, end customers approach either a Registrar or service provider.



Registration and delegation of domain names

Registering a domain name is not enough to get it working for your website. For this to happen, a domain name record must be delegated to one or more of the nameservers within the DNS. This can be arranged through companies such as NetNames and, once achieved, the record will be spread throughout the DNS by the process described in How do domain names work? (p. 4).

For instance, if a nameserver is queried about your domain name and does not have the information to resolve the request, it will escalate it up the DNS hierarchy to obtain a record (known as the zone file) from a nameserver that does. It will then cache that information and refresh it periodically. The amount of time between these updates is known as the Time To Live (TTL) and this is an important factor when making changes to domain name information. Each zone file comes with its own TTL, which represents the amount of time that the zone file's data should be cached for before checking again. However, it is important to be aware that not all local DNS servers adhere to the specified TTL so the propagation of updates to zone files can take longer than TTL to filter through the Internet.

The nameservers onto which a domain name is delegated also store additional details. This includes the mail exchange (MX) records required to route email and contact information for the domain name known as the WHOIS record. This WHOIS data includes the name of the registrant and also the administrative, technical and billing contact information (all of which they will have to supply when they register). In addition, the WHOIS data sometimes includes the creation and expiry dates of a domain name record.

WHOIS data is also stored by many registries and made freely available on their WHOIS servers. These registries are known as 'thick' registries and those registries who do not do this are known as 'thin' registries. In the case of thin registries, such as the .com and .net registry, WHOIS data is stored and provided by the Registrars.

It is useful to know that domain names can be registered without being delegated to a nameserver. In these cases the domain name will not work – in the sense that it will not resolve to a website when typed into an Internet browser. However, many companies find this helpful as it enables them to register domain names based on their intellectual property for defensive purposes. For instance, by registering netnamesucks.com and not pointing it to a website through delegation, NetNames precludes anybody from using it for malicious purposes.

Choosing domain names wisely and managing them effectively is vital for marketing and branding purposes. It makes a big difference to how readily you are found by customers and plays an increasingly important role in sales and marketing campaigns. Research has shown that over 70 % of TV ads, 80 % of press ads and even 22 % of radio ads incorporate a domain name – demonstrating just how central domain names have become to marketing activity.

The importance of domain names

Domain names can be brands. Amazon.com, for example, is as big a brand as any of those associated with high street bookstores. ebay.com, equally, is now as well known as Sotheby's and Christie's. Companies across the globe recognise the need to extend their brand into the digital domain.

Domain names are interactive

Companies spend a lot of money on their branding, trying to communicate core values. However, you can't click on the logo on your jogging shoes and get a list of five things that Nike means to consumers. Domain names, on the other hand, are relatively inexpensive to register; and provide direct access to information and functionality that you control.

Indeed, many companies use websites just to publicise and reinforce their brand image.

Domain names can be targeted at different people

A company's brand can be perceived differently by different communities of interest in different countries. Whilst there may be core values across markets, the ability to orientate image to suit specific audiences and their tastes is invaluable.

Registering a domain name in different country-code suffixes enables you to create localised content to target regional brand perception and yet still maintain a global brand presence with a general suffix such as .com. As such, domain names are very flexible branding mechanisms.

For instance, when the digital agency Dowcarter was charged with creating pan-European campaigns for the Honda Civic it had quite a challenging task – as Jeremy Crowe, strategy director at Dowcarter, illustrates: "Perceptions of Honda [the brand] vary throughout Europe. In the south it is quite a sexy brand, whereas in the UK and northern Europe it is not".

The solution was to register two domain names for the two different brand perceptions. civicliveit.com (for northern Europe) and civicfeeling.com (for Italy and Spain) were promoted in their separate markets using press, TV and posters. However, both sites linked visitors to another site, newhondacivic.com, which incorporated elements of both campaigns. These marketing campaign specific domains are known as Campaign URLs or CURLs.

Tips on making a name for yourself

Internet users often try to guess the domain name of the company they wish to visit rather than look for it through search engines. Whether this is due to the sheer number of results a search will generate or just because users would rather cut out the middleman and go straight to the source is uncertain. However, what is clear from a recent report from CommonName (a provider of keyword navigation and Internet search services) is that 60% of internet users have up to three goes at guessing a company's domain name before they give up looking. Indeed, 71% of respondents to its survey said they switched to a rival company after failing to find the one they were looking for.

This 'three strikes and you're out' model emphasises the importance of creating a domain name that customers will either recall or could easily guess. And there is more to bear in mind:

- Register variations on a domain name, using different suffixes and simple misspellings. They can still lead to the same website and will help capture genuine visitors who inadvertently mistype or misspell your domain name – creating a ring of protection against those wishing to hijack your brand and customers. Registering ccTLDs for this purpose is also useful should you wish to create localised content at a later date and it gives the right impression of commitment to that market.
- If you want to keep a slogan or new brand name secret you will need to be careful when registering a domain name in advance. The owner is usually listed in the WHOIS records (see Glossary, p.29) of a registry and these are freely available to anyone on request. Companies such as NetNames can provide 'account masking' for you so that you can secure domain names anonymously (with the registrant information concealed from the public until the time is right).
- Using hyphens is particularly useful for search engine optimisation. If the words that make up a domain name are made distinct by use of hyphens, then your website is likely to achieve higher placing by certain search engines when those words are entered as search terms. On the other hand, omitting hyphens makes a domain name easier to remember. Consequently, there is mileage to be gained in registering both forms for a website.
- If your company name doesn't translate well into a domain name then register something associated with your business. For instance, UK home and garden company, B&Q, registered www.diy.com because the ampersand in its name is not usable in domain names. (DIY stands for Do It Yourself, a widely used term in the UK for home improvement.)
- Don't forget to renew the domain names associated with old campaigns. Whilst they may no longer be contemporary, if they have been effective then people will

remember them and may still be using them. Moreover, you can point them at the website for a new campaign. You may notice with the campaigns listed as examples in this guide that people have not always renewed as advised.

- Use writing techniques to create memorable domain names. Alliteration and assonance, for example, work particularly well. www.va-va-voom.co.uk, after all, is easier to remember than the spelling of Renault (although this website is no longer live). Similarly, www.quotemehappy.com is easier to recall than 'Norwich Union', the insurance company who owned the campaign.
- If you are going to mention a domain name in radio ads make sure it is easy to pin down. For instance, if you are going to include a number then register it in both a spelt out form, e.g. 'three', and in character form, e.g. '3'.
- Wherever possible, try to register a name with at least one .com variation. The .com extension is, and will remain for some time, the most common suffix for commercial websites. It is the first extension that most people will think of when trying your name in their address bar and the only one that some people will know. The White House blundered by registering only www.whitehouse.gov. Consequently, thousands of users misguidedly ended up at a site containing satirical plotical comment (www.whitehouse.org), whilst others viewed a directory listing site: (www.whitehouse.com). This is also true for non-numerical references. The Home Office was recently forced to curtail a radio campaign advertising a website that promoted safer online browsing for minors named thinkUknow.com. Many visitors misinterpreted this to be thinkYOUknow.com, and found their way to some decidedly inappropriate material.

Domain names are important assets that need protecting. Unfortunately, your intellectual property is all too prone to abuse on the Internet. Financial service companies, for instance, are top targets for fraud. By registering misspellings of an organisation's name, fraudsters dupe visitors into believing they have arrived at the legitimate site.

However, it's not just banks that are at risk. Any organisation's image and trademarks can be hijacked for the benefit of another. To stay on top, you don't just need to focus on your own domain names. You need to be aware of the issues, be proactive in registering new names and look out for other names that might infringe your rights.

Domain names and trademarks

Although the DNS was originally conceived as an elegant technical solution to navigate between computers hosted on the Internet, it is now used as a de facto online brand navigation system and often perceived to be an 'Internet trademark' scheme. However, despite significant progress in applying trademark principles to domain name rights, the distinction between the two remains substantial. Consequently, companies need to be wary of the issues both in terms of protecting their intellectual property and of implementing a domain name management policy.

Indeed, while in most countries there are statutory rights pertaining to trademarks, the same cannot be said for domain names. The US has the ACPA (Anticybersquatting Consumer Protection Act) to help protect against infringements of domain name intellectual property, but most other countries do not provide recourse in law except through those binding stipulations that may or may not be laid out in registration policies.

Cybersquatting

Cybersquatters are individuals and organisations who register domain names in violation of the rights of trademark owners. To qualify they have to achieve this deliberately, abusively and in bad faith. Typically, this is done for several reasons. For instance, they might want to sell the name on to a trademark owner at an inflated price. Other reasons include piggybacking the success of someone's offline brand to generate traffic for a website. A case in the US saw domain names such as www.drinkcoke.org, www.pepsisays.com and www.mymcdonalds.com being registered to direct traffic to an anti-abortion website.

Cybersquatters are becoming increasingly sophisticated, as is the technology that they use to monitor the Internet for possible opportunities. This advancement means that it is often a matter of minutes after an announcement or event for the cybersquatters to make their move.

When it was announced that David Beckham would be transferring to football club LA Galaxy, one cybersquatter registered every version he could of the LA Galaxy team name. Hoping to cash in on people looking for more information on the move, he became the proud owner of www.lagalaxy.org, www.lagalaxy.info and www.lagalaxy.co.uk. All these domain names now point to websites that feature pay-per-click adverts allowing the squatters to make thousands from misdirected internet users.

Cybersquatting can be carried out in a number of different ways. It can include using someone's trademark as part of a domain name (as with www.mymcdonalds.com), using a suffix that the trademark owner hasn't registered (as with www.introducingmonday.co.uk) or registering a misspelling of a trademark (known as typosquatting).

However, cybersquatting does not include the registration of domain names that are not registered trademarks. Consequently, it is perfectly possible for a desirable domain name to be sold on for a legitimate profit. The typical example is the case of eCompanies who paid \$7.5 million for the domain name www.business.com, which uses an un-trademark-able common noun.

However, this premise can prove problematic. For instance, the Virgin Group has fought an unsuccessful campaign to gain ownership of www.virginmail.com, which presently leads to a pornographic website. Virgin claimed the domain name infringes its rights and could easily be confused by customers searching for its v.mail Internet mail service. Moreover, the word 'virgin' was registered by the Virgin Group as a trademark as long ago as April 11, 1973. However, the panel presiding over the dispute decided that, despite this, "the word 'virgin' is a generic English word which, when combined with another generic word such as 'mail', takes the resulting combination outside the scope of the Complainant's trademarks".

The bigger (and potentially the more lucrative) the brand, the bigger target it can become. For example, at the time of writing, Microsoft plans to file a major round of lawsuits in the US and UK against individual cybersquatters and typosquatters who have registered domain names containing variations or misspellings of Microsoft's key brands including 'Xbox'. The move comes just as the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has announced that incidents of cybersquatting grew by 25 per cent during 2006.

Microsoft claimed that during 2006 an average of 2,000 domain names containing its trademarks were registered every day and three quarters of those are owned by professional domain name speculators. Microsoft tried to sue more than 200 people in the US last year, and the latest round of law suits will also target British cybersquatters.

Some clever domain names that have been snatched from under Microsoft's nose include www.exbox.com, www.windowsexp.com and Bill Gates himself has found the www.billgates.com address cybersquatted by an individual in Florida. In 2004 Microsoft even sued a 17-year-old high school student from Victoria, Canada called Mike Rowe, for having registered the domain name www.mikerowesoft.com.

UDRP and other dispute resolution policies

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) has established a structure through ICANN in which anyone registering a domain name with complying registries has to agree to dispute resolution. Should there be an argument over who has legitimate right to a domain name then the complainant can pursue the case through means of what is called the Uniform Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP). This means filing a complaint with an approved dispute-resolution service provider, such as WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center, and paying an arbitration fee.

However, should the domain name in question have been registered via a non-compliant registry, the situation is rather different. Moreover, UDRP only applies to registries in the .biz, .com, .info, .name, .net, and .org Top-Level domains (and those country-code TLDs whose managers have chosen to adopt it).

There are other resolution policies created by registries such as Nominet (for .uk domain names). Nevertheless, even if a domain name in dispute falls under one of these policies, or UDRP, there is no guarantee the situation will be resolved to the complainant's liking or without significant investment of time and money. NetNames can help you with legal recovery.

Consequently, prevention rather than cure is often the best strategy for protecting intellectual property online. Indeed, research from the analyst Gartner shows that it is 1,000 to 100,000 times more costly to recover a single domain name that is being 'squatted' than to budget for proactive domain name management and registration.

Collect and preserve evidence

If you discover a domain name that infringes your intellectual property, your case should be properly documented before you decide to take any action. It is crucial to capture snapshots of a website, before it is taken offline or otherwise changed, and to print these out. Here are some steps to follow:

- Printing the website in black and white is acceptable. However, if it's pertinent to the trademark issues at stake, print it in colour.
- Explore the website and follow links to their destination. If multiple windows open, make a record of the sequence. Again, print out everything that you find.
- Capture WHOIS database printouts. These too can be subject to change.
- Keep copies of emails and notes from customers and employees relating to the domain name in question (including any offers of sale you have received).
- If you have missed the opportunity to capture all the information you need – i.e. records of the website under suspicion have changed – it is sometimes possible to recover what you need from the Internet archive's Wayback Machine. This site has an archive of old web content and can be found at www.archive.org.

Establish use

The way in which a squatter is using a domain name is important in bringing a case or proceeding against him or her. Here are some tips to bear in mind:

- Failure to use a domain name can be actionable if it interferes with a business (for example, by preventing it from having an online presence at the most logical location). But if it is inactive and there are a set of more serious problems from active sites, it may be sensible to simply monitor the site until it becomes a higher priority.
- Does the site show an 'under construction' or 'coming soon' information notice, or offer email contact information that might tell you something about the registrant's intentions? Is it using a known mark to trade under? Does it present itself as being connected with a commercial venture?
- The use of a site for banner advertising, pop-ups or as a source of junk mail (spam) can be a straightforward infringement. So is evidence of a site redirecting users to a second commercial website that displays competing or tarnishing products.
- Looking at the website's metatags (contained in a web page's source) can tell you a lot about the true intentions of the site's current owner. Word-stuffing – hiding a plethora of disingenuous words in a page to raise search engine placing – and false metatag information (including the name of the company whose trademark is being infringed) can all be useful evidence in establishing bad faith.

Registering domain names is deceptively inexpensive. The real cost comes in terms of managing those registrations or, rather, in not doing that effectively. Most companies dedicate little resource to domain name administration, let alone take the time to set up a working domain name strategy.

Many companies, particularly large corporations, have over 1000 domain names registered. However, it is not uncommon for them to have no defined way of knowing just how many they own, who registered them or for what purpose.

Managing domain names

To manage your domain names in-house, the following tasks usually have to be carried out on a regular basis:

- Reply to multiple renewal notices, possibly from multiple Registrars, each with a different renewal process and contact person.
- Monitor for domain names registered by employees without permission, a significant problem even among relatively small companies.
- Pay renewals and registrations – entering credit card details, writing cheques, responding to invoices, managing sign off with the internal accounts department.
- Contact support organisations to change the details of a domain name (e.g. pointing, legal owner address, re-delegation of nameservers and so forth)..
- Research registration requirements in different suffixes. Some countries require you to go through a local agent: setting up these relationships can be a long-winded process.
- Maintain awareness of changing industry dynamics – new suffixes and changes to registration requirements of existing suffixes.
- Monitor for domain registrations by third parties that represent potential infringements of intellectual property.

The pitfalls of bad management

Failure to renew

Accidentally failing to renew a domain name that has been registered is a sure sign that a company isn't managing its domain names properly. Moreover, this simple administrative mistake can have catastrophic effects because the domain name and any website or email address dependent upon it will no longer work for users.

It's not just small companies that fall foul of this problem. During the Christmas period of 1999 Microsoft did not renew the registration for passport.com – a site that verifies user

identification and passwords for access to Hotmail and about 25 of its other services. As a result, users were powerless to use these sites – that is, until one user guessed the problem. Michael Chaney, a Linux consultant, paid the renewal fee on Microsoft's behalf so that he could get hold of his email.

Embarrassing as this is (the receipt can still be viewed at www.doublewide.net) things could have been worse should Mr Chaney not have proved such a Good Samaritan.

Confused responsibility

When registering a domain name there are three points of contact that will need to be filled out in the application; namely, the administrative contact, the billing contact and the technical contact (see Glossary p26-29). However, if careful records are not kept and monitored of who has registered what and who each contact is, problems can occur.

A renewal notice may go unnoticed if it is sent to someone within the organisation who has moved on, for example. Alternatively, responsibility for the domain names of one business unit may actually fall to another and due to a lack of communication the right actions may not be taken in time – as is believed to be the cause of the Washington Post losing email on February 6, 2004.

Missed opportunities

It is an unfortunate fact that many companies, products and services around the world share the same or very similar names. That means you need to be proactive about domain name registration if you want to take ownership of those names relating to your trademarks and business.

For instance, a businessman by the name of Mr Uzi Nissan registered www.nissan.com for his company, Nissan Computer Co., before the Nissan Motor Co. decided it wanted to. Consequently, the Nissan Motor Co. had to resort to long and costly litigation to try and obtain the domain name, which has so far met with limited success.

Protecting the brand

Companies should register variations on domain names concerning their trademarks and other intellectual property – not only with different suffixes, but also other permutations including common misspellings and hyphenation. This is not just to secure the greatest number of visitors to your websites but also to prevent competitors, cybersquatters and other interested parties from using them for their own means. Remember, just because a domain name has been registered doesn't mean it has to point to a website. Also, you can have multiple domain names pointing to the same website. So, although you may not have dedicated websites for individual products and services, registering relevant domain names can still be useful.

Indeed, failing to register obvious permutations of a domain name or offline brand can have serious repercussions and damage your organisation's image. For example, when PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC), a global management consultancy company, created a brand site at www.introducingmonday.com to publicise a name change, it neglected to register www.introducingmonday.co.uk.

Domain name scams

Recently, the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) issued an alert about "scam artists" offering domain name pre-registration services in new TLDs. The truth is that at the time of the scam, no-one had been officially authorised to "pre-register" domain names for the new TLDs. So just as with those selling plots of land on the moon, there was no way for these organisations to ensure that customers got what they paid for once it became available.

Typically, when a new suffix is launched, the registry concerned will offer what is known as a 'sunrise period', where trademark owners are given the opportunity to register domain names before they are made available to the general public.

Pseudo names

No single organisation is in charge of the Internet. Consequently, anyone can create a root system similar to the unique authoritative root managed by ICANN. Indeed, plenty of organisations have; although not quite on the same scale. Some of these are purely private and do not affect the DNS: others aren't, and they present potential problems both for Internet users and organisations looking to register domain names.

These alternative root systems overlap the DNS root by incorporating its structure and its assigned domain names and then adding what are known as pseudo names – domain names that have not resulted from the consensus-driven process overseen by ICANN. Frequently, these alternative roots have been established to support 'for profit', Top-Level domain registries that have been unable to gain entry into the authoritative root as managed in the public interest by ICANN.

Alternative root providers are by no means alone in offering pseudo names. Other entities create browser plug-ins and software workarounds to accomplish similar results. However, while both these propositions are legal and technically not an incorrect use of the DNS, they are a risky proposition for anyone choosing to register a domain name in such a way. If an organisation or individual offering pseudo domains goes out of business, or changes policy, then registrants will lose their names.

In the case of plug-ins, it is also clear that you can't rely upon users to have these installed. Consequently, it is advisable to ignore any vendor purporting to offer registration in domains such as '.web', '.sex', '.global' or '.usa'. These domains do not exist in the current TLD name root structure and only work with the installation of these complicated user plug-ins.

In 2001, a report from the leading analyst, Gartner, revealed that "domain name management has not been a key initiative of many enterprise(s)". Today, the situation hasn't changed. Enterprises realise there is a need to implement a domain name strategy but few have a plan that is proactive as well as reactive.

Properly implemented, a proactive approach will minimise costs involved, deter cybersquatting, avoid pitfalls and complement marketing activities. In NetNames' opinion, there are five steps to success.

- 1. Choose your vendor**
- 2. Consolidate**
- 3. Implement a corporate policy and tidy up**
- 4. Identify infringements**
- 5. Monitor**

Step 1 Choose your vendor

When taking control of your organisation's domain names you should seek to make administration as simple as possible. That means consolidating all your domain names with a single vendor (i.e. a single Registrar or service provider). That way you are only dealing with one organisation when it comes to renewal notices, invoicing, updating contact details and arranging any other changes or additions to your company's domain names. Ideally, the vendor will be an ICANN Accredited Registrar and authorised to work with all domain name registries, meaning you can have domain names in all the available suffixes for your organisation.

When choosing your vendor you should look beyond basic registration transactions. There is much more on offer than you might think and services such as NetNames' Platinum Service can really aid your domain name strategy. Moreover, it is important to remember that your requirements will change as your company grows and develops, so you will want to ensure that your vendor has enough scope to cover future needs. Look for a vendor that is focused on the corporate market, not the mass consumer or retail market.

Step 2 Consolidate

Once you have chosen your vendor, you need to have your domain names transferred across. This may sound daunting but in actual fact it is quite simple.

The crucial thing is to change the vendor name on each of the records held with registry operators. (The vendor should be able to help you do this.) Once this is achieved the vendor is entitled to act on your behalf with the registry operators and the domain names have effectively been consolidated.

From a technical point of view though, you will also have to consider how your domain names are being hosted on the DNS. If they are being held on nameservers supported by different vendors, then you should aim to consolidate them on to one provider's nameservers.

The reason for this is that the vendor will be able to change the technical details on the domain name records at the same time as taking control of hosting the names. Consequently, the technical transfer can be seamless.

NetNames brand audit tools

NetNames has developed a unique range of tools that enable you to search the information of WHOIS databases across the world. This will enable you to get a complete picture of your company's existing domain names..

Step 3 Implement a corporate policy and tidy up

Once your position has been consolidated, you should lay out a company policy for domain name management. This will probably be unique to your company, based on its needs and the way it puts domain names to use. However, here are some tips:

- Develop a policy to standardise the registrant details on each domain name. Rather than having the technical contact, administrative contact and billing contact point to individuals within the company, point them to a generic email address such as domainadministrator@netnames.com. This will help to ensure that correspondence is not bouncing from an out-of-date address, or being sent to someone who has moved on or changed roles.
- Determine which individuals in the company will be permitted to approve orders for modification, renewals and new domain names and establish clear lines of communication between them and whoever is managing the portfolio.
- Clarify where you want your domain names to point: it is important to know and keep a record. You may want all ccTLD variations on a domain name to resolve to the same website today. However, should you choose to provide local content at a later date then you need to have a clear understanding of where your ccTLDs currently point and all the information pertaining to that.
- Review each of the domain names in your portfolio to ensure the information is correct and that they comply with policies you have established.
- Put in place a policy for key brands you want to register as domain names and the appropriate suffixes. You should also include direction on registering misspellings, hyphenations and other common variations on your intellectual property.

NetNames Platinum Manager

All your domain names can be entered into NetNames Platinum Manager, which will automatically populate the technical details and registration information for each domain name from the WHOIS databases and keep them current.

A central interface for the entire portfolio can be developed with subsections for the company's domains, a section for competitor domain names and a separate section for potential infringements. You can manage your entire portfolio with Platinum Manager, make instant domain registrations, bulk updates and set up 'watches' on specified domain names.

Step 4 Identifying infringements

The next step is to search for domain names that contain your company's intellectual property. However, rather than trawling the web in the hope of finding such cases, it is possible to search the WHOIS system. All authorised registry operators are under obligation to make information on domain names available through WHOIS. Companies such as NetNames can provide tools for searching the WHOIS system which will help you not only discover domain names that use your intellectual property, but also find out who registered them.

NetNames industry expertise

NetNames can advise you on the best course of action with a suspected infringement. It can also act on behalf of a client to acquire the domain name from the current owner. Whether you need to 'buy-back' a domain or pursue legal recovery we will be able to advise you on the best course of action.

Step 5 Monitor

With everything in place you will need to continually monitor your domain names, keep them up-to-date and watch out for infringements made by other parties. Choosing a vendor that can help you limit the amount of time needed to do this is important.

NetNames' monitoring solutions

NetNames' monitoring solutions will proactively check for new domain name registrations that infringe your intellectual property and notify you via email so appropriate action can be taken.

The administrative tasks involved with the day-to-day management of a large domain name portfolio can eat up valuable company resources. Managing a portfolio of even 500 domain names can be a full time job. As well as staff costs there are the cost of registration, NIC fees, DNS fees and other miscellaneous expenses.

All these costs can be minimised by employing the services of a company such as NetNames.

NetNames

NetNames is a leading domain name management company. It is an ICANN Accredited Registrar and has over 12 years of experience in the industry, working with many of the world's top companies.

NetNames is focused on providing professional domain name services for large corporations and intellectual property professionals, from registration to full account management. NetNames is also a global company, with offices in the UK, USA and continental Europe. The company has established relationships with domain name registries around the globe and is able to offer online domain name registration in all available domain name suffixes, including those countries embargoed by the US Treasury, such as Cuba.

NetNames Platinum Service

NetNames Platinum Service is the industry leading solution for corporate domain name management.

Guaranteed domain renewal

Platinum Service guarantees all domain names in your portfolio will be renewed. This removes the risk of inadvertently allowing names to lapse and means you no longer have to deal with individual renewal notices or waste time worrying about expiry dates.

Dedicated account management

Account management is at the heart of NetNames Platinum Service. We therefore ensure that our team of dedicated professionals are truly the best in the business. With an average of 5 years' industry experience, our highly skilled account managers will not only manage your domain name portfolio, but will become an integral part of your brand protection team.

They will;

- Partner with you to develop a solid account plan and work process to suit your business
- Strategically review your domain name portfolio every quarter
- Work with you to ensure that your domain name portfolio reflects your evolving business and online brand presence

- Help you safeguard against potential brand infringements and violations and quickly help you recover any domain names previously lost
- Manage all of your registrations and transfers irrespective of scope
- Keep you abreast of the latest industry updates

NetNames Platinum Manager

NetNames Platinum Service includes NetNames Platinum Manager, a unique online application which provides complete visibility and control of all your domain names. Platinum Manager is Registrar independent, meaning you can also include domains owned by third parties such as competitors or potential cybersquatters.

The customisable interface displays any or all information relating to each domain name, including legal owner, administration and technical contacts, registrant address, and all technical details. You can search, sort, format and export the data quickly and easily giving total flexibility and control.

You can also divide your portfolio into sub-sections such as departments or cost codes and assign multiple users with different levels of access. If any changes are made to the names within your portfolio, you will be automatically notified via email. This means you can delegate responsibility but still maintain complete visibility of all your company's domain names.

Simple and flexible invoicing

NetNames Platinum Service removes the administrative burden of managing a domain name portfolio. Rather than having individual invoices for each registration and renewal, you receive one consolidated bill per quarter that covers all the domains in your account.

The annual cost of each domain is spread across four instalments and new registrations are no longer billed up front, but simply added to your account and included in the next quarterly invoice. You can cancel a domain at any time, regardless of the renewal date, provided it has been in your account for at least six months.

NetNames Platinum Service is the only company to provide this 'pay as you go' approach, meaning you are no longer tied to a two-year fixed registration period. This is especially valuable for domain names with a short life cycle, for example a domain name for a marketing or advertising campaign.

Global domain name coverage

NetNames has global reach. Its multi-lingual team of registration specialists understands the intricacies of registering and renewing domain names anywhere in the world. It has set up strategic relationships with country-level registries and it can help you meet local presence requirements in countries where this is necessary. NetNames also offers comprehensive coverage of Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs).

A-Records

The A-record is the most basic and the most important DNS record type. It is used to translate domain names such as "www.netnames.com" into IP addresses such as 23.211.43.53. They are stored on DNS nameservers.

Administrative Contact

(see also Billing Contact, Technical Contact)

As part of the domain name registration process, organisations or individuals must provide the Registrar with key contact names. The administrative contact is one of these names, and will be the main point of contact between the Registrar and the registrant.

Billing Contact

One of the key names that must be given to the Registrar when completing a domain name registration form. The billing contact is the person responsible for paying any registration or renewal fees and dealing with bills from the Registrar.

ccTLD (country-code Top-Level Domain)

This signifies the country the domain name is registered in, (e.g. www.netnames.co.uk). Every country and geographic entity recognised by the United Nations has been granted a unique two letter ccTLD.

CNAME

CNAME records are domain name aliases stored on DNS nameservers, which point one domain name to another domain name. CNAME records are useful in a number of ways, especially where a number of domain names are pointing to the same website.

Cybersquatters

Because many domain names can be registered on a 'first-come, first served' basis without restrictions, it is possible for people to register domain names that contain a company's trademarks or brands. Such individuals or organisations are described as 'cybersquatters'. Whilst policy on what exactly constitutes cybersquatting differs from country to country, and sometimes between registries, it typically involves registering a domain name including the trademark of another for some kind of gain.

Defined by the U.S. federal law, the Anti-Cybersquatting Consumer Protection Act (ACPA), cybersquatting is the act of registering or using a domain name in bad-faith or with intent to profit from the goodwill of a trademark belonging to someone else.

DNS (Domain Name System)

The Domain Name System is the means by which the addresses typed into a web browser are translated into IP addresses. It is built around a set of databases that store IP addresses, and the domain names with which they are associated. When a domain name is entered on the browser, the DNS looks up the details and points the web user to the correct site.

Domain name

A domain name is the string of characters typed into a web browser to find a particular website. It is part of the URL. To connect to the Internet, a computer needs its own Internet Protocol (IP) address, which consists of a series of numbers. However, because these strings of numbers are hard to remember, it was decided to create domain names. Most companies use their name as an integral part of their domain name e.g. netnames.co.uk

gTLD

gTLD stands for generic Top-Level Domain. Examples of a gTLDs are .com, .net and .org.

IANA

IANA is the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority, the entity that oversees global IP address allocation, DNS root zone management, and other Internet protocol assignments. It is currently operated by ICANN.

ICANN

ICANN is the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. It manages the DNS, making sure that every address is unique and that each domain name matches its assigned IP address. ICANN also accredits domain name Registrars for gTLDs.

IDN

An IDN is an Internationalised domain name. That is, a domain name that uses a different character set to that present in languages such as English. In other words domain names in non-ASCII character sets.

IP Address

An Internet Protocol Address is the unique number given to every device connected to the Internet that enables computers to identify and locate each other. IP addresses come in the form of a series of numbers between 0 and 255, separated by full stops (or dots). For example, an IP Address may look something like: 56.234.22.12.

Nameserver

A nameserver (or domain nameserver or DNS server) is a computer that holds a list of domain names and their associated IP addresses.

NIC fee

NIC stands for Network Information Centre and is often used to refer to the registry operator, particularly in the case of ccTLDs. The NIC fee is the fee charged by the registry and varies significantly from one suffix to the next.

Registrant

The person or entity that registers and is the legal owner of a domain name.

Registrar

A company that has a direct and authorised relationship with the domain name registries. The term is most commonly used when referring to gTLDs. In order to become an ICANN Accredited Registrar, a company must meet certain business and technical requirements.

In the case of ccTLDs, the role of a Registrar is performed by what is often referred to as an authorised dealer.

Registry

The Registry is the organisation responsible for managing the database that stores information about registered domain names for a particular TLD. Different registries exist for different Top-Level domains and there can be only one registry per TLD.

Root

The root is really just a hypothetical point from which domain names are derived. It's the top of a domain name structure above Top-Level domains (TLDs). Nothing actually exists at this point, but it's useful nonetheless for defining the name space. For instance, whilst alternative roots do exist (creating their own name space), ICANN presides over the only unique and authoritative root. It is this root that ensures the DNS works effectively, enabling the majority of Internet traffic to get where it's meant to go.

Sunrise Period

The term Sunrise Period refers to the period of time at the launch of a new Top-Level domain or second-level domain during which owners of trademarks may register a domain name containing the owned mark prior to the general release.

sTLD

A sponsored Top-Level Domain is a generic Top-Level domain proposed by an independent agency, with that agency establishing and enforcing rules restricting the eligibility of registrants to use the TLD. For example the .travel domain is reserved for entities whose primary area of activity is in the travel industry.

Technical Contact

The third key name that must be given to the Registrar when completing a domain name registration form. The technical contact can be the same as the billing contact or administrative contact, but must be able to address any technical issues. It is therefore important that the technical contact is from the company whose nameserver is being used for the domain name.

Typosquatting

Typosquatting is a form of cybersquatting which relies on mistakes such as typographical errors made by Internet users when inputting a website address into a web browser. Should a user accidentally enter an incorrect website address, they may be led to an alternative address owned by a cybersquatter.

TLD (Top-Level domain)

A Top-Level domain represents the last part of a domain name, e.g. .com, .net, .org, etc.

UDRP

UDRP stands for the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy. It is a process established by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) for the resolution of disputes regarding the registration of internet domain names. The UDRP policy currently applies to all .biz, .com, .info, .name, .net, and .org Top-Level domains, and some country code Top-Level domains.

URL (Uniform Resource Locator or Universal Resource Locator)

A URL is normally understood as the full web address that people type into a browser to find content on the Internet. It differs from a domain name because it also includes the type of protocol used to access the object (e.g. http, ftp) and often extra instructions to find a particular web page being hosted.

WHOIS

WHOIS refers to the records in databases maintained by domain registries, which store details about the domain name and who the registrant and key contacts are. It also refers to the protocol used when accessing these databases. The amount of WHOIS data that is publicly accessible varies between different registries.

WIPO

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is one of the specialised agencies of the United Nations. It was created to promote the protection of intellectual property globally.

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Platinum Service customers

More than 30% of FTSE 100 companies have chosen NetNames Platinum Service. Platinum Service customers have said:

"With NetNames Platinum Service we can be confident that all our domain names are under one roof and will be managed and renewed by experts who specialise in this business."

British Airways

"With Platinum Service, we are able to quickly and easily add new names to the portfolio as we continue to expand the business, as well as monitoring those already in existence."

Centrica

"We found [Platinum Service] to be the best solution available for corporate domain name management."

Hilton Group

"NetNames Platinum Service is an obvious choice, as it gives us both the flexibility and control we require to effectively manage our domain name portfolio via one central point of contact."

William Hill

