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Cybersquatting

Do you own a domain name? Are you sure?

When customers switch to Squiggout and want to transfer their domain name into our systems, they often are surprised to find out that they are not listed as the domain owner. Usually their web developer or hosting company registered the domain name in their own name to keep control over the website or for some other reason. This practice is called cybersquatting and many major corporations are currently involved in lawsuits against it. But what if you're a small business and do not have the resources to file a lawsuit over a domain name?

Here's a common mistake that most small businesses make. They need a website, so they contact a few local web design firms. The web designer or sales person pitches them on a project that includes site design, web hosting, and domain registration. The small business signs the contract and everyone is happy. Until they want to change.

So what's the problem? Your domain is registered in the web design firm's name. Now you are at the mercy of that web design firm or developer. I can not tell you how many times I've seen this. The last domain name we retrieved for a client took two months and many man hours.

How to protect yourself from cybersquatting?

Register your domain name with an I-CANN.org accredited domain register. For an I-CANN domain register company to keep their accreditation they MUST comply with written standards, which includes registering the domain name in the owner's name.

If using a web developer or hosting company, make sure they register the domain in your name. You have paid for it; it should be in your name. Make it part of the contract. If it gets registered in your name, make sure you have control over it from the domain registration company, not the hosting company. This means you have access to your domain in the domain register's system.

Avoid free domain for life hosting companies. It is free because it is registered in their name, and you only get it for free as long as you host with them. If you leave, they can charge you whatever they wish for you to acquire the domain name.

Trademark your name. This gives you legal rights to go after anybody who tries to steal your name or use your trademark. This includes domain names. Having a trademark does not ensure that other people or companies won't use it. They will if it benefits them.

Purchase domains that are close to, or a misspelling of your domain name so that people can not use them to set up a site designed to steal customers or turn them away. This is what most cybersquatters do. We have all misspelled a website name, ending up where we did not want to be. Try it! Misspell a major corporation's website and see where you end up.

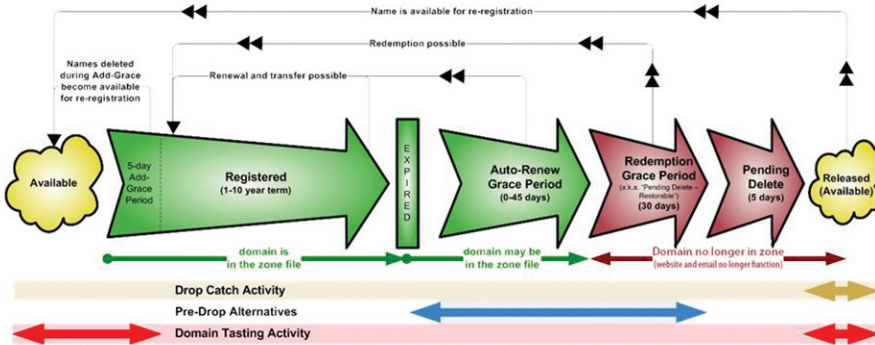
Do not let your domain expire—unless, of course, you do not need it anymore. Once expired and released, anybody can purchase it. This is a life-cycle of a domain chart from registration to release.

If you let your domain expire, the domain registration company may and WILL charge you an amount of their choosing for you to keep your domain name. Do not let it expire.

Within a year of registering your domain name, you will receive official looking "letters" from many different companies. These letters state your domain registration is expiring and you need to send money immediately. I receive calls about these "letters" everyday. Most of these companies are just re-registering the domain for more years and charging a huge dollar amount. Domain registration costs from \$1.99 to \$95.00 per year based on what domain extension you want (.com, .info, .name, .mobi, etc). Most .com extensions cost \$10.00 to \$11.00 on average per year.

You can check your domain in the Whois database at InterNIC.net, which is the U.S. Department of Commerce. This database lists all Internet domain names and their owners. See if your website domain name is being cybersquatted. This is also a place you can go to dispute the domain registration.

You have spent a lot of time coming up with a name for your company. Do not let a cybersquatter steal it, use it, or abuse it. For more information, or help getting a domain name, contact us. We will see to it that you never find yourself in this situation.



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