

Whois Workshop

Introduction to Registry/Registrar Issues

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Serving the Public Interest

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Background

- In the “early days”, whois was used by network operators (ISPs, web-hosters, infrastructure providers) to identify domain holders – in case of email problems, DOS attacks, etc.
- The data collected in whois was rudimentary – registrant, administrative, technical and billing contacts

Background (continued)

- Data elements historically collected in whois:
 - **Registrant** (though no telephone number or email address)
 - **Administrative Contact** (usually web-hoster or ISP)
 - **Technical Contact** (usually ISP)
 - **Billing Contact** (sometimes registrant, sometimes web-hoster, depended on retail model used to register domain)

Background (continued)

- In 1999, ICANN required registrars to provide both web-based and Port 43 access to whois
 - Not all registrars have an operational whois – the requirement is detailed in the RAA
 - Most of top 10 gTLD registrars limit queries per IP address – maintain that this protects customers & system overload
- Bulk Whois access also required
 - Registrars must make available their list of registrants (who do not “opt-out”) for a fee “not to exceed US \$10,000”
 - Of the top 10 TLD registrars, only a fraction offer bulk whois with contracts that conform to the ICANN contractual requirements (most include provisions that are not “in the spirit” of the contracts)

Background (continued)

- In 2001, ICANN required registries to provide both web-based and Port 43 whois
 - Registries with “thin” data – VCNR and PIR (at start) only show minimal data
 - PIR is converting from “thin” to “thick” throughout 2003
 - Registries with “thick” data show full registrant record – same as registrars
 - GNR (.name) was able to change ICANN contracts to offer minimal data (to protect their registrants – individuals)

The Data

- Registrars manage the registrant (customer) relationship
 - Collect domain name record details at registration
 - Manage the updating of the data
 - Furnish it to “thick” registries
 - Provide access via Whois
- Registries simply provide access via Whois
 - if .com/.net, then “thin” display
 - if .org (in transition), .info, .biz, new sponsored gTLDs, then “thick” display

Issues

- Many interests now want to keep whois status quo:
 - IP community – to protect marks
 - Law Enforcement – to help investigations
 - Network Operators – in case of attacks
- Many interests want to restrict whois data:
 - Privacy Advocates – protect PII
 - European Union - protect PII and data export
 - Registrars – retain customers/market share
 - Registries – PII concerns, not to violate EU restrictions

Some Misconceptions

- Spam is only based on domain registrations
 - If you post to public mailing lists, “bots” harvest your email address
 - If you purchase anything on-line and the retailer does not have a policy against spam, your email address will be sold
- Bulk Whois is the major source of email addresses for spammers
 - Since so few registrars offer Bulk Whois files, spammers use other methods to harvest email addresses

Some Realities

- The registry zone files are used to identify changes to each TLD
 - The best source for spammers & others
- Via contractual requirements, registrars and registries must make data freely available to anyone
 - Enables data mining/harvesting of Whois records

For Further Discussion

- Allow zone files to be restricted to legitimate uses
 - Necessary for IP, ISPs, network operators, etc.
 - Today, registries must comply with any request – cannot decline a request for free zone file access
- Limit whois access for legitimate purposes
 - Most queries can be addressed by “domain available” or “domain not available” response
 - Requires education to community
 - Requires interested parties to define “legitimate purposes”
- Engage community in refining the purposes for whois in this changed world and environment
 - Much has changed since “the early days”, registrar competition in 1999, registry competition in 2000

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