

PROTECTING THE VALUE OF .ORG DOMAINS

An Interview with PIR President and CEO Edward G. Viltz

In November 2006, the Public Interest Registry launched a new public awareness campaign to protect .ORG domain name holders, also known as registrants, from the dangers of allowing .ORG domains to expire. In this interview, PIR president and CEO Edward G. Viltz sorts out the issues and reinforces the value of .ORG domain names.

Q: What was the motivation behind launching the protectyour.ORG campaign?

EGV: Over the past year, PIR has noticed a dramatic increase in the number of domain name registration transactions in the .ORG registry, followed by a corresponding increase in deletion transactions during the Add grace period. What motivated us to examine the potential dangers of allowing domain names to expire and then be deleted was the ease with which names can be evaluated for their revenue potential, and the impact this might have on .ORG registrants. What we've learned is that this type of activity is usually automated. Individuals utilize sophisticated algorithms to select, test, and keep or reject names based on their potential monetary value.

Q: Can you describe some of the potential consequences of allowing .ORG domain names to expire?

EGV: The real danger for .ORG registrants is that a name that has expired and subsequently been deleted can be re-registered by another party and used in a manner that is contrary to what the original owner intended. In one case, a rape crisis center had its site relaunched with links to subscription-based pornographic Web pages. In this case, the intention of the new registrant was to deceive those who were in need of the center's services or who were already taking advantage of its services. Clearly the result was damaging to both the center and to the people in need of its services.

The campaign encourages .ORG registrants to be wary of allowing their domain names to expire, even those that are not actively being used. Once a domain name expires and is fully deleted, there's very little that can be done if it has already been registered by another party.

Q: Is it illegal to register and then use a .ORG domain name that once belonged to, and was being used by, another organization?

EGV: It is not illegal to register a deleted domain name. However, we believe it is unethical to register an expired and then deleted domain name for purposes of deception, such as in the case of the rape crisis center.

Q: Why is this issue of particular concern to .ORG registrants?



Serving the Public Interest

EGV: While the .ORG top-level domain is not restricted to noncommercial enterprises, it is intended to represent nonprofits, nongovernmental organizations, cultural organizations, foundations, charitable organizations, and even businesses that have developed charitable giving arms or are promoting services that are in the public interest. We believe this elevates the value and the integrity of the .ORG top-level domain. And we believe our role as the .ORG registry is to educate .ORG registrants how to properly manage their domains. In addition, it is our goal to inform .ORG registrants on the consequences of allowing their domains to expire.

Q: There appear to be two different issues that inform the campaign: One that speaks to the need to prevent .ORG domain names from expiring and one that speaks to the kinds of activities wherein domains are acquired upon deletion purely for their monetary value, such as “domain tasting.” Is that right? If so, is there a danger of those issues becoming confused?

EGV: These are, in fact, two separate issues. However, they dovetail in a critical way. At PIR, it is not our intention to take on domain tasting as an issue or to discredit it. Our aim is to inform and educate the .ORG community about the unintended consequences of registrants allowing their domain names to expire. And the most common danger appears to be the possibility that an expired domain name will be deleted, re-registered and used in a manner that is damaging to the original owner.

Q: Why would an organization allow a domain name to expire?

EGV: Sometimes it’s intentional. Organizations often have a number of .ORG domain names, depending on the types of services they offer. In some cases, a domain name may be used for a one-time event or project. Once the event or project ends, an organization may dismiss the domain name as superfluous and then choose to let it expire. Even in those cases, we advise organizations to hold onto their domain names. For a relatively low cost, an organization can avoid having names that are associated with their enterprise picked up and used in a potentially damaging manner.

In some cases a domain name expires unintentionally. Perhaps the person listed as the administrative contact with the registrar has left the organization or his or her e-mail has changed since the domain name was registered. In other cases, renewal may slip through the cracks. Through the protectyour.org campaign, we hope to enlighten the community about the true value of all .ORG domain names, which is often well in excess of what was spent to purchase them.

Q: What are the steps that an organization or an individual can take to prevent a problem with their domain names expiring?

EGV: The PIR protectyour.org public awareness campaign includes a set of five steps that can be taken to reduce the possibility of losing a .ORG domain name. A booklet titled *5 Simple Steps to Protecting Your .ORG Domain Names* is available in English in both print and as a PDF. It is also available as a PDF in several other languages.



We suggest that .ORG domain name holders visit www.protectyour.org for more information about protecting and preserving the value of .ORG domains.

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For more information about PIR's [protectyour.org](http://www.protectyour.org) public awareness campaign, please see www.protectyour.org or call Wendy Rickard +1 609-466-4343.

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