WHOIS STUDIES UPDATE

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WHOIS - Definition

- WHOIS -- provides public access to contact information for Registered Name Holders

- Requirements are in ICANN agreements

- Required data (thick WHOIS) – nameservers and DNS configuration data, registrar, start date, expiration date, and registrant contact information, technical contact and administrative contact.

- Thin WHOIS -- only data sufficient to identify the sponsoring registrar, status of the registration, and creation and expiration dates for each registration.

Sample WHOIS record:

Registrant:

ICANN

4676 Admiralty Way Suite #330

Marina del Rey, California 90292 US

Phone:+1.3103015817

Administrative Contact:

ICANN

4676 Admiralty Way Suite

Marina del Rey, California, 90292

Phone:+1.3103015817 / FAX:+1.3108238649

Email:domain-admin@icann.org

Technical Contact:

ICANN

4676 Admiralty Way Suite

Marina del Rey, California, 90292

Phone:+1.3103015817 / FAX:+1.3108238649

Email:domain-admin@icann.org

Domain servers in listed order:

NS.ICANN.ORG

A.IANA-SERVERS.NET

C.IANA-SERVERS.NET

B.IANA-SERVERS.ORG

D.IANA-SERVERS.NET

Registered Through

GoDaddy.com, Inc.

Domain Name: icann.org

Created on: 14-Sep-1998 04:00:00 UTC

Expires on: 07-Dec-2012 17:04:26 UTC

Last Updated on: 13-Aug-2009 15:10:10 UTC

Why are WHOIS studies important?

- WHOIS policy has been debated for many years
- Many competing interests with valid viewpoints:
  - Law enforcement, IP owners, others want easy access to accurate contact information
  - Individuals and privacy advocates are concerned about privacy protection and abuse of public info
  - Governments want their legal regimes to be followed
  - Providers are reluctant to absorb new costs, Registrars earn revenue from privacy services
- Few policy changes to WHOIS (prohibition against use for marketing, conflicts procedure)

Goals of WHOIS studies

- No PDP underway now
- GNSO Council hopes that study data will provide an objective, factual basis for future policy making
- Variety of topic areas selected are targeted at informing key policy issues of concern – providing information such as possible causality in increasing spam and other harmful acts; useful info about registrants; use of proxy and privacy services, etc...
- Technical consideration of alternatives, especially in light of the growing number of international registrations

WHOIS Studies Overview

- **The GNSO Council has identified several broad WHOIS study areas**

  1. Misuse of public WHOIS data

  2. Registrant identification study (previously "misrepresentation")

  3. WHOIS proxy and privacy services study

  4. Display of non-ASCII character sets in WHOIS

  5. Compilation of current and potential WHOIS service requirements

1. Misuse Studies

- **Will study extent of misuse of public WHOIS data to generate spam or for other illegal or undesirable activities. Two approaches:**
  1. **Descriptive Study –** will survey registrants about specific acts they have experienced that they believe occurred using WHOIS contact data; survey registrars about how WHOIS can be queried; and survey others about reported incidents from cybercrime, research and law enforcement organizations.
  2. **Experimental Study –** will measure a variety of harmful acts by classifying messages sent to test domains registered by a representative sample of registrars. Will compare harmful acts associated with public vs. non-public addresses and examine impact of public WHOIS and anti-harvesting measures.
- **RFP released 27 September – responses due in 60 days**

1. Misuse (cont'd)

- 2 types of studies may compensate for limitations inherent to each:
  - Can't measure % of all queries that lead to misuse
  - Difficult to track harmful acts. Was WHOIS data exploited?
  - Difficult to reliably assess anti-harvesting measures
  - Difficult to trigger or measure harmful acts in experiments

Registrant Identification Study

- * previously "misrepresentation"

- Looks at how registrants are identified in WHOIS

- Will study extent to which domains used by legal persons or for commercial purposes:

  1. Are not clearly identified as such in WHOIS; and

  2. Are correlated to use of privacy and proxy services

- Also using RFP approach, posted 23 October, responses due 22 December

Registrant Identification cont'd

- Review sample of domains looking for names or organizations that are either patently false, appear to identify a natural person, an organization engaged in non-commercial activities or a privacy or proxy service – for further analysis.

- Results will quantify domains registered to natural vs. legal persons and domains used for commercial vs. non-commercial purpose, distributed by gTLD, geo region and proxy/privacy use.

- Failure to clearly identify as a legal person

Registration Identification cont'd

- Challenges:
  - Study can only provide empirical data, there is still debate about what uses are impermissible (e.g. use of proxy services by legal persons)
  - Difficult to identify licensees of domains registered by proxy services
  - Large numbers of ambiguous owners (legal vs. natural persons) could skew results
  - Disagreement re: commercial use

WHOIS Proxy and Privacy Services

- Study the extent to which privacy and proxy services are abused to:
  1. Obscure the source of illegal or harmful communication or activity; and
  2. Delay source identification
- Plan to pursue a similar RFP approach
- TOR drafting not yet begun
- Hope to complete by end of year

4. Display of non-ASCII character sets

– Proposal recommended examination of various client interfaces to assess implications for the accuracy and readability of WHOIS contact information

– A new SSAC-GNSO Technical Working Group will consider display specifications for internationalized registration data (WG tasking may pre-empt WHOIS display study)

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5. WHOIS Service Requirements

- May 2009 request from GNSO Council
- Staff tasked to collect and organize a comprehensive set of requirements for the WHOIS service policy tools
- Intended as an accurate and neutral compendium to help Council consider alternatives
- Status and update will be covered in Part II of this presentation.

Next steps and ways to get involved

- Attend the Internationalized Registration Data (IRD) workshop in Seoul on Wednesday 28 October at 15.00

- Contribute to the SSAC-GNSO IRD Working Group just being convened

- Staff will release study information as analyses are complete – several months

- The GNSO Council and staff will then consider which studies to conduct

Additional Information

- GNSO Council Resolution in Mexico City, March 2009
  https://st.icann.org/gnso-council/index.cgi?04_mar_2009_motions

- GNSO Council Resolution on WHOIS Service Requirements
  https://st.icann.org/gnso-council/index.cgi?07_may_motions

- ICANN Board Resolution regarding display and usage of
  internationalized registration data, 26 June 2009
  http://www.icann.org/en/minutes/resolutions-26jun09.htm#6

- Updated cross reference table for Whois studies under consideration
  http://gnso.icann.org/issues/whois/whois-requested-studies-chart-25sep09-en.pdf

- Internationalized Data Registration Working Group charter
  http://gnso.icann.org/drafts/internationalized-data-registration-wg-draft-charter-27sep09.pdf

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Thank You

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