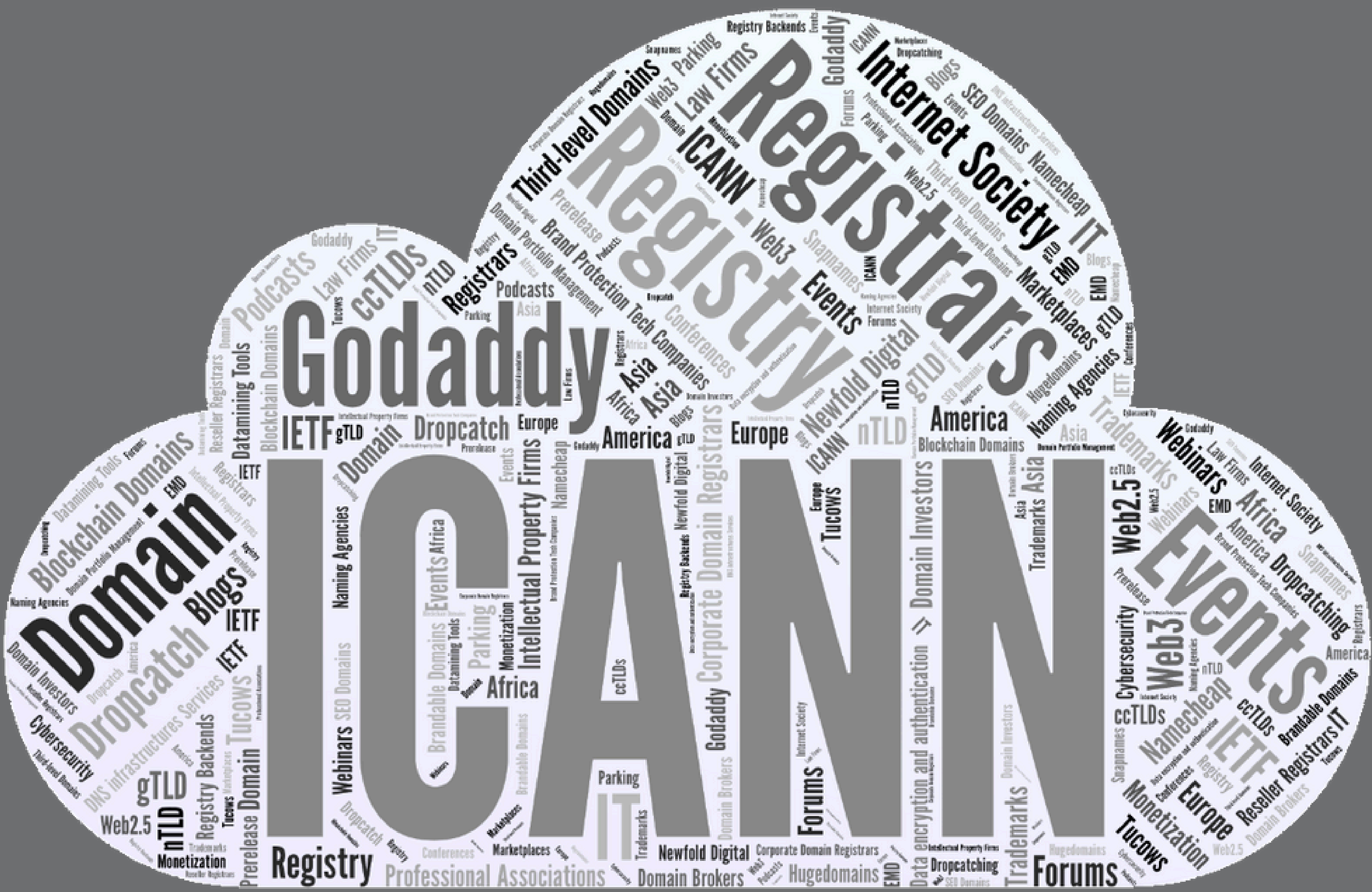
THE DOMAIN NAME INDUSTRY IN 2025

KEY PLAYERS, SERVICES AND RESOURCES



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Despite its size and turnover, the domain name sector is seldom covered by the media, academic courses, and market studies.

Who are the main players in the sector? What are their strategies? What are the best practices? The purpose of this document is to provide answers to these questions, especially for registrars, registries, intellectual property consultants, lawyers, SEO specialists, brand creators and domainers.

The first part describes the organizations which are essential for the operation of the domain name system. Initially simple technical objects, domain names have gained importance with the rapid development of the web, both for practical life and for business. Many services, especially in the fields of IT, marketing and law, have naturally emerged to meet these new needs. These services are provided by actors of various specialties and sizes, which are analyzed in the second part of this report. Events, online media, social networks and other initiatives have been carried out by individuals who have contributed to shaping a domain name industry. Their prominent figures are presented in the third and final part of the study.

Disclaimer

This eBook aims to provide an up-to-date overview of the domain name sector and therefore does not include organizations or individuals who are no longer active. To ensure accessibility for a broad audience, only a few hundred of the most prominent key players in the domain name sector are featured. A larger list of the top 1000 organizations, resources and key people are available in our paid publications.

Definitions and basic concepts are covered only briefly. Readers interested in exploring the technical, historical, or commercial context of the sector in greater depth are encouraged to consult our Knowledge Base section at *onlinestrat.com*.

Written from a European perspective, this study seeks to offer a global view of the sector, though not all regions of the world are covered with the same level of detail.

Part One. The Domain Name System and its Institutions

This first part provides an overview of the main organizations responsible for the operation of the domain name system. **The current situation is marked by the domination of large organizations and multinational companies,** mostly originating from the United States of America, and differs significantly from the original conception of the Internet as a public good. **The threats of fragmentation of the Internet are growing**, both technically and geographically.

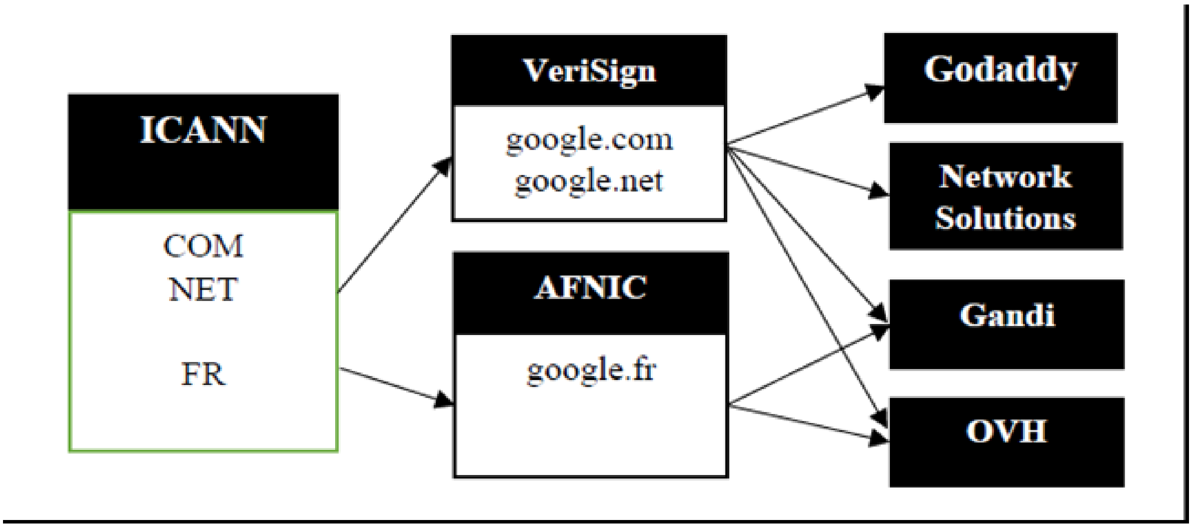
The Technical Ecosystem

Centralizing Bodies

ICANN

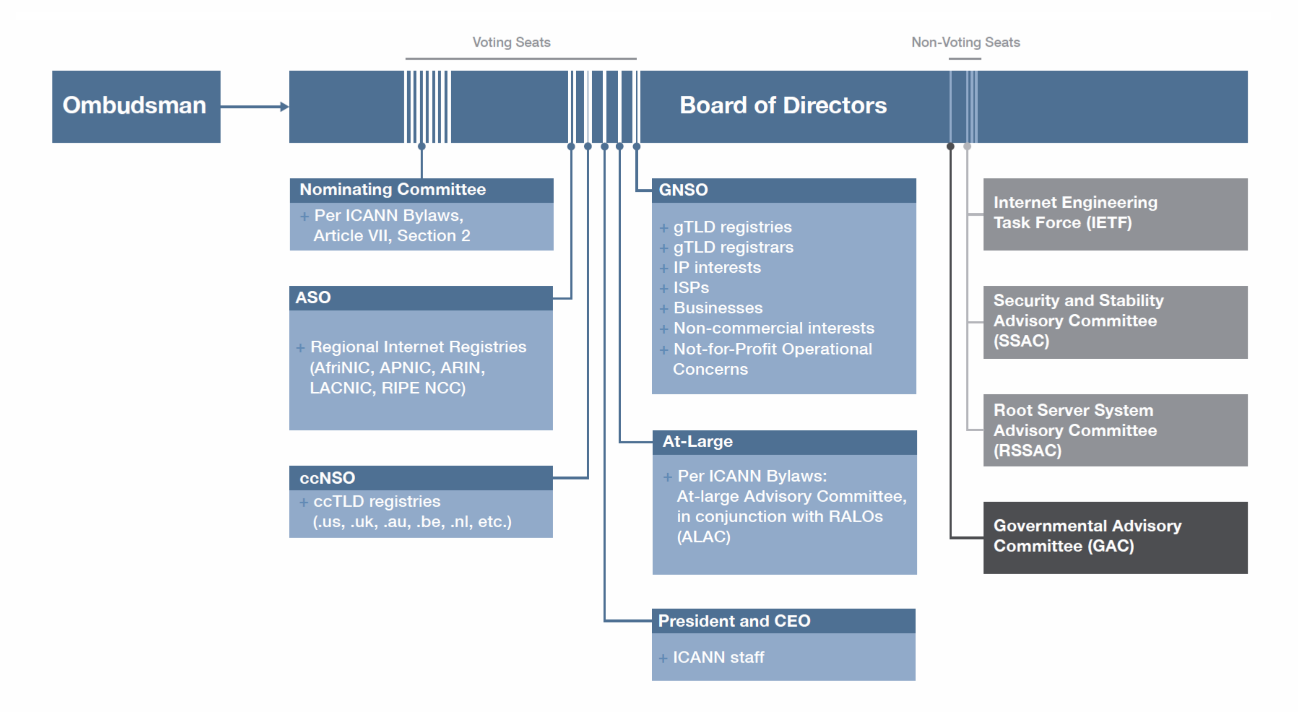
ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) is the organization that manages the Internet. It is an international nonprofit organization, headquartered in San Diego, California. The uniqueness of domain names is guaranteed by the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA); an authority integrated within ICANN. The management of operations is entrusted to the American company Verisign. **ICANN entrusts the management of domain name extensions to entities called registries by contract.** Domain names are generally not marketed by the registries themselves, but by companies specializing in this field, known as registrars.

Figure 1. From the Root to the Registrars



One of the unique features of ICANN is its highly participatory functioning, based on a "multi-stakeholder" model. Its main players are the countries (within the GAC), some international organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), professional Internet experts and representatives of civil society and business bodies. However, the distribution of participants leads to a situation where **powerful for-profit organizations have been able to gain more control over the decisions than the other stakeholders.**

Illustration 2. Organizational Structure of ICANN



Supposed to guarantee the neutrality of the Internet, ICANN has increasingly been the scene of financial and political maneuvers that overshadow the general interest. In what some consider a shocking conflict of interests, Fadi Chehade and Akram Atallah, two former ICANN leaders, respectively joined in 2016 and 2018 Donuts (now Identity Digital), known for its acquisition of hundreds of new TLDs, and owned by the private equity fund Ethos Capital.

As a nonprofit organization, ICANN cannot make a profit but spends a lot of money, with an annual budget of around one hundred fifty million dollars, largely made possible by the launch of new extensions in 2014. With an application review cost set at $185,000 for each project, and nearly 250 auctions to decide the winners between two or more applicants, **ICANN has achieved a significant financial coup. This will be repeated in 2026, with the second round of nTLDs.**

ICANN Communities

ICANN's multistakeholder model brings together different communities to ensure that I nternet governance decisions reflect the interests of all affected parties — including governments, users, technical experts, and the domain name industry.

Among these groups, the most influential are the GNSO, GAC, ccNSO, and ALAC, as they shape domain name policies, represent national and public interests, coordinate country-code domains, and give voice to individual internet users. Each of these groups is composed of constituencies that organize specific interests; within the GNSO, the most important constituencies are the Registrar Stakeholder Group (RrSG) and the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG).

Internet Society

An American non-profit organization created in 1992 by Internet pioneers, **the Internet Society (ISOC) is the most influential technical authority in the internet sector.** It aims to promote and coordinate the development of the network and provides organizational and financial support to the IETF.

It brings together tens of thousands of members around the world, in over 100 local branches called "chapters" and controls several organizations, among them the Public Interest Registry (PIR) which is responsible for managing the .ORG extension registry [1].

The Internet Society organises the annual Internet Governance Forum.

IETF

Funded by the Internet Society (ISOC), **the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is an organization whose mission is to produce and promote Internet standards**, particularly those of the Internet protocol suite TCP/IP. Its participants are researchers, academics, and engineers who **develop the well-known RFC (Request for Comments) specification documents**. They act within the IETF with a status of volunteers. This atypical and self-organized body operates informally, without either a statutory framework, a board of directors, and even members.

Within the IETF, the Internet Architecture Board (IAB) is a committee whose mission is to oversee the standards and protocols of the Internet.

International Internet-Related Organizations

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is a specialized agency of the United Nations for information and communication technologies, whose mission is to facilitate international connectivity of communication networks, as well as the development of technical standards.

A United Nations agency too, **WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) is the global authority responsible for intellectual property issues.** It notably resolves disputes related to domain names.

Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) are organizations responsible for managing and distributing Internet number resources, such as IP addresses and Autonomous System Numbers (ASNs), within specific geographic regions. These resources are critical for the functioning of the Internet. There are five RIRs worldwide, each serving a distinct region.

A Fragmenting Internet

Geopolitical Issues

Domain names are an element of intellectual property that has acquired considerable importance in business life. As a technical creation of ICANN over which they have no control, the states have difficulties making it a well-defined legal object. Depending on the country, various types of organizations establish rules related to the use of domain names at the national level.

[1] In 2019, under possible conflict of interest conditions, ISOC agreed to sell the .ORG extension to Ethos Capital, an investment fund co-founded by the former President of ICANN Fadi Chehadé, . The sale has been invalidated by ICANN.

States aim to control Internet activities within their borders, regulating infrastructure and content independently of ICANN, to which they are not contractually bound. In the face of the risks of Internet's control by the USA, as evidenced by the Snowden or Cambridge Analytica scandals, **several major powers express secessionist intentions.** Thus, **China uses a root different from that of ICANN, and Russia is expected to do the same with its RuNet project**.

Strategic Interest from Financial Actors

In addition to the geographical fragmentation of the Internet, there is a **progressive takeover by financial interests, gradually replacing the free and open Web with a proprietary Internet**.

A small group of investment funds controls significant ownership in all major tech companies, meaning these giants are not truly independent competitors. The "Big Three" — BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street — are the world's largest asset managers. They collectively hold major stakes in leading tech companies like Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Microsoft, and Meta, giving them significant influence over the global technology sector. Together, they are estimated to control between 15% and 20% of the shares in each of these companies.

As in many other sectors, these powerful investment funds — along with major financial companies such as Berkshire Hathaway — have secured dominant stakes in critical parts of the domain name industry, particularly registries and registrars.

Thus, little by little, the Internet sector is transitioning from an open universe to a fragmented space controlled by Internet giants and states [2]. But the fragmentation of the Internet goes beyond that, with also technical threats for the existing ICANN model.

Alternative Roots to ICANN System

A growing number of companies offer the creation and management of domain name extensions outside the ICANN management system.

The system of roots outside ICANN is as old as the Internet itself. Until the late 2010s, these networks were designed to meet the specific needs of companies or communities, with no aim of replacing the current system. These services can be used internally within a company, to provide a private and secure web environment for testing, backup or collaborative work. They can also be used to run private communities or even to maintain a personal or family network.

Domain names outside ICANN work in the same way as on the Web, but **an add-on to the web browsers is needed to access them**. When these domain names are commercialized to the public, there are often no fees for renewing.

One of the best-known alternative root is the .ONION bunch of addresses, which make up the Dark Web, a highly protected network used primarily for illegal activities. Access requires the use of the Tor browser.

[2] In 2014, Putin and a few Russian oligarchs took control of VK.com, the most used website in Russia after Google, to monitor communications between individuals.

Blockchain Domains

Decentralized Digital Identities

Blockchain domains are decentralized, blockchain-based identifiers that replace wallet addresses or traditional URLs. They emerged around 2017, starting with services like ENS, as a way to simplify crypto interactions. Decentralised domain names can replace the names of cryptocurrency wallets such as *1A1zP1eP5QGefi2DMPTfTL5SLmv7DivfNa* with simple, easy-to-remember addresses on the blockchain such as *mywallet.eth*.

Their adoption grew between 2019 and 2021, driven by the rise of Web3, DeFi, and NFTs, as users sought ownership, censorship resistance, and alternatives to traditional DNS.

Owned as crypto assets, blockchain domains can technically be used for payments, identity, or hosting content without central control. However, such uses are in practice underdeveloped, blockchain domains being almost exclusively defensive, speculative or cybersquatting registrations. In addition, these decentralized domains create numerous situations of confusion and conflict, as any provider can create its extension on the blockchain, even if it already exists on the blockchain or in the ICANN root.

Leading Blockchain Domain Providers

Not all cryptocurrencies support blockchain domain systems. Only a few blockchains are technically suited for this purpose, mainly those that allow smart contracts.

The most widely used technology is ENS (Ethereum Name Service), with *.eth* domains that act as decentralized identifiers, replacing wallet addresses and integrating across the Ethereum ecosystem.

Unstoppable Domains is the second major player, offering multiple extensions across various blockchains. It has taken advantage of the hype surrounding cryptocurrencies and Web3 to sell via aggressive marketing domain names with flashy extensions such as .BITCOIN, .X, .CRYPTO, .NFT or .888, but not interoperable with the global DNS and which lack practical use.

Challengers in the blockchain domains sector include Space ID, which enables cross-chain domains like .bnb and .arb, sns.sol for Solana-based .sol domains, RNS on the Bitcoin sidechain RSK, Tezos domains for the Tezos blockchain, Peername, focusing on early or alternative blockchain naming systems, and Orange Domains, a joint-venture including Tucows.

Some Web3 providers **allow users to create their own TLDs**, especially Namebase and Bob Wallet, which operate on the Handshake blockchain. SPACE ID also offers this service on BNB Chain, Arbitrum, and Ethereum. Other smaller players like Freename, Decentraweb, and Pool also enable the sale of both Web3 top-level domains and second-level domains.

Web 2.5 Projects

Web 2.5 is a new concept aiming to bridge the gap between traditional DNS domains and blockchain technology by linking classic domain names to on-chain tokens. A U.S.-based company founded by Fred Hsu in 2023, D3 Global is a pioneer in the Web 2.5 space. Thanks to partnerships with major blockchains and registrars and participation in nTLD ICANN round 2 in 2026, D3 plans to launch ICANN-approved, blockchain-native TLDs and build an on-chain marketplace for legacy Web2 domains.

Registries

Registries are public or private organizations responsible for managing one or more TLDs, with the mission of ensuring the proper functioning of domain names under these TLDs.

gTLD Registries

Legacy gTLD Registries

The American company Verisign, with among its main investors finance magnate Warren Buffett, holds a central position in the domain name sector as it is the registry for the .COM and .NET [3] extensions. Verisign also maintains and distributes the root zone file on behalf of IANA and manages the DNSSEC key signing for the root zone.

The other major historical registries are all American. They include Public Interest Registry for dot ORG, NGO and ONG, Identity Digital (formerly Affilias) for INFO, PRO, and MOBI [4], and Godaddy Registry (formerly Neustar) for BIZ.

GoDaddy became a significant player in the sector following its acquisition of the Neustar registry, rebranded as GoDaddy Registry. GoDaddy Registry's portfolio of nTLDs expanded with the acquisitions of Minds + Machines and Dot Club registries. However, GoDaddy's interest in this market segment does not seem to be maximal, as the thirty or so extensions then held by UniRegistry were not included in its acquisition by GoDaddy in 2020.

The American company Identity Digital (formerly Donuts) became a legacy registry following its acquisition of Afilias in 2020. However, its core activity remains in the nTLD sector, where it is a leading player with ownership of approximately 260 extensions.

Except for Public Interest Registry, these registries also historically provided technical operator services on behalf of other TLDs, especially for countries and territories lacking the necessary resources or choosing not to do so. **The creation of more than twelve hundred nTLDs starting in 2014 has provided significant opportunities for these registries, becoming technical operators for nTLDs**.

[3] The American company Network Solutions, which had managed all registrations under the .COM, .NET, and .ORG extensions since 1993, was acquired in 2000 by Verisign for the then record amount of $21 billion.

[4] A leading historical registry, Afilias used to own the .INFO extension, as well as other significant ones like .PRO or .MOBI. It was among the major technical operators in the market, managing dozens of nTLDs.

nTLD Registries

With the new TLD program which started **in 2014, over 1,200 extensions have been created**. The nTLDs category of new domain name extensions are composed of three groups:

- NgTLDs, which are the new generic TLDs like .XYZ, .TOP, .SITE, .BEST, and hundreds of others.
- corpTLDs, which are TLDs reserved for companies, like .BNPPARIBAS, .AUDI or .BARCLAYS.
- geoTLDs, for local communities, like .TOKYO, .BERLIN or .PARIS.

The NgTLD market is by far the largest. In contrast to corpTLD and geoTLD markets, its registries are for profit organisms, typically Internet companies or institutions specialized in a specific topic or sector. They usually manage one nTLD, sometimes a few.

Table 3. Top 10 nTLD registries [5]

Registry Breakdown — Default list view

	Registry	new gTLDs	Domains	+/-	% Share
1.	Radix FZC	10	9,230,026	-9,695 ↓	21.39%
2.	Identity Digital Inc.	264	7,076,335	-1,574 ↓	16.40%
3.	XYZ.COM LLC	35	6,462,977	10,088 ↑	14.97%
4.	GMO Registry, Inc.	6	4,291,235	6,508 ↑	9.94%
5.	Jiangsu Bangning Science & Technology Co.,Ltd.	1	3,734,471	1,046 ↑	8.65%
6.	Shortdot SA	5	2,868,798	-5,479 ↓	6.65%
7.	Registry Services, LLC(GoDaddy Registry)	31	2,631,009	-3,947 ↓	6.10%
8.	Charleston Road Registry Inc.	46	1,426,848	-67 ↓	3.31%
9.	Internet Naming Co.	12	718,690	-70 ↓	1.67%
10.	ARUBA PEC S.p.A.	1	442,272	-44 ↓	1.02%

Source: ntldstats.com, March 2025

Multi-TLD Registries

The major players in the registry sector own and manage multiple TLDs.

Radix, a subsidiary of the Indian group Directi, owns 10 sought-after new extensions such as .ONLINE, .TECH, or .SPACE, and operates others. It is one of the few registries managing several nTLDs that has legitimate website publishers.

Japanese giant GMO Internet owns six nTLDs, including the successful .SHOP, for which it paid $41.5 million, and .TOKYO, the most widely used geoTLD. The company also serves as the technical operator for about fifty nTLDs.

Google (Charleston Road Registry) and Amazon both hold more than fifty extensions, although it is not a strategic activity for these companies. Only three of Google's extensions, namely .APP and to a lesser extent .PAGE and .DEV, are relatively widespread nTLDs. Amazon launched its first three new TLDs .HOT, .FREE and .SPOT in mid-2025.

[5] The figures provided are indicative. Registries use different legal structures, some of which are not taken into account in the statistics, and their portfolio and strategies are constantly changing.

UniRegistry became UNR and then, in 2022, Internet Naming. After selling the majority of its extensions at auction in 2021, the company still owns 12 nTLDs, including .CLICK, which represents over 97% of its registrations. Top Level Design operates .DESIGN, .INK, .WIKI, and .GAY, targeting niche audiences.

There are also **many NgTLD registries whose projects are pure financial investments**, without intent of bringing added value to Internet users. The goal is to generate short-term revenue, mostly through strategies and methods of questionable ethics. The players range from small private investors, typically domainers or registrars, to powerful investment funds, with dozens or hundreds of extensions under management.

Identity Digital's business model is typical of investment funds: multiplying acquisitions to achieve economies of scale and generate short-term revenue. Founded in 2010, the company is led by Akram Atallah, former President of ICANN, and controlled by Ethos Capital, an investment fund co-founded by former ICANN President Fadi Chehadé, with among its key partners former ICANN Vice President Nora Abusitta-Ouri [6]. One of Identity Digital's main sources of revenue involves charging thousands of dollars to large corporate clients through a service called DPML (Domains Protected Marks List), which simply involves blocking the registration of a brand's domain names in the extensions managed by Identity Digital or a certain period of time [7].

Originally, the .XYZ registry was a project with modest potential initiated by a young American entrepreneur, Daniel Negari. However, it received unexpected global publicity when Google chose the URL *abc.xyz* as the address for its new parent company, Alphabet. Thanks to the revenue generated by the large number of registrations, the owner of dot XYZ purchased around thirty new extensions, which are, however, not yet or barely used.

Registered in Luxembourg, ShortDot is the registry for five nTLDs, widely used, but with a high level of spam from Asia.

Secondary Players

Specialized nTLD Registries

Most nTLD registries manage only one or two TLDs and tend to be specialized. Among the specialized registries are Registry Africa, operated by the South African Registry and managing .AFRICA, Knock Knock WHOIS There, which runs .BLOG; Dot Art Registry, responsible for .ART; fTLD Registry Services LLC, which operates the two restricted TLDs .BANK and .INSURANCE; and DotTrademark Organisation Limited, which manages .商标, a Chinese-script TLD for trademarks.

Among the registries targeting a broad audience is the Chinese company Jiangsu Bangning Science & Technology, whose .TOP has one of the highest registration volumes in the nTLD space, largely driven by

[6] The presence of former senior executives from ICANN on the boards of directors of Donuts and Ethos Capital is further evidence supporting the thesis of financial capital's control over ICANN.

[7] This model of racket through cybersquatting was taken to its extreme with the .SUCKS extension, created solely for the purpose of extorting companies.

spam and illicit content. .LINK (Nova Registry), .ONE, .BEST, and .BUZZ (dotStrategy) are also general-purpose TLDs, but with a stronger focus on quality.

Repurposed ccTLD Registries

Some country-code domain extensions are referred to as quasi-generic because they are marketed and used globally, beyond their original national purpose. Extensions like .TV, .CO, .ME, and .IO are technically ccTLDs but behave commercially as if they were generic domains. This concept is recognized in ICANN documents, where these repurposed ccTLDs are described as operating similarly to gTLDs, despite their country-specific origins.

Some of these extensions are managed by major registry operators; for example, .TV is operated by GoDaddy Registry and .IO and .CC are operated by Identity Digital. Others remain partially independent, such as .CO managed by CO Internet S.A.S. and .ME operated by DoMEn d.o.o., or fully independent, like Zenaida for .AI domains, Global Domains International for .WS, BRS Media for .FM and .AM, Tonic for .TO, Ola for .CV and TM Domain Registry for .TM.

Previously managed by Freenom, .TK is now in transition, with Teletok (Tokelau's telecom) exploring alternatives.

Third-level Domains

Companies like IT.COM, CO.COM and CentralNIC Registry with US.COM, EU.COM, UK.COM and BR.COM offer services similar to a new gTLD registry, but for third-level domain names. This type of product has existed for a long time, yet significant advertising investments by IT.COM have recently brought renewed attention to this model.

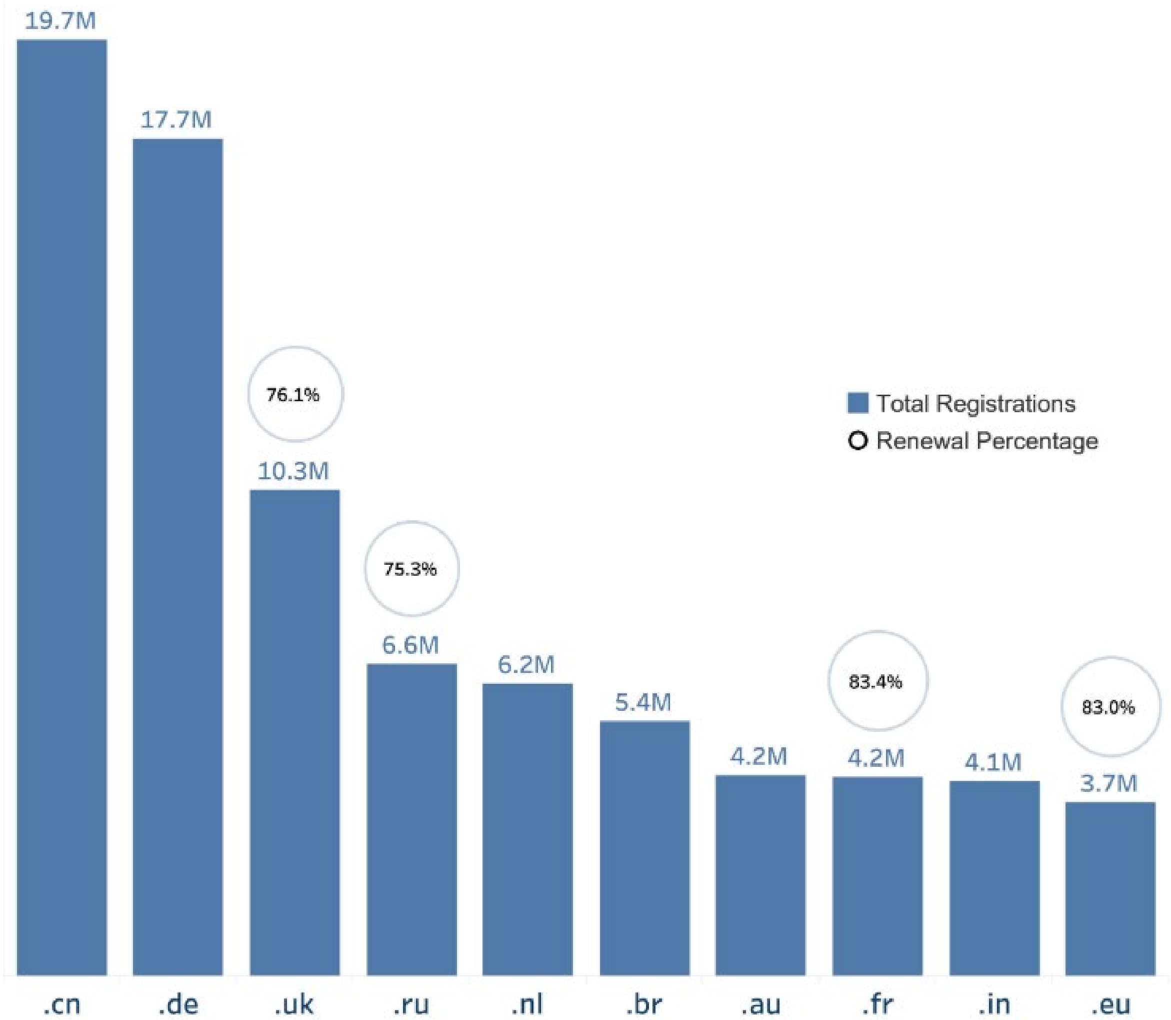
ccTLD Registries

A ccTLD (country code top-level domain) is a type of top-level domain used to identify a specific country, sovereign state, or dependent territory on the Internet. These domains consist of two-letter codes, such as .US for the United States, .DE for Germany, .JP for Japan, etc. In theory, national TLDs are under the control of the country they represent, but this rule still has exceptions [8], due to the way they were created starting in 1985.

In most countries, **managing a ccTLD is considered a public service mission**, generally carried out by an organization external to the State, whether under a mandate, contract, tender, or another arrangement.

[8] Unaware of the significance the Internet would attain, the creator of national TLDs, Jon Postel, assigned them to organizations or individuals chosen informally, sometimes with a simple connection to the concerned country. However, most countries and territories have managed to regain control of their extensions.

Table 2. Top 10 ccTLDs at the End of 2024



Source : Domain Name Industry Brief,.2025

China ranks #1 for obvious reasons of population size. **ccTLDs are the most developed in Europe**. On the contrary, they are generally little used in developing countries.

European ccTLDs

In Europe, ccTLDs are often the first choice, ahead of .COM. The popularity of European ccTLDs is generally due to two main factors, which are the perception of domain names under ccTLDs as a mark of trust [9], guaranteeing security and safety, and affordable prices.

European registries cooperate through CENTR, a regional association that brings together national ccTLD operators. It promotes European ccTLDs and facilitates the exchange of best practices among its members. EURid is the official registry operator for the .EU top-level domain, appointed by the European Commission. It is a non-profit organization based in Belgium and manages the technical, administrative, and policy aspects of the .EU, .ею (Cyrillic), and .ευ (Greek) domains.

[9] European ccTLD registries show strong efforts to combat DNS abuse and unlawful content.

Operating as a private not-for-profit cooperative, the German registry DENIC has the largest number of registrations, mainly due to its efficiency [10], its competitive pricing, the size of its domestic market and the local desire to oppose the hegemony of .COM.

Its runner-up in Europe, the private non-profit British company Nominet, has opted for an Anglo-Saxon model, with business-oriented activity, notably through technical operator services for more than 80 nTLDs.

Run by the private non-profit foundation SIDN, which operates under a public mandate, the Netherlands' .NL has the highest number of domain registrations per capita in the world. Like .DE, this is due to the absence of registration restrictions, strong local preference for the ccTLD, low registration costs, and the high number of domain investors.

Russia's .RU ranks third in Europe by number of domains, despite the country having the continent's largest population. This is mainly due to the national registry's limited business orientation—a common trait in the ccTLD sector. The IDN version, .РФ, is the most used internationalized ccTLD in the world and represents close to 10% of total Russian ccTLD registrations.

Dedicated to its public service mission; the French non-profit association [11] Afnic registry (French Association for Internet Naming in Cooperation) is one of the international benchmarks, especially for its technical expertise and for dispute resolution. Its foundation supports projects related to digital solidarity.

Smaller registries such as CZ.NIC (Czech Republic), NIC.at (Austria), Switch (Switzerland), and IIS (Sweden) show strong performance across key indicators such as ccTLD usage, DNSSEC implementation, and overall TLD health.

Asian and Pacific ccTLDs

Despite the high population and Internet penetration, Asia's ccTLDs remain underdeveloped. In major Asian countries—and more broadly across the continent—registries are generally not business-oriented, often impose restrictions on ccTLD registrations, and invest little in promotion. Several support IDN extensions to allow domain names in local scripts, but their adoption remains low. Founded in 1998 as a non-profit entity and incorporated in Malaysia, APTLD (Asia Pacific Top Level Domain Association) is an organization for ccTLD registries in the Asia Pacific region.

CNNIC manages .CN, the Chinese national extension and one of the largest in the world. The IDN version, .中国, represents less than 1% of total Chinese ccTLD registrations. JPRS in Japan and KISA in South Korea, which manage .JP and .KR respectively, are well-regarded for their technical expertise and consistent adherence to international standards. However, both have traditionally enforced strict registration policies. The relatively low registration volumes also reflect the unique nature of these markets, where digital presence often leans more toward apps and alternative online platforms.

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[10] DENIC is a business-oriented organization, whose members are exclusively registrars, without interference from public institutions or authorities.

[11] Although it has been the operator of .FR since its inception, Afnic is not the statutory registry for .FR. Since 2012, the mission's assignment follows a tender managed by the Ministry of Economy of France. This original model maintains a certain pressure on Afnic, whose results might not have been as good if it had been a state organization..

INRegistry operates .IN, the domain extension for India. Thanks to the absence of registration restrictions, it has grown alongside the country's digital expansion. A notable feature is that .IN domains cannot be traded on the secondary market by registrars.

Not technically a ccTLD but well integrated into the Asian domain landscape, DotAsia Organisation manages .ASIA, targeting individuals and businesses with ties to the Asia-Pacific region.

In Oceania, ccTLDs carry significant national significance. .AU, managed by auDA, is heavily used and well-regulated in Australia. In New Zealand, InternetNZ oversees .NZ, which is also widely adopted. Several territories in the region use their ccTLDs strategically, serving both local identity and niche global markets — such as .TV, .WS, .TO, and .PW.

American ccTLDs

ccTLDs are underused in the Americas, where .COM is preferred. LACTLD (Latin American and Caribbean TLD Association) is a non-profit organization that brings together country code top-level domain (ccTLD) registries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

.CA is managed by the Canadian organization CIRA (Canadian Internet Registration Authority). It is considered a global benchmark, in terms of efficiency, public interest, and protection of web users and brands. ccTLDs are far less developed in the rest of the continent.

Run by Registry Services, LLC (GoDaddy Group), .US, remains marginal. In Latin America, the most popular ccTLDs are .BR, which NIC.br manages with strict rules, as well as .MX, .AR and .CL, respectively managed by NIC México, NIC Argentina and NIC Chile.

African and Middle East ccTLDs

In Africa and the Middle East, ccTLDs are globally still underdeveloped. Until 2024 and the blocking of activity of the controversial Dutch company Freenom [12], several sub-Saharan Africa registries had even chosen to lease their national TLD to them.

However, a growing number of African countries are investing in promoting and defending their ccTLDs as symbols of digital sovereignty. The Africa Top Level Domains Organization (AfTLD) provides a forum for ccTLD managers from the African Region to discuss issues related to managing ccTLD registries.

In South Africa, .ZA is successfully managed by ZADNA, which also oversees Dot AFRICA and plays a significant role in shaping Internet governance across the continent. Among the best-performing African registries are Nigeria's NIRA for .NG, KENIC for .KE in Kenya, ANRT for .MA in Morocco, and ATI for Tunisia's .TN.

[12] A Dutch company famous for managing the free .TK extension, Freenom used to offer services for the .CF, .GQ, and .ML extensions, respectively for the Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, and Mali.

Table 4. Review of the Main Registries [13]

Registry	*Country*	*Extensions owned and/or managed*	*Strategy*	*Shareholding*
Verisign	USA	Verisign is the registry for the COM, NET, and a few other secondary extensions through subsidiaries, such as .TV. It is the technical operator for nearly 200 extensions, most of which are not utilized. Apart from the record auction purchase of the .WEB extension, Verisign has not yet ventured into nTLDs [14].	Tied to the U.S. government through a contract, Verisign is the most powerful company in the sector. By mid-2025, its market capitalization exceeded $22,6 billion dollars. Its strategy mainly consists of lobbying efforts to protect its monopoly on .COM and .NET.	Berkshire Hathaway (W. Buffet) and other funds, stock exchange
Public Interest Registry	USA	Public Interest Registry is the registry for the historical extensions .ORG, .NGO, and .ONG. It is not involved in the new extensions segment and does not operate other extensions.	Despite its NGO status, ISOC tends to manage .ORG like a private company, notably with a pricing policy optimized for profits [15].	Internet Society (ISOC)
Godaddy Registry	USA	GoDaddy created a subsidiary called GoDaddy Registry following its acquisition of the Neustar registry, owner of the .BIZ extension and technical operator for .US and over a hundred other extensions, mostly nTLDs. GoDaddy Registry's portfolio of owned extensions expanded further with the acquisitions in 2021 of the Minds + Machines [16] and Dot Club registries.	Due to its ownership structure, GoDaddy's strategy is driven by managers whose primary goal is to increase the company's stock price. The acquisition of registries and technical operators for registries are opportunistic purchases, as GoDaddy does not have real objectives in this market segment.	GoDaddy
Identity Digital	USA	Identity Digital (formerly Donuts) is the largest registry of new top-level domains (nTLDs), with over two hundred and sixty under its ownership, although none of them are widely distributed. Since acquiring Afilias, it also	Owned by investment funds since its inception, Identity Digital's business model relies on achieving economies of scale and maximizing revenue, with little regard for the added value to Internet users or ethics. The company is	Ethos Capital

[13] The ranking is only indicative, given the large number of possible criteria for classification: the number of owned TLDs, the number of extensions as a technical operator, the number of registered domain names, revenue, etc.

[14] The auction took place in 2016, but Verisign still does not operate the .WEB extension, as several losing bidders, including Identity Digital, have initiated procedures to nullify it. Furthermore, Verisign's purchase was less about a real project and more about neutralizing a potential competitor to .COM.

[15] The organization supposed to develop the Internet as a public good reached an agreement in 2020 with the investment fund Ethos Capital for the sale of .ORG, but the deal sparked an outcry, leading ICANN to reject it.

[16] The American company Minds + Machines (The MMX) owned and operated around thirty relatively low-profile extensions (VIP, WORK, FIT, LONDON...), including notably adult-oriented extensions (XXX, ADULT, SEX, PORN), acquired in 2020 from ICM Registry.

		owns historical extensions such as .INFO, .MOBI, and .PRO and has strengthened its technical operator activity.F	continuously looking for opportunities to acquire other entities, eventually to probably be purchased itself or going public.	
Radix	EAU	Radix is a subsidiary of the Indian group Directi. It owns around ten new extensions including ONLINE, TECH, or SPACE, which are among the few nTLDs to have found an audience. It is the leader among registries in terms of the number of registered domain names.	Radix has supported its development by leveraging its expertise as a registrar, offering a limited number of new extensions but with potential and a long-term strategy.	Directi
Google Registry	USA	Through its subsidiary Charleston Registry, Google owns around fifty new extensions. Apart from .APP, .PAGE, and .DEV, few of them are actively utilized.	Google entered the new extensions segment to protect some of its brands and facilitate the dissemination of various technical options. At the moment, this is not a strategic activity for Google.	Google
Xyz	USA	The XYZ registry holds the extension of the same name, which is one of the most used among the nTLDs, as well as about thirty others (CARS, BEAUTY, MONSTER, HOMES, COLLEGE, etc.).	Thanks to the revenue generated by the large number of registrations following Google's choice of *abc.xyz*, the owner of XYZ has acquired more than thirty new extensions as opportunities arose, many of which are underdeveloped.	Private capital
GMO Registry	Japan	GMO Internet owns six nTLDs, including the successful .SHOP, for which it paid $41.5 million, and .TOKYO, the largest used geoTLD. and serves as the technical operator for about fifty nTLDs.	As a leading Japanese Internet company, GMO Internet offers a wide range of services. The registry business is currently a secondary focus for the company.	GMO Internet

Source : ntldstats, various

Registrars

A highly competitive market

In the domain name registration market, all registrars market the same product. Given this and the low level of barriers to entry, **the activity does not allow for significant profits.** For these reasons, most players have a broader range of services, especially web hosting.

All registrars with over 10 million domains under management are based in North America. The clear market leader is GoDaddy, which holds approximately 15–20% of the global domain registrar market. The 2010s have been marked by a **strong movement of consolidation**, initiated by large companies and financial groups like GoDaddy, Tucows, or CentralNIC (now Team Internet). The business model of the acquirers consists of achieving economies of scale through acquisitions, mergers, and consolidations [17]. Some choose to focus on marketing and window dressing, selling the companies at a profit to other funds or to larger players. Others focus on profitability, increasing the prices of the services and reducing the costs [18].

Registrars in Asia and Europe generally operate with a limited geographic scope. Most focus on specific countries or regions, aligning their services with local language, currency, regulations, and domain name extensions. The African and Middle East region does not currently count large registrars.

The American Leadership

Godaddy

Founded in 1997, GoDaddy is the leading domain name registrar in the world, far ahead of all its competitors. The company has managed to become one of the greatest successes of the Internet without any notable expertise or added value compared to other players in the sector. The success achieved is primarily the result of aggressive marketing and historical focus on market share rather than on making profits.

Namecheap

The American registrar Namecheap is the smallest and most agile player in the global top. This gives it a considerable advantage over its competitors in terms of service fluidity. Coupled with a low-cost pricing policy and significant communication efforts, this strategy enables it to host over twenty million domain names. Namecheap also differs from the other American leaders in its lower concern regarding domain name abuse, resulting in a higher rate of cybersquatting and fraud among its customers.

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[17] This external growth strategy is used in many sectors, but yields the best results in the Internet sector, where marginal costs are low.

[18] In terms of customer service, the consequences are generally negative; however, communication and storytelling actions have quicker and stronger effects than the market's awareness of the decline in service quality. An example of how marketing and brand recognition often outweighs service quality in the domain name industry is that leading groups like GoDaddy, Newfold Digital, and Tucows arguably offer less value for money than smaller providers such as Dynadot and NameSilo.

Newfold Digital

Since its acquisition of Web.com from Siris Capital in 2021, the American investment fund Clearlake Capital, which already owned Endurance Group, has become a major player in the domain name sector. The activities related to domain names and hosting are grouped under the brand Newfold Digital.

Newfold Digital specializes in Internet hosting, with leading brands such as BlueHost and HostGator. The company also owns the Indian registrar PublicDomainRegistry (PDR) as well as Network Solutions [19], MarkMonitor and other historical American brands but mostly operating from India Domain.com, FastDomain, Bigrock and ResellerClub.

Via its subsidiary Web.com, Newfold Digital owns dozens of registrars, primarily serving its business of recovering expired domain names, in which it is one of the two leaders, alongside Dropcatch.

Tucows

The Canadian group Tucows markets its reseller offer under the brand OpenSRS and owns the registrars Enom, Ascio, and Hover, all with a little competitive value for money. Its market value has decreased by a factor of 6 between 2022 and 2023 and has not recovered since.

Other American Players

The American public website creation service Squarespace is among the largest registrars in the world, since it acquired Google's registrar activity in 2023.

Formerly a popular American registrar among domainers, Namesilo was acquired by a Canadian investment fund, leading to a notable increase in market share.

Dynadot [20] is a global-sized American registrar, with locations in the United States, Canada, and China. It is one of the last major registrars that has escaped the sector's consolidation trend.

Asia Pacific Registrars

The e-commerce giant Alibaba sells domain names through its Alibaba Cloud brand and its subsidiary HiChina, the number one web hosting company in China.

The leading Japanese registrar, Onamae, belongs to a large Internet group, GMO, which is also the owner or technical operator of a large number of nTLDs.

XinNet is a private Chinese company specializing in domain names and web hosting. The company owes its position among the leaders to a low-cost pricing policy, great communication efforts, and the size of

[19] Network Solutions was the first and only registrar until the late 1990s. Its place among the world's leading registrars is maintained through drop-catching activities, with domain names recovered by the registrars of the group being most often entrusted to Network Solutions. The latter offers one of the worst values for money in the sector, with registration costs approximately twice the market average and a poor service quality.

[20] Its clientele is predominantly composed of domainers, a market segment in which it enjoys a good reputation, thanks to a good value for money. It is one of the few registrars to allow domain tasting, which means than domains that are registered can be partially refunded if they are deleted within a five-day period.

the Chinese market, which remains difficult to access for foreign competitors. XinNet has a significant rate of domain abuse.

There are other significant players not affiliated with large groups, such as ChengDu West in China and WebNic in Singapore, the latter positioning itself as a gateway to Southeast Asian markets.

Currently, no Asian registrar is participating in the global consolidation trend. Their strategies remain focused on serving local demand, often marked by significant volumes of speculative registrations and fraudulent activity. European players

European Registrars

The German group United Internet is a web hosting and domain name leader, thanks to its flagship Ionos/1&1 [21], famous for its aggressive pricing policy, and other registrars such as PSI-USA, Cronon, United-Domains, and Arsys.

The public British group Team Internet (formerly CentralNic) is one of the most diversified players in the sector, notably holding a leading position in the backend activity for registries. It owns numerous registrars such as Key-Systems, 1api, Brandshelter, InternetBs, and Moniker. Its presence extends globally, with the company acquiring registrars and registries wherever opportunities have arisen since 2013.

The French low-cost web hosting company OVHcloud is also the number one registrar in France, and a major player in Europe. It offers competitive deals from webmasters to large multinationals.

REG is the main registrar in Russia, with an almost exclusive specialization in this market, which is sufficient to make it one of the European major players. Formerly known as Dada and a member of Team.blue, Register is an Italian company present in several Western European countries, mainly through the brands Register, Amen, and Nominalia.

Founded in 2000 as a project not intended to make a profit [22], the French company Gandi came under the control of the investment fund Montefiore Investments in 2019 and was then acquired by the Dutch hosting company Total Web Hosting in 2023, to become an entity of the Your.online group.

Among other major players in Europe are the French registrar Gandi (Your.online Group), the English subsidiary of GoDaddy,123 Reg, and the German reseller Key-Systems (Team Internet group), a B2B player.

[21] The rebranding to Ionos was accompanied by a reduction in contentious commercial practices, for which 1&1 was notorious.

[22] The company is also historically famous for its choice not to advertise.

Table 5. Review of the World Top 15 Registrars [23]

Group Name	*Number of Domains Under Management*	*Country*	*Description*	*Shareholding*	*Other Registrars*
GoDaddy	85 millions	USA	World Leader, thanks to a well-known brand built on aggressive marketing and pricing strategies, with a strong India-based operation.	Investment fund, stock exchange	Wild West Domains, 123 Reg
Namecheap	25 millions	USA	Namecheap is a low-cost registrar targeting particularly small-sized web professionals, including those indulging in illegal practices.	Private company	Spaceship
Newfold Digital	19 millions	USA	Newfold Digital was created in 2021 from the merger of Endurance Group, a consolidation of hosting providers and registrars, and Web.com, a major player in drop catching.	Clearlake capital	Network Solutions, PublicDomainRegistry (PDR), FastDomain, Register.com
Tucows	18 millions	Canada	Tucows is a group of historical and relatively declining registrars, with little activity outside the US and Canada.	Investment fund, stock exchange	OpenSRS, Enom, Ascio, Hover
Squarespace	10+ millions	USA	Squarespace is an American service for creating websites for the general public. It acquired Google's registrar business in 2023.	Stock exchange	

[23] Just as with Table 3 listing the main registries, the order in which these main actors are presented does not constitute a ranking. The column for registered domain names provides only an indicative value, as exact figures are impossible to determine due to the multitude of registrars owned by each of the groups mentioned. Moreover, the number of registered domain names is not a relevant indicator of a registrar's significance, as all offer related activities with varying degrees of added value.

United Internet	8 millions	Germany	United Internet is a leader in Europe, thanks to an aggressive pricing policy and a comprehensive offering for Internet presence.	Multinational	Ionos/1&1, PSI-USA, United-Domains, Arsys
Alibaba	8 millions	China	Alibaba Cloud is a by-product of a broader Internet services activity for China.	Multinational	
Team Internet	7 millions	UK	Formerly CentralNIC) Team Internet is a British publicly traded group. It has been pursuing a policy of acquiring registrars since 2013, making it one of the most comprehensive and diversified groups in the industry to date.	Stock Exchange	CentralNIC, Key-Systems, 1api, Hexonet, InternetBs, Moniker, BrandShelter, Instra,
Namebright	6+ millions	USA	Namebright is the registrar for all the domains snapped by Dropcatch and those owned by HugeDomains.	Private company	Dropcatch
Dynadot	6 millions	USA	Dynadot is one of the last major registrars privately owned. It offers a low-cost service with good quality	Private company	
Beijing Lanhai Jiye Technology Co., Ltd	6 millions	China	Beijing Lanhai Jiye Technology Co., Ltd. is a Chinese domain registrar closely linked to Gname.com Pte. Ltd., a Singapore-based registrar.	Private company	Gname
Namesilo	5+ millions	Canada	Popular among domainers, Namesilo was acquired by an investment fund in 2018, which subsequently expanded the company and took it public.	Stock Exchange	
GMO	5+ millions	Japan	GMO is the leading Japanese registrar through its subsidiary Onamae. It is an Internet leader, present in a multitude of market segments: Internet hosting, online advertising, cryptocurrencies, etc.),	Multinational	Onamae

Team Blue	5 millions	Belgium	Team.Blue is a group of registrars, web hosting companies and other web service providers including Combell, Register, Amen and TransIP.	Hg Capital (Private Equity)	Combell, Register.it, Amen, Nominalia
OVHCloud	5 millions	France	OVH is the leading web hosting provider in France and one of the key players in Europe.	Private capital, stock exchange	
Gname	5 millions	Singapore	Gname is a low-cost private registrar present in Asian markets, also offering a successful backorder service.	Private company	
Reg.ru	4 millions	Russia	Reg.ru is a major Russian hosting provider and domain name registrar, established in 2006	Private	
Ru-Center	4 millions	Russia	JSC “RU-CENTER” is a major Russian domain name registrar and hosting provider	Private Company (RBC Holding)	

Part Two. Domain Names Service Providers

Since the early 2000s, the growth of the Internet has given birth to new business activities. This section develops those dealing with domain names, whether technical, commercial, legal or marketing-related.

Trademarks Creation and Protection

Naming and Communication Agencies

All the major communications groups offer brand creation as part of their portfolio of services, usually including the creation or purchase of domain names.

The American firm Pentagram is a major player in the sector. Landor, a subsidiary of Young & Rubicam (WPP Group), and Interbrand (Omnicom Group) are among the world's leading brand strategy consultancies, as is Canada's Sid Lee.

Spain's company Mucho is an established player in Europe.

None of these major branding agencies have developed a specific expertise in the selection and acquisition of domain names. This is a key specialty of the French brand creator Nomen, and the core activity of the American agency Catchword. Luxembourg-based Vanksen also places domain names at the heart of their approach, on brand creation and on the selection and protection of domain names.

Brand Protection Services

Corporate Domain Registrars

Some domain names are highly valuable assets that must be entrusted to registrars with a reputation for reliability, called Corporate Registrars.

Corporate registrars are typically mid-sized companies that provide brand protection services tailored to local businesses. The American leader CSC Digital Brand Services offers consultancy services on all aspects of domain names, including legal aspects, as well as legal protection and monitoring. Notable other players include the UK’s Com Laude, Brandshelter (part of the Team Internet group), and SafeNames; Denmark’s Ascio (Tucows Group); Luxembourg's eBrand; France’s Nameshield; Germany’s Lemarit; Australia’s Melbourne IT; and the US-based Encirca.

MarkMonitor, the world-class American registrar, specialises exclusively in legal issues. Most major registrars like GoDaddy, Tucows, OVH or Gandi offer corporate registration services.

Law Firms

The largest global law firms, like Baker & McKenzie or Linklaters, offer services relating to domain names, but do not make this a strong speciality. Among them, only Hogan Lovells is an ICANN registrar. The American law firm Greenberg Traurig has also developed a strong expertise in domain dispute resolution and brand protection.

Intellectual Property Firms

All leading intellectual property firms have departments or lawyers responsible for protecting domain names, as part of their business. The largest players are often specialized in a region, such as the Luxembourg-based Dennemeyer for Europe, Dannemann Siemsen for Latin America or Kangxin Partners and Wanhuida Intellectual Property for China.

IP companies specializing in brand protection naturally focus more on domain name issues. They include the Dutch Novagraaf, the Swede Abion (formerly BrandIT), UK's Stobbs, the German law firms BARDEHLE PAGENBERG and SKW Schwarz and the French Plasseraud IP and Acumass.

Domain Name Protection Specialists

Some law firms specialize exclusively in domain name protection, such as UK's Lexsynergy, France's Dreyfus, and Italy's Studio Barbero. The USA is the only country with law firms, notably ESQwire, John Berryhill, JJN Solutions and Bernstein IP, specializing in defence and advisory services for domain owners.

Domain Registration Blocking Solutions

TMCH (Trademark Clearinghouse), managed by ICANN via Deloitte, is the official trademark validation system used to access most domain blocking services.

DPML and DPML Plus, by Identity Digital, block TMCH-verified trademarks across hundreds of TLDs operated by the registry. AdultBlock and AdultBlock+, from ICM Registry (a brand of GoDaddy Registry), block TMCH-verified terms in .XXX, .SEX, .PORN, and .ADULT. Part of the NameBlock platform, BrandLock is offered by ShortDot SA in partnership with other registries. It blocks TMCH-verified terms and variants across participating TLDs.

GlobalBlock and GlobalBlock+, developed by GoDaddy Registry, offer keyword-based blocking (TMCH not required) across 500+ TLDs. GlobalBlock+ includes homoglyph protection and broader variant rules.

Domain Intelligence

Domain data is a service provided by specialized registrars [24] . DomainTools is the world's leading provider of data for cybersecurity, including information of current and past domain name uses and registrants. Among the other major players are the American companies SecurityTrails and WhoisXMLAPI, and the Dutch company DataProvider. The Bulgarian company Edoms offers similar services with a specialization in expired domain names.

[24] These companies are generally accredited registrars but do not have any customers, as registrar status removes certain limitations on access to data provided by registries.

Domain Name Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity has become a key concern in the domain name sector. DNSSEC (Domain Name System Security Extensions) is increasingly adopted to secure DNS records with cryptographic signatures, protecting against threats such as cache poisoning and data interception.

Compliance with the NIS2 directive further encourages organizations to enhance their DNS security. This regulation imposes strict measures to protect digital infrastructures in businesses and essential services.

Email Protection

Protocols like SPF, DKIM, and DMARC are essential in preventing email spoofing and phishing. They ensure that only authorized servers can send emails on behalf of a domain, improving email security.

Key players in DMARC and email authentication include Dmarcian (USA), an early DMARC specialist; PowerDMARC (UAE/USA), offering full-stack domain protection; Red Sift (UK), focused on cloud-based email security; and DMARC Advisor (Netherlands), known for simple compliance tools.

PKI and Certificate Management

The PKI and Certificate Management sector secures digital communication and verifies online identities, with domain names playing a central role through SSL/TLS certificates. These certificates enable encrypted connections and confirm domain ownership.

Leaders include DigiCert (USA), a leading certificate authority known for enterprise-grade solutions, and Sectigo (USA), formerly Comodo CA, offering a wide range of digital certificates. GlobalSign, based in Belgium and part of Japan's GMO Internet Group, specializes in managed PKI services. Let's Encrypt (USA), a nonprofit, revolutionized the field with free and automated SSL issuance. ZeroSSL, owned by HID Global, also provides free and paid certificates with a focus on accessibility and ease of use.

Domain Name Monitoring and Brand Protection

Some brand protection technology companies specialize in domain name protection, management and disputes, leveraging AI-driven methods and digital monitoring technologies. US-based Corsearch is a global leader in this field. Tracer, based in the US, and Red Points, based in Spain, are also major players operating worldwide.

Holders of large portfolios of domain names, such as multinational groups, Internet companies or domain investors need domain name monitoring tools. Watchmydomains is a domain name management software package capable of returning information for all TLDs. It is owned by the Indian company Softnik, which also publishes DNPedia.com, a website providing statistics on historical and new gTLDs.

Authoritative DNS Infrastructure

DNS resolution is a free service provided when a domain name is registered. Some companies specialise in advanced DNS services for web hosting companies and large companies, such as providing faster DNS resolution, increasing DNS security or blocking advertising trackers. The major players of the market are large US companies.

Akamai is the historical leader for Content Delivery Networks (CDN), i.e. caching servers that enable high-traffic websites to save Internet bandwidth. Cloudflare, Google DNS, Cisco and AWS provide highly secure servers.

Domain Abuse Detection

Domain abuse detection focuses on identifying domains used for phishing, malware, spam, or other malicious activities by analysing DNS traffic, WHOIS data, and hosting behavior.

Spamhaus, based in Switzerland and the UK, is known for its global blocklists. CleanDNS, from the US, helps registrars and registries monitor abuse at scale. NetBeacon provides a standardized abuse reporting platform supported by industry stakeholders. IQ Global (Norway) is active in domain security and DNS-based threat intelligence.

Threat Detection and Response

The threat detection and response sector deals with identifying, analyzing, and responding to cyber threats across digital environments. It includes technologies that observe system activity, process external threat data, and act when suspicious behavior is detected. Domain names are often involved, as they help trace phishing, malware distribution, and communication with attacker infrastructure.

Cyber threat intelligence focuses on collecting and interpreting threat data. Recorded Future (USA, owned by Insight Partners) provides a platform aggregating large volumes of open-source and proprietary data. Mandiant (USA, part of Google Cloud) combines data analysis with observations from incident response operations.

Network security and Extended Detection and Response (XDR) cover systems that monitor traffic and endpoint behavior. Palo Alto Networks (USA) offers tools combining firewall and endpoint data. CrowdStrike (USA) and SentinelOne (USA) provide software that monitors and correlates activity on devices and networks.

Domain Name Technical Services

With ICANN's announcement of the next round of new gTLD applications, there has been a notable increase in demand for all kind of domain-related services. This surge is primarily captured by Corporate Registrars and Registry Service Providers, which are well-positioned to help organizations in navigating the complexities of acquiring and managing new gTLDs.

Registry Backends

Registry backends are companies that manage the technical operations for a given TLD. They are generally historical registries, as well as registrars that have expanded their range of services.

Three groups dominate the market. The registrar conglomerate Team Internet (formerly CentralNic) is a backend operator for around a hundred registries, including some with large registration volumes, such as .XYZ and .ICU. The two other main players are GoDaddy Registry (formerly Neustar) and Identity Digital (since the takeover of Afilias). Identity Digital combines the activities of registry and backend operator, for around two hundred extensions each [25].

The Chinese domain name service provider ZDNS is the technical operator of around twenty nTLDs, some of which enjoy high registration volumes. GMO Internet, the parent company of the Japanese registrar Onamae, is the technical operator of .TOKYO and dozens of other TLDs. Among the leaders until 2023, Verisign has dramatically diminished its registry backend activity.

Web3 Services

The rise of Web3 has led to the emergence of new domain-related services, though these remain niche offerings due to the still-limited market size. Endlessdomains aggregates the main blockchain domain registration services into a single platform, while also offering a marketplace for buying and selling domains. Other Web3 domains marketplaces include ENS Vision and GMB Domains.

Namebase provides a similar service but is focused exclusively on domains from the Handshake blockchain. Namestone specializes in creating subdomains for .ETH domains, catering to users within the Ethereum Name Service ecosystem.

Some ICANN-accredited registrars have enlarged their original services with a Web3 domain registrar offer. Nicnames and Namecheap encourage Web3 registrations for exploring new uses, while Encirca focuses on brand protection.

[25] The number of extensions under management is not a fully relevant indicator, as the number of registrations may vary a lot from one TLD to another.

Registrar Reseller Solutions and Software

Billing and Domain Management Software

Becoming a registrar does not require complex development. One can use **billing and domain management software such as the market leader WHMCS** (part of the WebPros group), or alternatives from smaller competitors like HostBill, Blesta and ClientExec. BoxBilling is a free, lightweight option suitable for small hosting setups, though it is less actively maintained.

Reseller Registration Services

White-label reseller registrars give access to their customers, mostly registrars, web hosting companies and domain investors, to **classic registrar functions (domain name registrations, renewals, transfers, etc.), without the need to be an accredited registrar themselves**.

Registration fees are generally close to cost price. Resellers get their profit from subscription fees and additional services such as email management, SSL certificates or website hosting. The main players in the resellers market are OpenSRS/Enom/Ascio (Tucows Group), CentralNic Reseller (Team Internet), Wild West Domains (GoDaddy), ResellerClub (Newfold Digital), InternetX (United-Internet), Realtime Register (Your.online) and OpenProvider.

Consulting Services

The most common domain name services like domain dispute, domain acquisitions or portfolio management are generally provided by corporate registrars.

Among the dedicated structures for domain name consultancy, Valideus, a subsidiary of the UK-based Com Laude Group, and the German company Dotzon provide technical assistance and consultancy services for registries and registrars. Other domain name consulting firms include the American companies Interisle and ZookNIC for reports and market studies, as well as FairWinds Partners for brand protection.

Part Three. Secondary Market Players

As the Internet has expanded, domain names have emerged as valuable digital assets. As key elements of online presence, they are now actively bought and sold, giving rise to a specialized industry dedicated to domain trading and brokerage. This market involves investors, brokers, and marketplaces that facilitate transactions, often involving high-value domain names.

Domain Trade Services

An Asymmetrical and Heterogeneous Domain Trade Market

The domain name secondary market comprises two totally different segments: EMD and brandable domains vs. SEO domains.

A Sluggish Market for EMDs and Brandable Domains

The market for Exact Match Domains (EMD) and brandable domains is the oldest, with sellers generally being domain name investors and buyers being companies, individuals, or brokers acting on behalf of third parties. The demand is made up of an infinity of players, generally companies, that may buy from time to time one domain in the secondary market. On the contrary, the supply is made up of a very limited number of players, called domain investors, and which aim at selling many domains.

The typical domain investor is often depicted lounging in his luxury car or sunbathing by their pool. In practice, the reality is less glamorous. **Most domain name investors are not making a profit, and domain names are very rarely their primary business.** Domain sales are occasional, by the unit or in limited quantities, and occur when a need arises.

The general public's perception of the domaining activity is skewed by the fact that one can find exuberant offering prices for domains one sale, but nobody buys them at those prices. Also, the media and social networks often romanticize record sales. Most of them are biased, fictitious or exceptional cases that are not representative of the market prices.

The Buoyant Market for SEO Domains

SEO domain names are domains that have already been used in the past and still have quality incoming links. Those so-called expired domains for SEO are part of the domain name secondary market, but they follow their own logic and dynamics.

In contrast to EMD and brandable domains, buyers are generally not looking for one specific domain but rather focus on SEO metrics. They can buy large quantities of SEO domains if the investment is profitable for their SEO. Another difference is that sellers are not domain investors, but companies specialized in expired domains registration, called name catchers. The market is dynamic, and the imbalance between supply and demand is strongly in favor of the latter.

The buyers of such domains are SEO agencies and consultants and website publishers. They use expired domain names to obtain better positions in Google using specific techniques (e.g. 301 redirects, PBNs, etc.) or create websites to sell sponsored articles.

Another particularity of the SEO domains market is that the supply does not come from the largest markets for Google. In the USA and Canada for example, established SEO agencies tend to avoid techniques prohibited by Google, because of the risk of having their clients penalised. The market has on the contrary been strong for over a decade in several European countries such as France or the Netherlands, where Google's supervision is less strict than in the USA.

SEO domains have also historically been popular in Asian countries like Japan, China and South Korea. Since the beginning of the 2020's, buyers also come from emerging countries such as Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, thanks to an increase of traffic monetization.

Domain Name Buyers

There are no players in the market whose activity includes recurrent purchases of EMD and brandable domain names in the secondary market. Domain investors and website publishers rarely buy over the counter. Their main sources of supply are domains available for registration, domainers private marketplaces and expired domains.

On the contrary, SEO professionals and website publishers regularly purchase SEO domains, sometimes in bulk quantities. For link building professionals and platforms, expired domain names are often a central element of their activity.

Platforms for selling sponsored articles have existed since the mid-2000s. Germany was a pioneer in this market. Google considered and still considers that the purpose of selling links is to manipulate search engine results, and do not hesitate to blacklist link sellers, platforms and sometimes even buyers. From 2015, the offer began however to become more structured, with practices that Google was hardly able to detect or at least differentiate from link exchanges. Taking advantage of the inaction of Google, thousands of link building platforms and agencies emerged in countries such as Germany, France, Spain, India and Bangladesh. The core activity is to grab expired domain names with good SEO metrics, turn it into a small site and start selling sponsored articles. Thus, the demand for SEO domains is high in areas with strong CPC, such as finance, housing, tourism and gambling.

Domain Names Sellers

The Traditional American Premium .COM Model

The domain trade business originated in the USA, and the vast majority of the best-known domain investors still reside there. Unlike in Europe, where domain investors are generally discreet and even tend to hide their identity, their American counterparts are often assertive and sometimes public figures [26]. Storytelling is omnipresent, with the main message being that domain names are rare, high-potential assets whose value is increasing exponentially.

In 2008, a worldwide publication [27] highlighted the exceptional prospects for the domain name sector. It was mostly based on the purchase of Marchex for 164 million dollars of around 100,000 domain names

[26] For example, the late celebrity lawyer Howard Neu founded the T.R.A.F.F.I.C. conference, artist Lana Del Rey is the daughter of domainer Rob Grant and the famous lawyer Lisa Bloom is married to the domainer Braden Pollock.

[27] Ham K, The Domain Game: How People Get Rich From Internet Domain Names, Paperback, 2008

from the American domain investor Yun Ye. Seventeen years later, the book's prophecy has been partly fulfilled, as the major domain name portfolios have almost all been bought out. Pioneers such as Mike Berkens, Kevin Ham, and even the legendary Frank Shilling[28] have sold their entire domain name portfolios, in the cases mentioned to GoDaddy, but generally for relatively modest total amounts.

In practice, domain names are only occasionally sold. In some countries, it is not even permitted to resell them, or restricted, like with the Indian .IN TLD. ICANN itself barely tolerates the activity, considering that a domain name should not be registered or purchased solely for resale.

The American-style domaining adventure has even been a fiasco for part of those who have ventured into it. Examples of failures include Kuwaiti Thunayan K. Al-Ghanim, whose company Future Media Architects counted up to 120,000 domain names, and the pioneer Demand Media, which later became RightSide, and Marchex.

Most domain names on sale belong to beginner domain investors that let them expire when renewals come up, then abandon the activity. Even for confirmed domain investors, sales are generally too sporadic to support a structure with employees and a business strategy. Most companies involved in buying and selling domain names have developed complementary services such as domain brokerage, drop catching or website publishing.

American Domain Investors

The American domainer Mike Mann owns one of the largest domain portfolios in the world, with a few hundred thousand domain names, almost all in .COM. Alongside headliners such as SEO.com and Phone.com, most of the portfolio is made up of domain names with a low probability of sale, whatever the price. Some well-informed sources consider Mike Mann’s business to be minimally profitable, a situation that can be generalized to the whole domaining industry.

A self-proclaimed "Domain King", Rick Schwartz is the one of the first instigators of the narrative about the exceptional value of domain names, sometimes by means of false claims, participation in dubious auctions and other tricks which are common in the sector. He has made a few sales worth several hundred thousand and even millions of dollars, but his domain name portfolio now comprises only a few thousand units, the majority of which have little to no market value[29] . He declares himself to be in "semi-retirement".

Like Rick Schwartz, Digimedia founder Scott Day is part of the American narrative on the wonders of domaining. This former watermelon farmer has turned to domain names, with a few gems to his credit, such as Recipes.com and Shops.com. Digimedia owns around 1,000 domain names of high average quality, which it monetises via advertising links and sells when bids are high enough.

Fred Mercaldo (Geocentric Media) is an American geo domain investor specializing in .COM city domain names, including Scottsdale.com and hundreds of others. Founder of Castello Cities Internet Network

[28] Often cited as the symbol of domaining success and a living example of the American Dream, this East German immigrant is said to have invested all his savings from his modest home in domain names, a bold move that a few years later made him a multimillionaire and the owner of his own island.

[29] During a live podcast in 2014, where he was invited to share advice (https://www.domainsherpa.com/rick-schwartz-handreg-interview/), Rick Schwartz registered 364 domain names live, explaining his strategy. Seven years later, around a hundred of them are available for registration again and none have been sold.

(CCIN), Michael Castello has acquired several .COM domains for American cities and other tourist themes. The particularity of these two is that they developed websites financed by local advertising, but they were not profitable, and the domain names are now for sale again.

There are also owners of premium domain names whose primary business is not domain names, such as Brent Oxley, founder of HostGator.

Other Domain Investors

China is home to several leading domain name investors such as Yue Dai, including successful Internet entrepreneurs looking for speculative investments like cryptocurrencies, Web3 assets, and to a lesser extent domain names.

South Korea is a world pioneer in domain name investing, with a distinction not always noticeably clear with cybersquatting.

India has a large community of domain investors, but none of them with a large portfolio. The Indian market is handicapped by regulations from the national registry, which forbids registrars to buy and sell .IN domain names.

Massive Investments: HugeDomains Model

With premium domains being limited, alternative investment strategies have emerged in the early 2010’s, replacing quality by quantity.

HugeDomains is a private U.S. company whose main business is to register domain names in generic extensions that have not been renewed by their owners, and to offer them for sale. The company also owns the drop catching world leader, Dropcatch, and the registrar Namebright. HugeDomains owned between three and four million domains in early 2025, according to unofficial estimates, making it the undisputed world leader.

The company's business model consists of optimizing the business by minimizing human intervention as far as possible, except for the sales negotiation part, which is managed by agents.

For its acquisitions, the company cleverly uses auctions from its customers on its platform and from third parties on other platforms to identify domain names with potential value. HugeDomains' basic reasoning is that if someone places a reservation on a domain name and/or makes a bid, then it has potential value. For example, every domain name obtained via its Dropcatch Discount service[30] is tested by an algorithm. If it is a sought-after term, in dot COM and without hyphens or numbers, it is not allocated to the customer who placed the backorder with the highest amount but is attributed to HugeDomains. Dropcatch indicates "Partner" as the result, taking care not to explain to the customer the customer that they have just done free research work for HugeDomains.

HugeDomains uses a similar technique on GoDaddy's ExpiredAuctions. Even when a bid is made in the last few seconds, HugeDomains' robots will bid higher, up to $500 if necessary, as soon as its algorithm considers that there is a potential resale value for the domain name. This second example highlights a flaw in

[30]Dropcatch Discount allows users to place reservations (backorders) on expired COM and NET domain names, at a price set by the customer, between $13 and $58.

this system, which is based solely on automation. In the absence of human supervision, HugeDomains' purchasing decisions are often irrational, which casts doubts on the company's profitability [31].

Other Large Portfolio Strategies

Following a similar strategy as HugeDomains, a few domain investors own very large portfolios at around 100,000 units or more, particularly in Germany with Martin Steinkamp (Nicsell) and Stefan Wiegard (Atop Capital) and in the Netherlands with Remco Doeve (Dovendi) and Ivo van Soast (Nomio24). Other large players include Gregg Mc Nair (Australia), Ryan De Corsie Ewen (UK), Thomas Dolezal (Austria) and David Czincenheim (France)

Obviously, the processes of domain purchases and sales are automated, with some domains being cybersquatting domains and regularly subject to UDRP and other extrajudicial procedures.

Domain Brokerage

The purchase or sale of a valuable domain name often requires expert advice and negotiations, which are the services offered by brokerage firms. In practice, they are often structures managed by domain investors and designed to sell their own domain names, but also those of partners and customers, to improve the profitability of their business.

Most domain brokerage agencies offer domain buying and selling services but also domain appraisals and strategic consulting.

Because of the risk of non-payment or non-delivery of the domain names, it is also often necessary to use a trusted third party. The world leader in domain name transactions is the American company Escrow.com. Sedo also offers this service, known as escrow, as do various registrars and law firms.

Major Players

Founded by domain name broker Andrew Rosener, MediaOptions.com is one of the most widely used brokerage companies for premium domain names. It publishes a catalogue of Dot COM domains on its website, usually without a list price.

Other major brokerage agencies include the U.S.-based DomainHoldings, Brannans, Defining.com, Saw.com and DomainAdvisors, as well as India's Namekart, Canada's DomainAgents, Australia's NameCorp.

Specialized Brokering Services

Unlike most competitors, Lumis concentrates solely on acquisitions for its clients.

The Chinese companies 62.com, founded by Raymond Liu and DN.com from Jack Dai are specialized in the Chinese market.

[31] HugeDomains is not a public company and does not publish its financial results, leading to various hypotheses about the company's goal and purpose.

Other brokers have chosen niches such as GGRG.com, run by the Italian domainer Giuseppe Graziano, which conducts business notably with China and specialises in liquid domains, i.e. short domains made up of letters, numbers or compounds.

Founded by Monte Cahn, RightoftheDot offers a consultancy and auction service for the acquisition of domain names, mainly in new TLDs, or auctioning and selling new TLDs themselves; however demand is still weak.

Jordi Gasull 's NameAgency and other small-scale structures enable well-known domain name investors such as the Booth Brothers (BQDN), Ammar Kubba, and Ali Zandi to supplement the income from the sale of their own domain names.

Drop Catching Solutions

Every day, more than a hundred thousand domain names, some of them of high quality, are not renewed by their owners and are said to have expired. From this date, a period called "grace period" begins - 30 days for gTLD and most ccTLD- during which it is possible to reactivate the domain name, sometimes at an additional cost. After this period, the domain name can no longer be renewed. It then enters a process, the duration and phases of which vary depending on whether it is a generic or geographical extension, and which ends with its deletion. It can then be registered again on a first-come, first-served basis.

The famous website Expireddomains.net provides exhaustive lists of expired domain names. In practice, the most coveted domain names are snapped up as soon as they become available by specialist companies called name catchers. The only way to obtain them is to place backorders with these companies, which vary according to the type of extension. This makes it possible to acquire the domain name for a cost generally ranging from a few dollars to $79, depending on the service used, or, where applicable, to take part in an auction with other people who have placed a pre-reservation on the domain name in question. The operation is free and there is nothing to pay if the domain name is not obtained.

Name Catchers for gTLDs

Dropcatch and Snapnames

In practice, recovering domain names with COM, NET or ORG extensions is very simple. All you have to do is place a backorder with Dropcatch and Snapnames. With a probability of over 90%, one of the two will obtain the domain name and allocate it to the person who reserved it or will organise an auction if at least two people have backordered the domain. Until 2023, this rate was above 99%, but Singapore's Gname, with its 500 ICANN-accredited offices, can now beat Snapnames and Dropcatch.

Founded by Andrew and Jeffrey Reberry, Dropcatch is the expired domain name drop catching service of US company HugeDomains, the world's largest domain name holder. Dropcatch is the leader for the three historical gTLDs (.COM, .NET, .ORG). To achieve this performance, the company owns over 1200 ICANN registrars, amounting to about 45 % of the total.

With two identical snap services, Snapnames and Namejet, part of the Newfold Digital group, is number two in the sector. Its performance is based on a network of several hundred ICANN registrars, created or acquired solely for this purpose.

There are other services such as Dynadot, SAV and Catched. These are only effective for recovering domain names in less-used extensions such as .INFO, .IO or .WS, as these are not processed by Dropcatch and Snapnames/Namejet and Gname tend to neglect them.

Prerelease

Given the sometimes considerable sums spent on auctioning expired domain names, the largest U.S. registrars have come up with the idea of putting domain names not renewed by their customers up for sale just before the end of the grace period, a process known as 'prerelease'. Thanks to its customers, GoDaddy earns hundreds of thousands of dollars every day by selling domain names that do not belong to it. Networksolutions (via Snapnames and Namejet), Namecheap, Dynadot, Namebright, Namesilo and other large registrars also offer this service whether via their own platforms or via GoDaddy or another partner.

The prerelease principle does not exist for European ccTLDs and is uncommon for other ccTLDs.

Name Catchers for ccTLDs

The major name catchers such as Dropcatch and Snapnames offer backorders for a very limited number of extensions, including no ccTLDs. Buyers of ccTLD expired domains therefore must turn to other players, of which there are many because each specialise in one TLD or a limited number of TLDs.

The vast majority are companies with no more than a handful of employees, and for whom drop catching is not their sole activity. The only medium-sized player is Germany's Nicsell. The company is owned by Martin Steimkamp, a German domainer with one of the largest portfolios of domain names in the world.

For the vast majority of TLDs, there are no name catchers, for reasons of lack of a sufficient market and/or administrative constraints.

Domain Marketplaces

There are a multitude of buy-sell platforms on the domain name market, but only a small proportion of them are active. These platforms are frequented only by sellers, the majority of whom are offering domain names of no value whatsoever, with unrealistic price expectations.

Generalist Platforms

GoDaddy, who also owns Afternic and Dan.com, is the world leader for domain name buying and selling marketplaces and services. As Dan was becoming a significant competitor for Afternic and GoDaddy, the latter bought him out in 2022. The business was discontinued in 2025.

Sedo, based in Germany, is the leader for buying and selling domain names in European languages.

The main advantage of Afternic and Sedo is that the domain names from their catalog which are offered for sale at a fixed price are displayed when users search for available domain name. A domain name availability search at GoDaddy, Namecheap, Ionos, and many more registrars will not only display available domain names, but also the exact domain name with its price [32].

There are several dozens of other platforms for selling domain names, of which only a small proportion are used. These include the registrars Dynadot, Namesilo and Name, as well as the name catchers Snapnames, Namejet, Dropcatch and Nicsell, to name just a few in North America and in Europe.

Specialized Platforms

Some platforms specialize in a particular type of domain name, such as Atom (formerly Squadhelp), Brandbucket and Brandpa for brandable domain names, and SEO.domains and DomainCoasters for SEO domain names.

Many platforms are aimed at players in a given geographical market: 4.CN for Chinese domain names, Aftermarket.pl for Polish domain names, etc. The world leader in buying and selling websites, Flippa, also has a domain name section.

[32] The price displayed by registrars is slightly higher than that on the Afternic or Sedo platforms, because it includes the registrar's commission. Most registrars partner with GoDaddy and Afternic, others with Sedo and some with both.

Domain Portfolio Monetization and Management

Domain Parking

Domain name parking is the practice of registering a domain name without associating it with an active website. This domain can be used to display a message or an advertisement.

Most registrars use domain parking to take advantage of the visibility of domain names not used by their customers. Domainers, on the other hand, use it to make a profit from the domain names, thanks to the clicks that visitors make on the advertisements. Very substantial until around 2010, the parking pages revenues have strongly declined to become almost insignificant. Most parking pages companies have disappeared or been bought out.

The leading solutions on the market are offered by Sedo, Bodis and ParkingCrew. Afternic Parking offers lower revenues. GoDaddy CashParking is a pay-as-you-go solution offered only for domain names hosted by GoDaddy. Secondary solutions include ParkLogic, DomainActive, Premium Traffic LTD and StakeWeb.

Table 6. Domain Names Monetization with Parking

For a long time, this famous photo entitled 'Parked Domain Girl' symbolized the typical parking page, as it generated higher revenues than other automated systems, despite its simplicity.. [33]

[33] During the golden age of parking (2005-2010), engineers and researchers from all over the world were working on maximizing parking revenues by all the possible means, including sophisticated automated websites generated via AI. However, none of parking systems was able to achieve better results than simple photos and links.

Other Monetization Solutions

Web traffic can be monetized through various types of services like affiliate links, paid redirections, display ads, sponsored posts, push notifications, or CPA offers. These solutions fit well with website traffic but not domain traffic, which is generally insufficient in terms of quality and quantity.

Domain investors with quality traffic can however monetize their traffic by creating campaigns with solutions tailored for domains such as TONIC. MailboxPark also pays domain owners for each commercial email received.

There is growing interest in AI-driven solutions for domain name development, particularly services that generate text, images, and other content to enhance website creation and branding. Hundreds of tools and solutions have recently emerged, but none of them has yet specifically addressed the market of developing unused domains.

Domain Management Solutions

Domain management tools allow for domain investors to manage, market, and sell their domain names more efficiently, typically through custom landing pages, portfolio organization, lead tracking, and analytics.

Efty is a platform for domain name management and sales, offering parking pages and statistics.

Also specializing in domain name sales, Fruits offers a simple interface that allows for the selection of custom landing pages.

The Chinese domain portfolio management platform Sudos offers tools for domain investors to centralize portfolio management, synchronize pricing across multiple marketplaces, and create secure, SSL-enabled landing pages.

OpusDNS is a promising similar service from InternetX that is expected to start in mid-2025.

Secondary solutions include DomainMarketPro and DNHat.

Non Profit Organizations

Technical Entities

DNS Infrastructure

Several technical institutes have developed strong expertise in domain name infrastructure.

The Internet Systems Consortium (ISC) plays a foundational role by maintaining core DNS infrastructure and developing BIND, one of the most widely used DNS servers.

NLnet Labs contributes critical open-source DNS software such as Unbound and NSD, widely adopted by registries and operators.

DNS-OARC strengthens DNS security and resilience through collaborative research and large-scale data sharing.

DNS resolvers translate domain names into IP addresses, making web access possible. Their speed, privacy, and threat-blocking capabilities directly affect user security and experience. Google Public DNS (United States) is known for speed and reliability. Cloudflare (United States) emphasizes privacy with minimal logging. Quad9 (Switzerland) blocks malicious domains and is transparency focused. Cisco Umbrella (USA, formerly OpenDNS) adds filtering and security for home and business use. NextDNS (USA/EU) offers advanced customization and analytics.

Domain Dispute Resolution

Domain dispute resolution is usually handled through arbitration under the Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy (UDRP), avoiding traditional courts. The main arbitral bodies include the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the Forum (formerly NAF), both authorized by ICANN. Other accredited providers include the Asian Domain Name Dispute Resolution Centre (ADNDRC) and the Czech Arbitration Court (CAC). These organizations offer fast, document-based proceedings to resolve cases involving cybersquatting, bad-faith registration, or trademark conflicts.

For country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs), dispute resolution varies. Some ccTLDs adopt UDRP or modified versions handled by these same providers — for instance, .CO (Colombia), .ME (Montenegro), and .TV (Tuvalu) are managed through WIPO. Others use national systems: France (.FR) relies on the AFNIC PARL EXPERT procedure; Canada (.CA) uses the CDRP via Resolution Canada. In contrast, countries like Germany (.DE) or Russia (.RU) require disputes to be resolved through their national court systems, with no formal extrajudicial procedure in place.

Professional Associations

Trademark Associations

INTA (International Trademark Association) is a global association of trademark owners and professionals specializing in trademark and intellectual property (IP) services. It organises an annual world congress largely attended by corporate registrars.

The International Association for the Protection of Intellectual Property (AIPPI), the International Federation of Intellectual Property Attorneys (FICPI), and in Europe the European Community Trademark Association (ECTA) and MARQUES are also key professional organizations for legal practitioners dealing with domain name issues.

Private Domain Names Associations

Based in the USA, the Internet Commerce Association (ICA) is a non-profit trade association representing the domain name buying and selling industry. Also in the USA, the Domain Name Association is a grouping of the major registrars and registries, particularly in the United States.

The Brand Registry group specializes in the use of brand top-level domains.

IT

Based in Germany, eco is Europe's leading Internet Trade Association. Domain names are managed by the Names and Numbers Steering Committee.

Communication and Marketing

The Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) is the leading international association dedicated to interactive advertising. Like the broader communication sector, it often overlooks the issue of domain names, despite their clear connection to digital communication.

Media and Events

Blogs and Informational Websites

Domain Industry Blogs and Magazines

Blogs and magazines specializing in the domain industry are few and far between.

Domain Incite, run by Kevin Murphy, offers analysis of the domain name market, registry and registrar activities, and ICANN policy developments. The Internet Commerce Association's blog focuses more on business practices and advice.

CircleID provides info on the technical, legal, and governance aspects of the Internet, with contributions from external writers. Around the Table is a new blog dedicated to Internet governance

Those specific aspects are also addressed by blogs such as Fairwinds Partners, JJN Solutions and Goldstein Report, but with much less frequent articles.

Published monthly by German eco, dotmagazine is an e-magazine on the Internet industry, with focus and domain names and web hosting.

The dotBrand Observatory is a promotional website by Com Laude about having one's own top-level domains.

Domain Investment Blogs

Numerous domain investment blogs and magazines exist. The leading publications are DN Journal, Domain Name Wire and Domaining.com, two magazines and an aggregator whose editorial line focuses on the buying and selling of domain names. Other similar but smaller blogs include OnlineDomain.com, The Domains, DomainInvesting.com, TLD Investors, DomainGang, and Crunch.id.

Forums and Social Networks

Half a dozen domaining forums are available in English. Domain name forums are in decline, partly because of the loss of popularity of this format, but also because they were historically frequented by domain investors, a population that is also declining.

Namepros.com is the leading domain name forum. It mainly features sections for buying and selling domain names. Dnforum.com was historically the leader, but was abandoned, then relaunched in 2017, without managing to recapture the success of the past. Founder of the Domain Summit, Helmuts Meskonis is currently the owner of Dnforum, Acordomains.co.uk and several other historical forums.

Other key forums include the Indian forum Inforum.in and Domain Name Canada.

Many webmaster forums have also a well-developed domain name section, such as BlackHatWorld, Warrior Forum, WebmasterWorld, WebhostingTalk or DigitalPoint.

DomainCord is a domain investor Discord community with insights and opportunities.

Most English-language domain name Facebook groups are of no use whatsoever. They are frequented by novice sellers who post offers for worthless domain names, often at unreasonable prices, which therefore almost never sell.

Domain Name Videos, Webinars and Podcasts

Institutional and Corporate Content

As in many industries, several major companies and organizations in the domain name sector host webinars and produce video content for YouTube channels and other platforms. **ICANN uses such audiovisual means for their free online courses** on topics such as Internet governance, DNS, and how the Internet works. Similarly, the European Union Intellectual Property Office publishes a portal to improve one's knowledge of intellectual property. MarkMonitor offers webinars focused on domain name management and security. Lastly, ABC Productions hosts the Domain Name Law Podcast (DNL Show).

Domaining Audiovisual Content

Most webinars, podcasts, and YouTube channels about domain names focus on domain investing. Formerly DNAcademy, GoDaddy Domain Academy is a course aimed at teaching how to invest in domain names. The American domaining magazine Domain Name Wire offers a weekly podcast.

Other domain investment podcasts include those hosted by Andrew Rosener (DomainSherpa), Alvin Brown (Kickstart Commerce), Josh Reason (Digital Fortune), Keith de Boer (Brandable Insider), as well as Chris Zuiker and Youness Kasmi.

Events

Domain Name Institutional Events

The main meetings in the domain name sector are the ICANN conferences, which are held four times a year, in each continent. They bring together thousands of participants who can attend many parallel conferences and debates, with simultaneous translation. ICANN also organizes regional events such as the Middle East DNS Forum and APAC DNS Forum.

For registrars, registries and the domain industry in general, ICANN meetings serve primarily as an opportunity for business meetings.

IETF meetings, RIPE's and to a lesser extent other Regional Internet Registries meetings are major technical gatherings on the development and coordination of Internet infrastructure.

Other key events are organized by registrars and registries, such as Centr Jamboree, Germany's DomainPulse and Baltic Domain Days, all in Europe.

Domain Industry Conferences

The largest private-owned conferences are NamesCon in the USA, Nordic Domain Days in Sweden, London's DomainSummit and France's NDDCamp. USA's Dominion and DomainerExpo are smaller events focusing on domaining and Web3 domains.

Other Events and Conferences Including Domain Names

Focusing on Internet infrastructure and cloud computing, The German giant trade fair Cloudfest is largely attended by registrars and registries.

The INTA Annual Meeting is a major global event for trademark and IP professionals. Other IP events bringing together IP professionals include the ECTA Annual Conference and Belgrade IP Conference.

Several major world Internet events such as the Internet Governance Forum, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)and NETmundial also include domain name-related topics, especially regarding Internet governance.

Key Individuals

The domain name industry comprises many companies and organizations with a wide variety of specialities. From this ecosystem emerge personalities whose activity related to domain names is not only linked to the position they hold but corresponds to a strong centre of interest, sanctioned by publications, conferences, interviews, etc [34] .

The following selection features portraits of some of the most influential people in the domain name industry.

Institutional Figures

Internet Pioneers and Technical Authorities

The Web was invented in 1989 in Geneva at CERN by British physicist **Tim Berners-Lee**. However, the Internet—the infrastructure behind the Web—was developed by Robert Kahn and Vinton Cerf, who created the TCP/IP protocol in the mid-1970s. Another key figure is American computer scientist Steve Crocker, who initiated the RFC system and contributed to the early development of ARPANET.

Among other Internet pioneers can be mentioned Ira Magaziner, who shaped early Internet policy, François Flückiger, who advanced web development at CERN, Esther Dyson, who chaired ICANN's first board, and Louis Pouzin, inventor of the datagram concept.

These key historical figures remain moral authorities in the Internet community but no longer play a decisive role in shaping the current direction of the domain name system.

Many world-class domain name figures continue the legacy of technical authorities in the domain name system, such as Anne-Marie Eklund Löwinder (Swedish DNSSEC pioneer), Jun Murai (Japanese, “The Father of Internet”), Andrew Sullivan (Canadian DNS expert), Paul Vixie (American, key developer of BIND), Nii Narku Quaynor (Ghanaian, Internet pioneer in Africa), Milton Mueller (American, Internet governance scholar), Daniel Fink (Brazilian, Internet governance advocate), Japp Akkerhuis (Dutch, DNS security expert), Andrzej Bartosiewicz (Polish, DNS security expert), Mike Silber (South African, Internet policy specialist) and Kenny Huang (Taiwanese, Internet infrastructure leader). However, **the new trend is individuals with less technical stature and more interest in Internet governance**.

ICANN Officials

ICANN is a vast and intricate organization whose structure includes numerous sections and layers of decision-making. It involves experts from technical, governmental, commercial, and civil society backgrounds.

At its head, **Kurt Erik Lindqvist serves as President and CEO**. Among other influential people, Tripti Sinha chairs the Board of Directors, while Maarten Botterman, her predecessor, led during key institutional phases. Leon Felipe Sanchez sits on the Board, contributing legal insight and a focus on user interests. Becky Burr has long influenced ICANN’s legal and accountability frameworks. Chris Mondini

[34] Many leaders in the domain name sector have reached their positions thanks to their managerial qualities, which are not specific to domain names. Such people are currently influential, but domain names represent only a stage in their career.

handles international stakeholder engagement. Paul Twomey, as a former CEO, helped ICANN expand globally.

Kim Davies manages the IANA functions, ensuring the stability of Internet core resources. Lawrence Strickling played a pivotal role in the transition of U.S. oversight of ICANN. Sally Costerton now serves as Senior Advisor to the President and SVP of Global Stakeholder Engagement. Veni Markovski supports government and stakeholder relations, especially in Eastern Europe. Rodrigo de la Parra leads regional engagement efforts across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Public Representatives

Most countries maintain dedicated officials who specialize in domain name governance and actively participate in ICANN and other Internet-related bodies.

Western countries like the USA, Canada, Germany, France or Australia count well-known representatives. There are fewer notable Asian individuals in domain name governance, partly due to cultural factors, as Asian countries tend to emphasize institutional roles over individual recognition. The prominent figures from regions like Africa and Latin America are not numerous either, because these regions carry less geopolitical and economic weight in the global Internet infrastructure.

Canada's Byron Holland is CEO of CIRA and an ICANN Board member. Andreas Musielak (Germany) is a leading registry executive, former COO of DENIC, and incoming CEO of nic.at. Pierre Bonis is the CEO of AFNIC, with a key role in Internet governance circles in Europe and at the global level, through organizations like CENTR and ICANN. Lucky Masilela is a South African executive who leads ZACR and Registry Africa and has served on AFRINIC's board to support digital inclusion across the continent.

Civil Society Experts

Several influential figures in the domain name space come from related organizations and are active across ICANN and other Internet governance bodies. Doreen Bogdan-Martin (ITU), Bertrand de La Chapelle (Internet & Jurisdiction Policy Network), and Jovan Kurbalija (DiploFoundation) are regularly involved in high-level digital policy forums.

Within the Internet Society and the At-Large community, key participants include Lynn St. Amour, Markus Kummer, Jeff Bedser, Sébastien Bachollet and Olivier Crépin-Leblond.

From Private Interests...

The unique structure of ICANN, being participatory, open, and democratic, allows the most powerful interest groups to stay informed in real time about discussions and to exert influence. A few hundred non-executive members participating in ICANN meetings and other domain name organizations mainly serve as **lobbyists for companies and other groups of interests**.

Among the tech Giants exerting influence at ICANN can be mentioned Google with Crystal Ondo, Meta with Mohamed El Bashir or Akamai with Christian Kaufmann. In the domain name sector, most of the largest private registries and registrars also have their representatives with key positions at ICANN, such as for example Keith Drazek for Verisign, Ashley Heineman and Sébastien Ducos for GoDaddy, Owen Smigelski for Namecheap, and Ashley LaBolle for Tucows.

Othe key individuals include Nigel Roberts (UK/Channel Islands) which defends ccTLD interests and has served on ICANN Board. Katrin Ohlmer and Dirk Krischenowski are German domain policy experts active in ICANN and other institutions, known for launching the .BERLIN TLD and promoting digital identity strategies for cities and regions.

Jothan Frakes and Kristian Ørmen are long-time industry insiders who has worked with numerous registries and registrars, helping shape business models and registry strategies. Michele Neylon, CEO of the registrar Blacknight, is active in ICANN processes and known for his advocacy on behalf of registrars and small businesses. With extensive experience at ICANN and Nominet, Phil Buckingham provides consultancy services, particularly in the new gTLD space.

... To Conflicts of Interest?

Some figures like Paul Kane, a British domain entrepreneur known for his controversial role in managing the .IO TLD, or Fadi Chehadé (former CEO of ICANN) and Akram Atallah (former head of ICANN's Global Domains Division and later CEO of Donuts) have moved between public-interest institutions and private domain companies in ways that raise legitimate concerns about conflicts of interest. Their transitions from regulatory roles into leadership positions at major industry players have sparked debate over transparency and governance integrity in the domain name ecosystem.

Business Leaders

Successful Entrepreneurs

The most prominent figures in the domain name industry are often pioneers who launched ventures in the 2000s or earlier, typically as web hosting providers. This includes the Indian billionaire brothers Bhavin and Divyank Turakhia who founded Directi, which still owns Radix, Masatoshi Kumagai, founder of GMO Internet, Octava Klaba, co-founder of OVHCloud, and Jonas Dhaenens, founder of Combell and CEO of team.blue.

Successes with similar profiles are also notable among registrars, such as Richard Kirkendall, founder and CEO of Namecheap; Todd Han, who founded Dynadot in 2002 and Xavier Buck, co-founder of EuroDNS; All remain active in the domain registration business today.

Others have switched to the NgTLD space, such as Ray King, who now focuses on Top Level Design, Jay Westerdal who sold DomainTools and now runs Top Level Spectrum, and Paul Stahura, founder of Enom and now with Identity Digital. The NgTLD sector also counts several new successful entrepreneurs, such as Daniel Negari who founded XYZ and owns 35 TLDs, or Lars Jensen with ShortDot.

In the blockchain domains space, Nick Johnson founded the Ethereum Name Service (ENS) and Matthew Gould, UnstoppableDomains. Fred Hsu, who co-founded Oversee.net, now invests in D3, a web 2.5 project.

Domain Name Executives

The domain name industry includes renowned experts with extensive experience at some of its leading companies. Among them are American Joseph Alagna, currently with IT.com; Australian Ben Crawford, now CEO of Com Laude; German Christian Voß, who recently joined GMO Registry; Frenchman Arnaud

Franquinet of Gandi; Briton James Tuplin at Bodis; British Prudence Malinki with MarkMonitor; and Canadian Robbie Birkner at OpusDNS.

Legal Specialists

Most renowned lawyers specializing in domain names are based in the United States, where the value of the domains is often sufficient to justify legal expenses. Ari Goldberger and Jason Schaeffer of ESQwire, along with John Berryhill, are well known for defending domain owners. UDRP panelists like Zak Muscovitch and Jeffrey Neuman also offer broader services, such as price negotiation and drafting of purchase agreements.

US attorney Gerald M. Levine, British national David Taylor of Hogan Lovells and Hungarian Ivett Pavlovics are renowned authors and speakers in the field of intellectual property.

SEO Experts

SEO and domain names are two complementary fields with great potential for entrepreneurs who master both, such as the Australian expert in traffic generation and monetization David Warmuz, founder of Trillion (formerly Treillan); Bulgarian Kalin Karakaheyov and his huge portfolio with SEO.domains; French Alan Cladx with a link-building services based on one of the largest PBNs in Europe; or US-based expired domain specialist Jeremiah Selander, founder of Catches.io.

Conclusion

This work presents a current snapshot of the domain name sector, without intent of medium and long-term predictions. According to the author, they have no place on the Internet [35].

We hope to receive many comments and suggestions, so that we will be able to launch a new edition soon, with a general update and greater accuracy in some sectors and regions (ie. Asia, Africa), where information is currently difficult to collect.

[35] In most sectors, it is common and relevant to make predictions based on current trends. However, this is not the case for the Internet sector, where the lack of entry barriers and the constant birth and death of new services, standards and technologies makes it unpredictable. From our perspective, the stakes for companies lie less in anticipating the future than in being able to seize the opportunities of the moment and to act rapidly in the right directions when changes are necessary.

Glossary

- ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution): Out-of-court procedure for settling domain name disputes in the EU.
- ccTLD (country-code Top-Level Domain): top-level domain corresponding to a territory or country.
- CENTR: Council of European National Top-level domain Registries.
- DNS (Domain Name Server): machines on which domain name information is installed.
- EMD is the acronym for Exact Match Domain.
- EPP (Extensible Provision Protocol) is a standard for communication via XML messages between registrars and the registry. It is implemented by means of an API linking the registrar interface to the registry.
- EURID (European Registry of Internet Domain Names): Registry which manages the .EU extension.
- gTLD (generic Top-Level Domain): generic top-level extension .
- ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers): Internet Regulatory Authority.
- Legacy gTLD: generic extension created before 2014, as opposed to nTLDs.
- NgTLD (new Generic Top-Level Domain): generic extension created after 2014, as part of the new extensions, along with geoTLD and corpTLD.
- nTLD (new Top-Level Domain): new extension created after 2014.
- OHIM (Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market): European Union agency responsible for registering trademarks and designs.
- Quasi-generic extensions, or Quasi-generic ccTLD: country-code TLDs used like generic TLDs, without geographic restrictions
- Penny TLD: extension offered free of charge or sold at a very low price.
- Registry: organization responsible for managing one or more domain name extensions.
- RIR (Regional Internet Registry): organization that oversees the allocation and registration of Internet number resources (IPv4 addresses, IPv6 addresses and autonomous system numbers) in a specific region.
- TLD (Top-Level Domain): first level domain name extension.
- UDRP (Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy): Out-of-court procedure for settling disputes over generic domain names.
- WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization): Specialized agency of the United Nations that facilitates the registration of international trademarks.

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About the author

Active in the domain name sector since the early 2000's, David Chelly is co-founder of NddCamp and a member of the AFNIC and FePSeM associations.

With a multidisciplinary background (PhD in Management, Law Degree, and a postgraduate Degree in Finance), he takes an active interest in all aspects of domain names, which he engages with on a daily basis.

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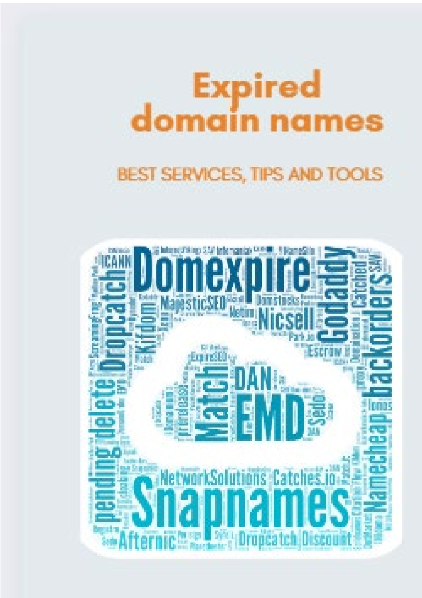
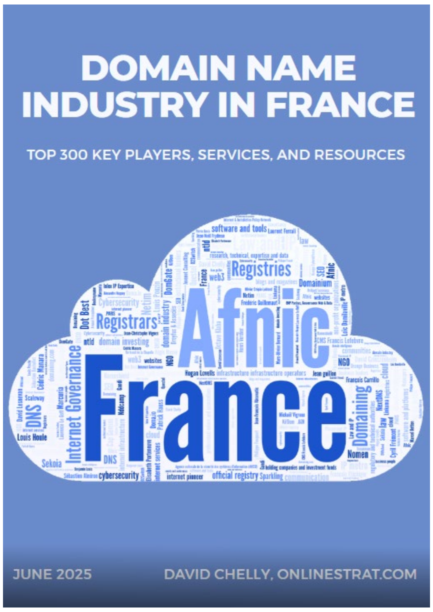
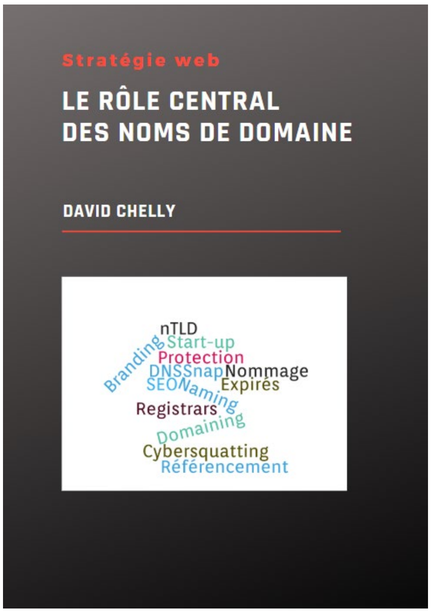
More publications from the author







And also, available in pdf or Excel : **Database of the top 1000 players**, services and resources of the domain name sector, with detailed info (presentation, website, contact name, social networks…).

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