

Think You Control Your Domain Name? Think Again!

By Butch Pujol

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Let me ask you some questions that may sound “obvious” but can have downright scary answers. Did you buy your domain name from a service? Do you know who is in control of your domain name? Have you done a “Whois” search to find out? The answer may very well shock you!

Buying a domain name is a very easy thing to do. But if you buy a domain name without any knowledge of “ownership” vs. “control”, you could very well be headed down a bumpy road.

Unfortunately, most Web site owners are unaware that “ownership” does not equate to “control.” Just because you paid for your domain name does not mean you have access or authority to make changes, transfers or other necessary functions. But if not you – the owner – who does?

There are 4 components to a domain name:

1. Registrant: you - the person who registered the domain name
2. Billing Contact: could be anyone
3. Technical Contact: could be anyone
4. Administrative Contact: could be anyone

The registrant is you. You might assume that items two, three and four are also you. A natural assumption. Guess what... most of the time they are not! THIS is where you get into trouble.

Who's In Control?

So whose names are listed in the “control” spots? Nine times out of ten, it is a person within the organization you purchased your domain name from. Any inquiries about billing, technical issues and administrative questions are sent to this arbitrary person. The domain name registration company has FULL control over your URL. What does this mean?

Even though you are the owner, and you make a request for changes, the confirmation request will go to the administrator for verification. This person has the full authority to approve or reject changes

to your domain name.

The Dangers

Keep one thing in mind, domain registrars can, and do, go out of business. They get bought and sold just like other organizations. They are not legally required to notify you of any changes within their firm. This fact alone can cause unlimited problems with renewals, changes, sales or transfers. But that's not all.

Let's say you put in a domain transfer request. A time sensitive confirmation will be sent from the registrar of your domain name to the administrative contact. This confirmation must be answered within a certain timeframe. Now, if the administrative contact is someone at the business you purchased your domain name from we could have a serious problem. That person might be on vacation, sick, fired, or even under orders not to respond. In any case, your transfer will be denied. Think it doesn't happen. I'm horrified to tell you it does – every single day.

What does the technical contact control? Basically, where your Web site "lives." What happens if you submit a hosting transfer request and your technical contact (not you – someone at the business you got your domain name from) does not respond to the message? Your domain name is trapped! Worse case scenario... your site is down for days or weeks because your Web site lives at one place, and your domain name lives somewhere else.

And finally, the billing contact. At some point it will be time to renew your domain name registration. Most registrars send a notice to the billing contact 30 days before the payment is due. For whatever reason, the person listed as the billing contact does not contact you about the renewal. You just lost your domain name due to expiration!

Your Domain Name Is Being Held Hostage

When a domain name registration company forces itself into the contact fields of your registration records, it's commonly known as being "held hostage."

I personally know of countless horror stories of online business owners who have fought tirelessly to "free" their domain names and regain control. They will be glad to tell you the woes of losing control of your URL. So what do you do about it? How do you get back full control of your business?

Steps To Take

Make sure when you register a domain name that the registrant, administrative, technical and billing contacts are in your name. Just as soon as you receive confirmation and access information, log in and change any "forced" contact information to your name.

Use a contact email address you will always have. A good one is the one associated with your domain name. The email address on record must match the email address you are sending a request from. If you use an email associated with your ISP (@hotmail.com, @rr.sc.com, @earthlink.com) and later change ISPs, you'll have to make contact information corrections prior to making any transfers, etc.

And lastly, if at all possible, register with a company that provides you with a management or control center. This is – without a doubt – the safest way to go.

- You won't have to wait for someone else to make needed changes.

- You won't have to ask anyone for permission to make changes.
- You will never be denied the changes you need to make.
- You won't lose your domain name because the company listed as "contact" closed or was bought out.
- You won't lose your domain name because you weren't notified of the renewal date.
- You WILL be in full control of the most important part of your company - your domain name.

Take back control of your domain name today. Make the necessary adjustments to the contacts on record so that your URL can never be held hostage.

Butch Pujol is an online Consumer Advocate who helps you make the most of the Internet. He is the author of "The Consumer's Guide to Internet Safety & Online Professionalism" and founder of Safe Domain Solutions <http://www.safedomainsolutions.com> and Safe Internet Business Solutions <http://www.safeInternetbusiness.com> .

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