

Domain name re-registration

1. Introduction

The issue arises out of previous discussions on dropcatching. This paper will explore the issues surrounding the gap between registrants' expectations about re-registering a domain name on cancellation and the reality.

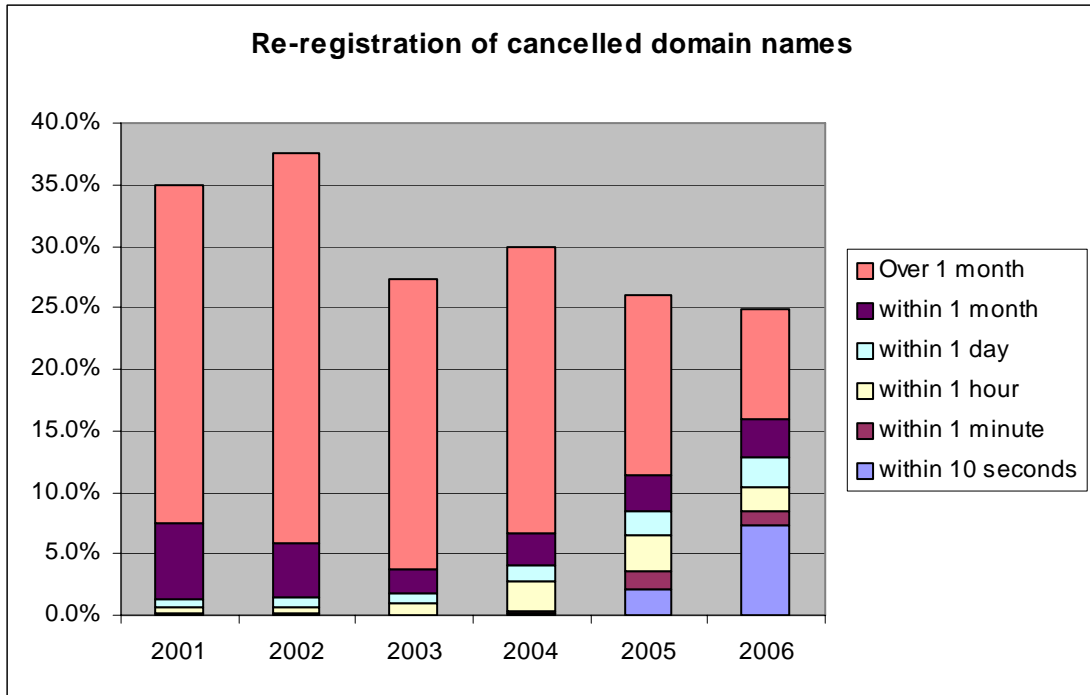
The issue of waitlists, auctions and lotteries has been on the PAB programme for some time. In preparing this paper, the Executive felt that rather than focusing on potential solutions (e.g. waitlists), it would be more constructive first to identify the problem, and the policy principles which arise from it. Having identified policy principles, suitable operational responses can then be evaluated.

2. Cancelled domains

Domain names which are not renewed are cancelled. At present, we do not publish the exact cancellation date and time of domain names. In practice, it is possible to work out the date of cancellation of the majority of domain names. However the time of cancellation is randomised on any given day. Amongst a small but specialised section of the registrar community (dropcatchers), there is intense competition for cancelled domain names.

The technical resources and ability of dropcatchers, make it highly unlikely that "ordinary registrants" will be able to register a domain name on cancellation. Currently over 25 % of cancelled domain names are re-registered within a day of cancellation, and 7 % are re-registered within 10 seconds of cancellation. As at July 2007, 50 % of re-registered domain names were re-registered within 5 minutes of cancellation.

Since the introduction of our Domain Availability Checker (DAC) in April 2005, we have seen the speed of re-registration increase significantly. The DAC averages 25 million queries per day, has 160 active users and 306 subscribers. The top 20 % of DAC users account for over 80 % of DAC activity.



Our current mechanism for the allocation of cancelled domain names gives rise to the following issues:

- a gap between registrants' perception about catching domains on cancellation vs the reality of their chances. We are routinely asked how best to acquire a domain name if it is not renewed. The honest answer is "you won't".
- significant advantage is gained by a minority of registrars who circumvent our current systems (e.g. through creating fictitious memberships, and thus doubling access limits). We actively look for these and have implemented additional checks, but the practice continues.
- We are concerned that our current systems and processes may favour a very small subset of our stakeholders, to the detriment of the majority. Whilst fair competition between registrars is beneficial to the wider community, we are becoming increasingly concerned that advantage for a few is being gained through unfair means.
- Nominet is expending significant resources in dealing with dropcatching, which is disproportionate to the percentage of our registrars who are engaged in this activity. We would prefer to focus resources on programmes which will benefit the majority of registrars.

3. Policy Recommendations

We ask the PAB for advice on two policy principles concerning the gap between registrants' expectations and reality on cancelled domain names, and on an even playing field enabling all registrars who wish to do so to compete for cancelled domain names.

If the PAB accepts these principles, we will explore a range of appropriate operational responses. If these are not successful in enhancing competition, we will bring proposals for standalone mechanisms back to the PAB.

For information, we offer a range of operational responses which may be considered:

- a. Review our communications, in order to close the gap between registrants' expectations and reality
- b. Review the effectiveness of current anti-abuse mechanisms on systems such as the Automaton, DAC, and WHOIS, and make adjustments where appropriate
- c. Review current operational systems to ensure that an even playing field exists in which people can compete for cancelled domain names, proposing adjustments where appropriate
- d. If operational measures do not achieve the goal of ensuring fair competition, then consider standalone responses for distribution of cancelled domain names – e.g. auctions, waitlists or lotteries.

We invite the PAB to endorse the following policy principles:

- The PAB advises the Board that it is uncomfortable with the discrepancy between registrants' perception and reality on cancelled domain names. The PAB invites the Board to consider suitable operational responses.
- The PAB believes that there should be an even playing field, in which all registrars can compete for cancelled domain names. The PAB invites the Board to consider suitable operational responses.