

Issues with fast cancellation

PAB Paper
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When Nominet comes across a problem with a registration, such as a wrong address, they contact the registrant and attempt to get the data corrected.

If this does not happen, the name is likely to be cancelled and returned to the pool where others can register it. This process can be quick; in one instance, the timing was:

Day 1: Nominet received a complaint
Day 7: fax sent to customer giving a deadline of day 21
Day 22: name available for re-registration

Payment for this domain was fully up to date. In another case a domain was deregistered without warning. By comparison, a name that has not been renewed can remain suspended for 120 days after payment was due; during this time the original registrant can renew without difficulty.

The base problem here is that, because registrants are slow to correct what they perceive as minor problems until they become major ones, Nominet often has to escalate the situation by preventing the name working before they can get the problem remedied.

However, immediately deregistering the name is an excessive step, because it leaves it open for others (e.g. the "dropcatcher" community) to jump in before the registrant is aware of the problem. While the registrant may be in breach of the registration contract, this is excessive punishment for a minor breach. Even worse, it can only require one letter to get lost (either by the Royal Mail or within Nominet) for a co-operative and innocent registrant to lose a name that they have built up much goodwill in.

The obvious solution is to have an intermediate stage where the name is unavailable to the registrant (thus providing an incentive to fix the issue) but is not released back to the pool.

Proposed policy:

Nominet shall not cancel a domain name, other than with the explicit agreement of the registrant, unless that name has been suspended for at least 20 working days. This period of suspension may run concurrently with suspension for any other reason.

Note that if there is no registrant then the suspension period could not be waived; this allows for the situation where the problem is that Nominet believes the registrant has ceased to exist while the user does not.

Counter-arguments

On nom-steer, Eleanor Bradley writes:

The decision not to suspend domain names prior to cancellation was introduced for purely practical reasons. In many cases the former user of the domain name would not want the domain name to be inaccessible for a period of time and would rather attempt to re-register the name. In addition suspension followed by cancellation would be likely to alert more people to the imminent cancellation of the domain name thus reducing further the domain name users chances of re-registering.

I would simply disagree with the first of these two points: the former user of the domain name would probably prefer an opportunity to resolve the issue rather than having to fight for the name with all the other potential applicants. And the second is equally indefensible: either FCFS should apply to a situation, in which case the former use should not be given an advantage, or it doesn't, in which case it is better to suspend the name until the matter is resolved rather than allow a new registrant to get embroiled as well.

Someone else (Alex, I think) mentioned domains which were registered by "Mickey Mouse" and quickly cancelled. If Nominet are being paid for these domains, then I don't think there is a significant issue. If not, then that itself may be the problem.

Alternatively, it might be possible to craft an exemption on the basis that the name has never had any significant DNS entries (this would have to be defined carefully to deal with tag holders who automatically set up a template DNS).