

Nominet Registration Periods Working Group – Summary of Discussion

Introduction

The Nominet Registration Periods Working Group was formed by the PAB WGSC in August 2004 and has discussed three issues:

1. Should we allow single year registrations?
2. Should we allow “registration” synchronisation? E.g. 2 years + 2 months.
3. Should we allow more than 2-year registrations? If so up to what limit?

This position paper summarises the views of the working group and proposes a way forward.

Single Year Registrations

The concept of single year registrations was positively received by all participants, for the following reasons:

- It would provide parity with the other domain registries, notably the .com/net/org registries.
- Many ISPs provides annual billing for their hosting and other services and it would allow UK domain names to be billed for as part of, and in sync with, their normal annual billing cycles.
- There were numerous cases cited where registrants operated short term projects, for which an annual registration seemed more appropriate.

It was appreciated that an annual registration may be more costly than a two year registration/renewal, but the WG felt unable to provide an exact position on this, except to note that other registries provided fee parity for one and two year registrations (and some provided discounts for longer registrations).

It was recommended that single year registration periods be introduced.

Registration “Synchronisation”

The potential to “Synchronise” a registration date, i.e. to renew a domain name for P years plus Q months was also well received. The main reason for supporting this proposal was the ability to synchronise billing cycles for domain name registrations and other services provided by a tag holder.

There was some debate as to how many months could be added (or indeed subtracted) to a registration period during a synchronisation. It was felt that:

1. A synchronisation action should only be permitted at the domain’s normal renewal point.
2. A synchronisation action should only extend a renewal
3. A renewal should only be permitted to be extended by up to 11 additional months.

There were limited concerns, which included:

- Potential operational and financial impacts on Nominet, if, for example, domain name renewals are largely synchronised on “key dates”. However, Nominet’s operation is largely electronic, and the renewals window is quite large, so this may not be an issue.

- It was noted that a ISP could offer this service to its customers already by simply holding funds “in trust” for the customer and managing the domain renewal date for them, however, it was felt that this would be highly undesirable as:
 - If the domain was moved to a new tag holder, this status could not be maintained and monies may be lost by registrants.
 - It would not be possible for this arrangement to be accurately reflected in whois, undermining any consumer confidence campaign and activities Nominet may be undertaking.

It was recommended that registration period “synchronisation” be permitted at the time of renewal, such that a renewal could be made for N years plus M months, where $0 < M < 12$.

Multi-Year Registrations

The issue of multi-year registrations (e.g. 5 and 10 years) was discussed. Whilst some felt that this would be a useful addition to the portfolio of Nominet services, there greater concerns about the provision of such a service, mostly surrounding:

- Nominet’s ability to ensure a complete and accurate register over a longer registration period.
- Nominet’s ability to ensure the register could be operated for the required period of time.
- The effects that a longer registration period would have on the life cycle of domain names and in particular, whether domains from defunct registrants could be returned to the pool in a timely fashion.

Length of Registration

The problem of registrations outliving registrants was a key concern. Many business cease trading after a few years and as such domain names registered for long periods could end up in limbo - still registered but without any Domain Name Servers as the business has ceased paying for hosting services.

Therefore, we would need to review the processes of bringing domain names back into the available pool and the impact on DRS policy and procedure for domain names whose registrant longer exists (whilst Nominet has the authority to cancel domain names, it finds it difficult to identify when a domain name registrant has ceased to exist). One respondent noted “I have had two clients in the last 12 months who have registered two domain names that were not renewed. The domain names where an exact match of their company or trading name; just think of the problems - logistical and legal - that my clients would had had to overcome to obtain these domain names from companies that were no longer trading.”

It was argued that “we need to balance the interests of the current *and future* Internet community as a whole, so even if 10-year registrations are popular, it doesn't mean they are good for the community as whole.” A respondent noted that 10 years is a very long time on the internet and situations, technologies and requirements will likely change.

Data Accuracy

The problem of data accuracy, where by Nominet loses contact with a registrant due to a change of contact details, or indeed, a legal name change, has often been cited as a strong reason not to provide domain name registration periods which are longer than two years. Having a two year renewal cycle does ensure that reasonably regular contact is maintained with registrants.

One solution to the problem might be a requirement for re-validation of registrant data. However, it was observed that requiring re-validation on a biennial basis was not significantly different to requiring a positive renewal on a similar basis.

One respondent suggested that the responsibility for accuracy of data should fall to the ISP and/or owner of the domain. They argued that Nominet's role should be nothing more than enforcing that responsibility. It would seem to be sufficient to check the contact email addresses are "live" on an annual basis. With the responsibility being the ISP's or the owner's, it would seem fair to suspend any domains that have unresponsive contact email over some suitable period of time.

The possibility of detrimental price effects was also raised. Longer periods may result in current tag holders making more money by selling more domain-years and then, in the event of tag-holder failure, customers being faced with paying other companies they have to transfer to additional management fees, etc. in the future which they didn't expect to have to face.

Finally, respondents noted that there were financial implications for longer registrations. Both in that significant up-front cash might be generated and that the cost of collections would be reduced (e.g. one large 10 year payment, instead of 5 smaller ones), but that also there would then be a longer commitment required maintaining the registry operation (currently Nominet only maintains two years financial reserves).

Whilst most respondents felt that long registration periods would be of benefit, the WG was unable to come to a definite consensus as to the feasibility of the idea. As a result, it recommends wider consultation, perhaps fed by a position paper from the Executive.

Proposed Way Forward

The Working Group proposes that:

- The PAB recommends that single year registrations and registration period syncing be implemented by Nominet, subject to further consultation with stakeholders as the PAB seems necessary.
- That the issue of 10 registrations be debated further by the PAB as, whilst in principle, the idea is a good one, the WG is unable to make concrete assertions on data integrity, the prolonged operation of the register without further input from the Executive.
- That the working group on variable registration periods be wound up, it's objectives having been achieved.