

Nominet's introduction of new .uk internet addresses

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Summary

On 20 November 2013 Nominet announced that from the summer of 2014 we will allow the registration of second level domain names so that businesses and consumers are able to use shorter domain name such as *example.uk* instead of *example.co.uk*.

We are making this change in response to the significant demand for shorter domain names and to keep .uk relevant in a changing market which will see over 1000 new top level domains like .shop and .london launching next year. It also brings us into line with other countries like France and Germany who already have the equivalents in .fr and .de.

The key features are:

- People who have registered .co.uk domain names will have five years in which no one else will be able to register their domain name as a second level domain name.
- The existing second level categories of .co.uk, .org.uk, .gov.uk etc will continue to be supported and developed.
- The wholesale price for the new .uk domain names will be the same as for existing .uk domain names, which at £2.50 per year continues to be cheaper than .com, .org, or .net domain names.
- For foreign registrants of the new .uk domain names we will require a validated UK address for service of legal papers.

We also announced our security roadmap which sets out a range of security initiatives we are planning to make available for all .uk domain names and our plans to develop practical help on cyber security for small businesses.

To complete the picture we have published for consultation a draft Data Quality Policy which sets out our commitment to maintain and improve the quality of the data we hold on who has registered which domain names.

Nominet – what we do and how we do it

Our job is to ensure that when someone looks for a .uk website (eg. www.bbc.co.uk) their computer or mobile device can find the servers that host the website on the internet. We have infrastructure that can do this very quickly and on a massive scale; reliably handling around 3.5 billion queries every day.

Nominet is a not-for-profit company with a constitution that commits us to act for public benefit. Any surplus generated by the operation of the .uk domain name system is either invested in our infrastructure to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose, invested in projects that increase trust and security on the internet, or used to more broadly influence and invest in the future growth and

development of the UK internet. As part of this work we established an independent charity, The Nominet Trust, which supports initiatives which harness the internet to stimulate positive social action at a grass-roots level. Last year we donated £6m to the Trust.

We have run the .uk top level domain since 1996 and have built .uk into one of the largest domain name registries in the world with over 10 million domain names. Our vision is for .uk to be a trusted and safe space on the internet and our success in fulfilling this vision is part of the underpinning of the UK's vibrant online economy.

The benefits of shorter .uk domain names

In 2014 the way we use internet domain names is going to change significantly with the launch of around 1,000 new “top level domains” for website and email addresses. This will mean that in addition to the existing 20 generic top level domains like .com and .org, businesses and consumers will be able to choose addresses that end in .shop .restaurant .hotel .web etc. There will also be many new geographic top level domains with the introduction of .wales, .cymru, .scot, .london, .paris, .nyc, etc.

This massive expansion in the availability of top level domains will give rise to a wave of innovative ways for people to use website and email addresses and increase the availability of short and memorable addresses. Allowing the registration of domain names in the second level of .uk will not only provide more choice, it will also allow businesses and consumers to benefit from shorter domain names while still being able to use the well trusted .uk domain space.

The importance of keeping .uk at the forefront of the market

The .uk domain space has provided an underpinning for the UK's vibrant online economy with four out of five consumers saying they prefer .co.uk websites when they are searching online. Having a .uk domain name helps businesses target their customers and helps consumers find products and services that are relevant to them. With the unprecedented competition from around 1,000 new top level domains it is important for the UK's online economy that we maintain .uk's place as a trusted space at the forefront of the market.

As well as the economic benefits there are also a number of public policy benefits of the extensive use of .uk domain names which contribute to the overall position of .uk as a trusted space on the internet. These public policy benefits include the following:

- .uk domain names are subject to Nominet's rules and our Dispute Resolution Service that help businesses protect their trade marks and intellectual property.
- UK law enforcement and regulatory bodies are able to work with Nominet to protect UK consumers.
- Nominet works closely with UK self-regulatory bodies like the Internet Watch Foundation to prevent illegal material being hosted on .uk domain names.
- As key stakeholders in Nominet's policy process UK policy makers and businesses have influence over how the .uk domainspace operates.
- The growth and scale of the .uk domain space has allowed Nominet to keep wholesale prices at the same low level of £2.50 per year (£3.50 if the domain is only registered for one year) since 1999, ensuring that the price of a relevant domain name is never a barrier to UK businesses getting online.

How we will introduce the new .uk domain names

The new .uk domain names will be available for registration from summer 2014. However, with over 10 million .uk domain names already registered, we do not undertake changes to the domainspace lightly. We have therefore conducted two extensive public consultations as well as market and economic research. We have used the feedback from the consultations and the research to develop a process for introducing the new domain names in the simplest and least disruptive manner.

Users of .co.uk domains will have 5 years to register their equivalent second level domain: Having considered many different options we have concluded that the best way to protect the interests of our existing registrants is to have a period of five years in which the holder of an a .co.uk domain name will have an exclusive right to register the equivalent second level domain name. In other words only the registrant of website.co.uk will be able to register website.uk for a period of five years. We have introduced this measure as mitigation against potential confusion and to allow a long period in which registrants can make a considered decision about any change in their domain name.

In total 96% of domain names will benefit from the 5 year reservation period: Of the 10.5 million domain names we currently manage 93 % are registered in .co.uk but many of the registrants of domain names in the other sub-domains such as .org.uk have also registered the same name in .co.uk and so will benefit from the 5 year reservation period. Registrants of domain names that are not registered in .co.uk and which are registered in only one of the other sub-domains will also benefit from the 5 year reservation period.

There will be some cases where the registrant of a .org.uk domain is different to the registrant of the same term in .co.uk. In these cases the .co.uk registrant will benefit from the 5 year reservation period rather than the .org.uk registrant. As part of the launch process of the new .uk domains we will contact all of our existing registrants to let them know about what options are available to them.

All of our existing sub-domains will continue to operate: It has always been our intention to broaden the choice of .uk domain names for businesses and consumers rather than to close down any existing sub-domains. We fully intend that .org.uk will continue to provide an ideal home for organisations in the public sector and third sector that want to clearly communicate their non-commercial nature and their UK identity. As a not for profit company ourselves we will continue to use nominet.org.uk as our primary domain name. The existing public sector sub-domains (which are not managed by Nominet) such as gov.uk, nhs.uk, ac.uk and police.uk will continue to be actively used.

Continued great value pricing: We have decided against introducing second level registrations as a “premium product” and will charge the same wholesale price as for current .co.uk registrations. Our current pricing is £2.50 per year (£3.50 if the domain is only registered for one year). This price level has been maintained by Nominet since September 1999 which is a real terms price cut of around 46 % over 14 years.

As you would expect given Nominet not-for-profit status our domain names provide great value when compared to our competitors. Wholesale prices for a .com domain name is around £4.95, a .net domain name is around £3.50, and a .org domain name is around £5.20. (All three are priced in dollars so exact £ values fluctuate with exchange rates.)

Working for a safer and trusted internet

We are committed to keeping .uk a safe and trusted space on the internet and we are introducing a number of initiatives to support security and high standards in the domain name industry.

Increased security for all .uk domain names: In 2014 we will be launching new tools to help our registrars, the companies who sell domain names to the public, to further enhance the security of their domain portfolios, including a domain-locking tool to protect high profile domains from social-engineering attacks. We will also be offering registrars the opportunity to adopt additional security controls when accessing Nominet's registry systems which will give the domains they manage a stronger second line of defence against hacking.

Supporting cyber security for SMEs: We are working to develop a tool aimed at helping SMEs identify when security-related issues are adversely affecting their domain, with a view to encouraging the take up of additional website security features. In a separate initiative we are exploring how we can work alongside others in the internet community to offer practical help to small businesses concerned about cyber-security.

Identifying new security risks on the internet: We have developed a data visualisation and analysis tool to assess the behaviour of the domain name system. This has already helped identify a significant weakness in the software behind the global domain name system and we hope to deploy this technology in a number of ways to identify new threats and help keep the internet safe.

Enhancing trust in .uk domain names

Alongside the introduction of the new .uk domain names we are also introducing two key elements to improve trust in .uk domain names:

The requirement for a UK address for service: Although around 90% of .uk domain names are held by UK business and consumers, one of the reasons for the success of .uk domain names is that we allow companies and individuals from outside the UK to register .uk domain names in order to address a UK audience. To further enhance the trust consumers place in .uk domain names any foreign registrants of the new .uk domain names we will require a validated UK address for service of legal papers.

Improving data quality for all .uk domain names: All .uk domain names are listed on the "WHOIS" service on our website which includes the name and address of the business (or just the name in the case of non-trading individuals) who registered each domain name. Keeping this data up-to-date for 10 million domain names is a major task, we therefore have an extensive data quality programme to validate and update our records. As part of our commitment to continue to raise standards we have published our draft Data Quality Policy which sets out data quality requirements and commitments for us and our registrars, who are the businesses which sell domain names to the public.

For our more information

All of the details about the introduction of second level registrations, our security roadmap and our Data Quality Policy are available on our website at www.nominet.org.uk/sldr

For more information on these issues or any other aspect of Nominet's work please contact: David Abrahams, Head of Public Policy, on 01865 332 225 or david.abrahams@nominet.org.uk.