Recommendation 17

Findings

According to our consumer research, one of the aspects that consumers struggled with (once they had been informed of the existence of WHOIS in many cases) was locating WHOIS Services and interpreting WHOIS Data. This is particularly pronounced with 'thin' WHOIS Services which affect .com and .net, which together hold over 100 million domain name registrations at the time of writing.

We understand that ICANN already provides a WHOIS lookup service called Internic. The WHOIS Review Team supports the concept of the Internic service, as a 'go to' place for those wishing to find out information about domain name registrants. It finds that in practice, the Internic service is little known, and is not user friendly. For example, it delivers only the 'thin' WHOIS data for .com and .net. [NB we will define this term elsewhere, not in the findings]. This requires users who are looking up through a web interface to find the relevant registrar's website, and their WHOIS Service before they are able to complete their query.

The WHOIS Review Team unanimously believes that WHOIS Services in general and Internic in particular are not optimised for usability, and therefore do not promote consumer trust. Further, we believe that they prevent the WHOIS from being more widely used and relied on by consumers.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Internic Service is overhauled to provide enhanced usability for consumers, including the display of full registrant data for all gTLD domain names (whether those gTLDs operate thin or thick WHOIS Services) in order to create a one stop shop, from a trusted provider, for consumers and other users of WHOIS Services.

In making this finding and recommendation, we are not proposing a change in the location where data is held, ownership of the data, nor do we see a policy development process as necessary or desirable. We are proposing an operational improvement to an existing service, the Internic.