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WHOIS Accuracy Study

Findings, Public Comments, and
Discussion

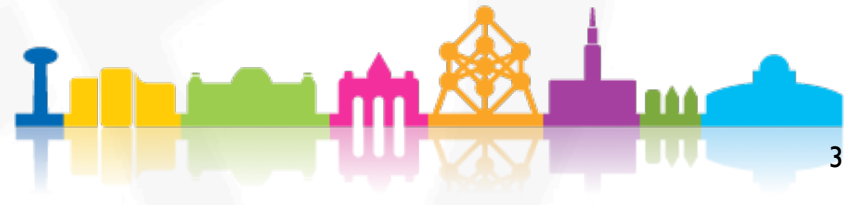
23 June 2010

David Giza, *ICANN*

Jenny Kelly, *NORC*

Today's Objectives (Dave)

- **WHOIS Accuracy Study – Summary**
 - History
 - NORC Study Findings
- **WHOIS Accuracy Study – Public Comment Overview**
 - WHOIS Concerns
 - WHOIS Suggestions
 - Study Criticisms
 - Future Study Suggestions
- **Summary and Next Steps**
 - Information/Education
 - Policy
 - Enforcement



Why did ICANN conduct a Whois Data Accuracy Study? (Dave)

- To provide the Internet community with statistically valid information regarding the percentage of domain names that contain accurate Whois data
- To provide information that might be useful in the policy development and enforcement processes regarding Whois
- To contribute to community discussion regarding Whois



Background (Dave)

- WHOIS thought to have inaccuracies, but extent unknown
- Current study objectives:

Establish baseline % of records containing inaccuracies

Identify the nature of inaccuracies, and the barriers to improved accuracy

Communicate findings to the Internet community

Receive and review public comment and input on the draft report

Identify next steps (information/education opportunities, policy initiatives and enforcement actions)

Publish final report on Whois Accuracy Study



WHOIS Accuracy Evaluation - History

- The U.S. GAO published a report in 2005:



“Prevalence of False Contact Information for Registered Domain Names”

- ICANN commissioned the accuracy study in 2008:



“Study of the Accuracy of WHOIS Registrant Contact Information”

- The GAO report differed from the NORC report in several key ways:

2005 GAO Report	2009 NORC Report
Determine prevalence of patently false or incomplete data; determine if false data is corrected by ICANN	Test the accuracy of data; provide info to assist internet community w/ policy & practice
Investigate top three gTLDs (.com, .org, .net); info on registrant, administrative, and technical contacts	Investigate top five gTLDs (GAO three + .info, .biz); info on registrant only
Draw on 900 domains (to give +/- 5% margin of error)	Draw on 2400 domains (to give +/- 2% margin of error)



Accuracy Criteria

Based on requirements in the Registrar Accreditation Agreement (RAA):

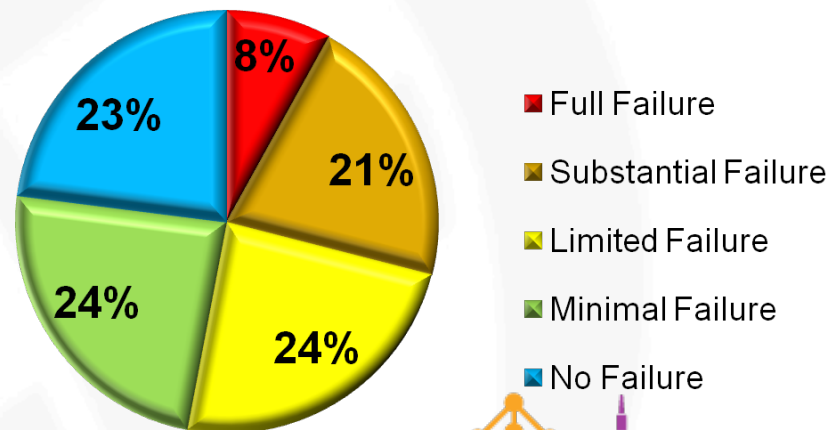
1. Is the registrant's address deliverable?
2. Can the registrant's name be linked with the address?
3. When contacted, does the registrant verify/acknowledge ownership of the domain name?



WHOIS Accuracy - NORC Study Findings

- The NORC 2009 Study reported similar findings to the 2005 GAO study (percent of full failures were similar, as were some other metrics)
- Only **23%** of the records were fully accurate, but twice that number met a slightly relaxed version of the criteria
- **8%** of the records failed with obvious errors
- Most of the barriers to accuracy can be addressed by internet community, though **cost of ensuring accuracy will escalate with the level of accuracy sought**
- **Cooperation among all registrants and other ICANN constituents will be needed** to provide equitable advantage for the cost involved in creating greater accuracy

Accuracy of WHOIS Registrant Contact Information



Barriers to Accuracy

- Registrant concerns about privacy, registrant ability and understanding of data provided
- No requirement that the registrant be a legal entity or have a physical address, and no verification required of data at point of input
- Low risk of errors or omissions being detected, and minimal consequences for errors or omissions which are detected
- Burden involved in verification; no centralized system or clearing house
- (ASCII character set limitations)



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WHOIS Accuracy Study - Public Comment Overview

- The WHOIS Contact Information Accuracy Study was made available for public review and comment from 15 Feb 2010 to 1 May 2010 (extended date)



- Several news outlets reported on the study:

ConnectIT

IT News Online

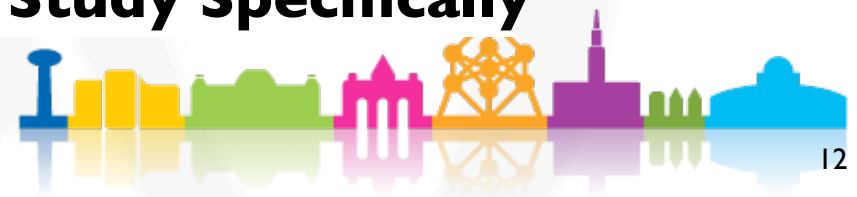
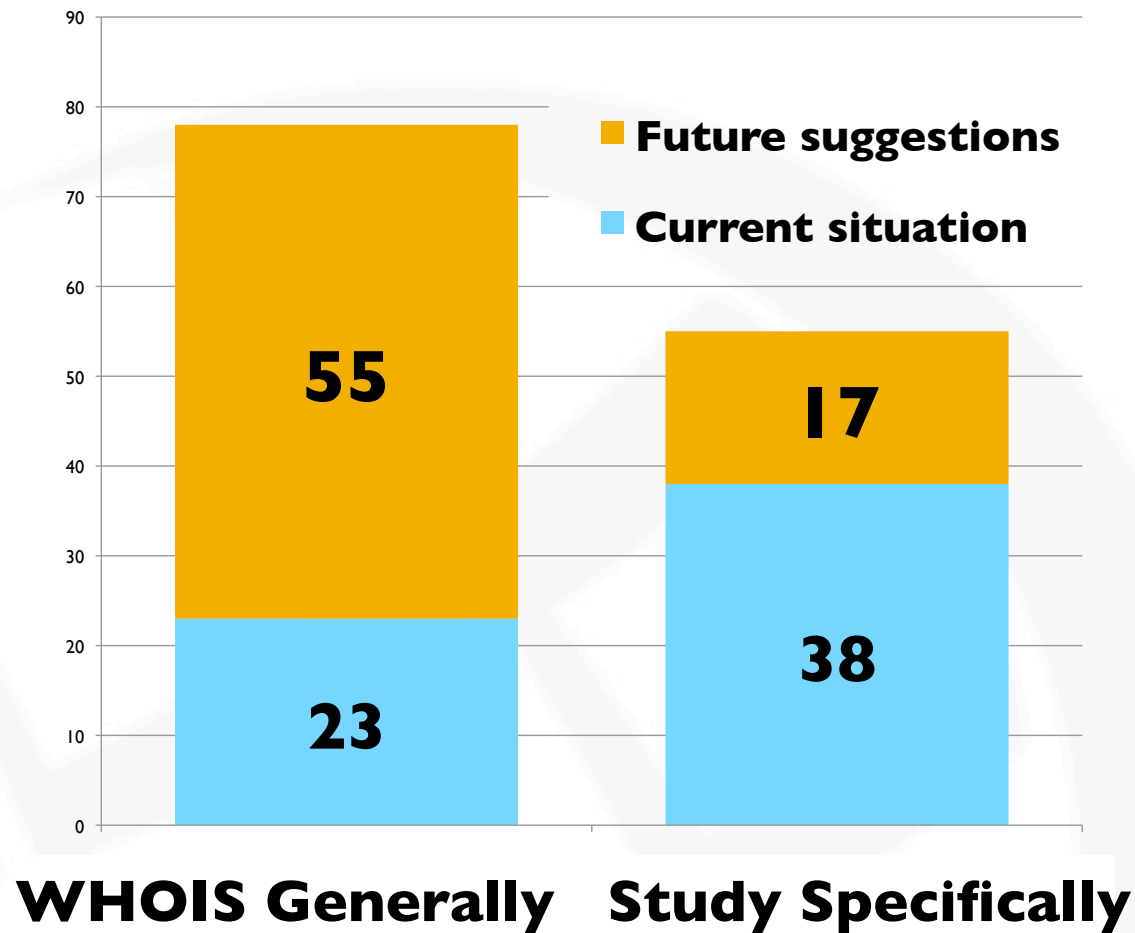
Information Week

(and others)

- 133 comments (from 21 sources) were received for consideration by ICANN; the topics and number of comments for each are shown on following pages
- Majority of sources included comments that they **supported the study** or felt the **results were not surprising**



There were more comments regarding WHOIS than the study itself, particularly the future of WHOIS



WHOIS Accuracy Study - Public Comment Overview

- **WHOIS Concerns:** [23 of 133 comments, or 17%]

- Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) [10]
 - Valid information is key to protecting IPR
- Criminal Activity [8]
 - Belief that criminals will never provide valid contact information
 - Valid information is crucial to bringing criminal actors to justice
- Privacy [4]
 - Concern over privacy and identity theft
 - Desire to promote anonymity and ensure right to privacy
 - Belief that 3rd party cannot make private information available to public
- Accuracy Leading to Increased Costs [1]
 - Improvements will involve increased costs with negative consequences

Greater
Comments

Fewer
Comments

[# comments]



WHOIS Accuracy Study - Public Comment Overview

- **WHOIS Suggestions:** *[55 of 130 comments, or 41%]*
 - Implement steps to improve the accuracy *[31]*
 - Match registrant information with credit card information *[9]*
 - Implement centralized global clearinghouse or thick registries *[6]*
 - Develop system of email verification *[5]*
 - Develop system of address verification *[5]*
 - Reduce barriers to accuracy *[4]*
 - Implement a privacy flag *[4]*
 - Develop system of phone verification *[2]*
 - Validate contact information upon hosting *[1]*
 - Use existing system (WDPRS) *[1]*
 - Recognize the need to improve accuracy of WHOIS *[16]*
 - Take no action if the result can't be a 'flawless system' *[1]*

[# comments]

Greater
Comments

Fewer
Comments



WHOIS Accuracy Study - Public Comment Overview

- **Study comments:** [38 of 133 comments, or 29%]
 - Support for the study [10]
 - Study confirmed what they thought [7]
 - Study focus:
 - Proxy services should have been studied in greater depth [6]
 - Study should have concentrated on registrars [3]
 - Study should have been broader than registrant [2]
 - Study method:
 - Verifying physical addresses is not possible in many countries [3]
 - Study size was too small [2]
 - Study had flawed phone contact method [2]
 - Domain name expiration or deletion status should have been considered [1]
 - Results too high / too low [2]

Greater
Comments

Fewer
Comments



WHOIS Accuracy Study - Public Comment Overview

- **Future Study Suggestions:** *[17 of 133 comments, or 13%]*

- Registrars should be the focus *[5]*
- Proxy services need to be studied in greater depth *[3]*
- Email addresses should also be verified *[2]*
- Focus attention on known bad domains *[2]*
- Bulk registrants should be considered separately *[1]*
- Administrative contact should be relied on first *[1]*
- Additional WHOIS studies should be funded *[1]*

[# comments]

Greater
Comments

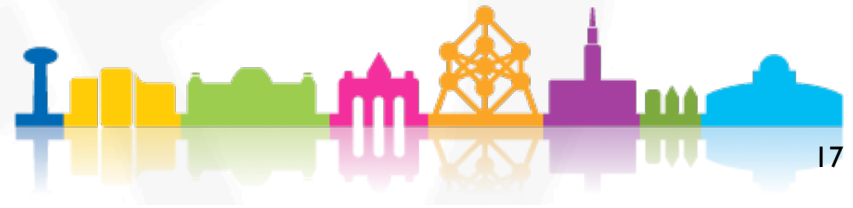


Fewer
Comments



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Summary

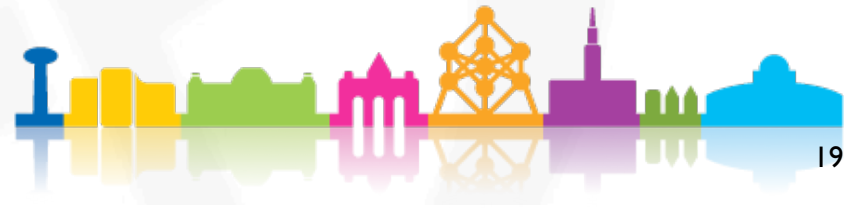
- Both the GAO and NORC studies investigated the state of WHOIS accuracy, and both found that there were **unacceptable levels of inaccuracies**
- Public comments provided a broad spectrum of **suggestions for improvements and for future study. Support for incremental improvements.**
- What should the next steps be?



Next Steps (Dave)

- **Information/Education:**
 - Conduct additional WHOIS studies
 - Increase WHOIS information available to registrants on the ICANN website
 - Implement registrar-developed and led WHOIS education program for registrants
- **Policy:**
 - Privacy/proxy issues - under consideration for further study
 - WHOIS Verification strategies – potential area for further study
- **Enforcement:**
 - Use the WDPRS tool to more effectively address and adjudicate complaints
 - Use the new 2009 RAA enforcement methods/tools (suspension, etc.)
 - Audit registrars more rigorously

Suggestions and Discussion?



Thank you



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