

The devil is in the details

Domain Registration Scams

By Mark Costlow, President

Domain owners, beware! Unscrupulous people are using a variety of scams to get control of your domain name. If you're not careful, they can raise your yearly registration fees and lock you in to their terms, causing you needless effort and expense.

These scams are not new, but they do seem to be increasing in frequency. They come from a variety of sources. A common one we see repeatedly every year is called "**Domain Registry of America**" (aka DROA), and there are several others that come and go.

The scams can take many forms. One pervasive theme is for the scammer to send you an "**invoice**" for a domain-related service. We have seen them sent by email, fax, and the US Mail. They are very official-looking, designed to look like a bill for services actually rendered. But if you read the tiny print, you can usually discern that it is in fact a solicitation rather than an invoice, and sending them a check constitutes a request for them to transfer your domain name away from your current registrar into the scammer's control. Once they get their hooks in your domain, they may charge you large amounts for yearly renewal and make it very difficult to transfer your domain away to a friendlier registrar.

Sometimes the scammer will offer the first year of service at a reasonable rate, and then increase the rate after that. But other times they will start with the high rate right off the bat. They are hoping to catch people that are too busy to look very closely and simply pay the "invoice".

Another variant on the scam involves sending a "**renewal notice**" for some domain-related service. At first blush, it looks like a renewal notice for the domain registration. On closer inspection you will find that they are instead soliciting you to purchase a "listing", "indexing", or "search engine ranking" service related to the domain. Again, they are hoping you'll just pay it without thinking.

Here is a list of the most common scam types we see involving domains:

- Fake domain renewal notice

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Travel Apps and Tablets

Until quite recently, going on a long-distance trip and staying online required quite a lot of getting ready and not a little bit of luck. Nowadays, it still requires some preparation and forethought, but there are hosts of new options for travelers, including a number of applications available for savvy users. This article will list a few of the things that should be considered with smartphones and tablets to make them useful tools on your trip whole process of getting there and enjoying your stay much easier.

Planning Your Trip

It used to be that guide books or pictures from a friend's trip were the only way a traveler could get a feel for the actual layout and distances of a destination before leaving. But that was before sites like **Google Earth**, **Flickr**, and **Twitter**. Google Earth is not just maps. It has tons of data that can be overlaid. Flickr Places can locate less well-known attractions and groups of locals can be a font of info. You can make inquiries on Twitter or search their archives for tourists' discoveries and insights from the natives.

Apps can help plan your travel to fit your schedule and budget, also. Check the apps store early on.

Traveling with an iPad

Tablets, especially the iPad, seem to be made especially for travelers. They are extremely portable with a

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- Listing/Indexing service disguised as domain renewal
- Renewal notice for a similar domain (e.g. you own mycompany.com and they send an invoice for mycompany.us)
- Fake use-it-or-lose-it threat. They tell you someone has inquired about registering a name similar to yours and offer you the one-time chance to get it first. Usually this is for various Asian domains such as .asia. (I.e. you own mycompany.com and they want to sell you mycompany.asia).

How To Protect Yourself

Here are a few ways you can keep from becoming a victim of these scams:

1. **Ask SWCP!** If you receive any kind of domain-related solicitation or bill, feel free to ask us about it, whether your domain is registered with SWCP or another registrar. We can determine conclusively for you: (a) who is the current registrar and (b) when the domain REALLY expires. We are also happy to look at any suspicious domain invoice to tell you if we think it is legitimate or a scam.
2. **Enable WHOIS Privacy.** The WHOIS database is a public record of the ownership of all domains in the world. Unfortunately, scammers and unscrupulous marketers (spammers) use this information to send scams or poach customers. With WHOIS Privacy, your contact data is masked out of the WHOIS database. If someone needs to contact you for a legitimate purpose, they email the WHOIS Privacy address, and that gets forwarded to you. WHOIS Privacy is FREE for all domains registered with SWCP -- simply ask us to enable it for your domain. If your domain is registered elsewhere, contact your registrar to ask them to enable it. Sometimes there is a fee involved, so be sure to check.
3. **Use Domain Locking.** With a "transfer lock" on your domain, it cannot be transferred to another registrar without getting explicit permission from the domain owner. SWCP locks all domains that we register by default (as do most registrars these days). If your domain is registered elsewhere, contact your registrar to make sure.

And finally, a word of caution. All these scam notices have had another unpleasant side effect. Some people have had to ignore so many of them they have accidentally ignored the legitimate renewal notices and had their domains expire. Losing a domain name can be catastrophic if your business depends upon it. Like your hard drive crashing without backups, you may discover too late that you were more dependent on it than you had realized.

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good sized screen. They can be used for connections, maps and guidebooks as well as entertainment, and the long battery life of an iPad can come in very handy too. But there are several things you should consider, and many of these tips are equally valuable for iPhone or other kinds of tablets, too.

First, speaking of battery life, remember that there is **no global standard for wall plugs** and most countries use frustratingly different pin and socket arrangements, so pack a plug and power adapter for *each* of the countries you plan to visit. Secondly, buy a **sturdy flip-open case** for your iPad. Aside from protecting the device, your iPad will look more like a book and attract less attention.

Third, be **ready to go offline** or **use Wi-Fi** outside the US. If you have a 3G or 4G iPad, turn off the "automatic updating" feature so you won't be charged roaming fees. However, remember you won't be able to use GPS to navigate with just Wi-Fi. If traveling abroad with a smartphone, call your carrier to find out what **data roaming charges** apply. Consider turning off the "celular data" feature so that app updates won't rack up data charges.

Maps and travel guides are essentials. There are plenty of apps available, including walking tours, a huge variety of language guides, weather trackers and a multitude of maps. Guidebooks and travel information in **PDF format** are always accessible, even when offline, so you may want to stock up. And loading up your device with **movies and games** to keep you and your companions amused—especially kids—can help pass those empty hours waiting in airports or wherever.



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Make sure you know *who* your domain registrar is, and white-list their address in your spam filter. The best way to make sure your domain never expires is to **register it with SWCP**. Our renewal-tracking service is second-to-none: we email you notices when renewal time gets close, and if we don't hear back from you we contact you by phone to make sure you know the domain needs to be renewed. No other domain registrars that we know of go to that length.



Southwest Cyberport

New Mexico's Expert Internet Service Provider since 1994

505-243-SWCP (7927) • SWCP.com • Help@swcp.com

5021 Indian School NE, Suite 600, Albuquerque, NM 87110

Portal editor/chief writer, Jay Nelson jnelson@swcp.com