Getting tough on 'dishonest' ISPs, cyber-squatters

By Issa Sikiti da Silva   23 Nov 2009

'Dishonest' Internet service providers (ISPs) who register clients' names as their own and make it difficult for clients who later want to change and have their names managed by another ISP, and cyber-squatters (including spammers and 'witches') will be dealt with severely by the new licensing regulations which are now up for public scrutiny.

.zadna

"The .za licensing regulations are meant to formalise and recognise relationships between ZADNA and the entities involved in administering and registering .za domain names, which has since its inception in the early '90s, never had clearly defined standards and accountability lines for the administrators of various .za domains, and the Internet service providers (ISPs) registering .za domain names," ZA Domain Names general manager Vika Mpisane told Bizcommunity.com on Friday.

"So all in all, the regulations will now establish accountability lines and set suitable technical and operational standards to which the domain administrators and the ISPs must adhere, and will help in various ways to stem unfair and unethical practices by some ISPs.

Making it difficult for cyber-squatters

"These new regulations will also see cyber-squatters' names deleted by a registrar with the aim of helping to protect the .za namespace better from being used by Internet thugs," he added.

An ISP that registers and sells domain names is called a registrar, while the entity administering a database or register of names in a domain is known as a registry, according to Internet terminology.

"We cannot say for sure squatters will have nowhere to hide, but we can say we now will be in a stronger position to receive cooperation from licensed ISPs to delete or cancel squatter names from their hosting platforms," said Mpisane.

"These dodgy characters will be frustrated but might simply go elsewhere outside .za and continue spamming and abusing trademarks and brands. Of great importance for .za is that the licensing framework will effectively put an expectation on licensees to work with us to identify and 'stem out' (sic) squatter activities from the .za space," he added.

Name, shame and jail?

As the spamming pandemic reaches a tipping point, many SA Internet users wonder whether there is any proposed regulation in place to name and shame the cyber-squatters or even put them behind bars.

Mpisane said: "Naming and shaming squatters themselves would require a combined global effort of law enforcers, businesses and the global Internet industry.

"Remember that squatters, who sometimes use fake names and credit cards to register names, may reside in one country and use domain names in other countries. This then demands cooperation between different jurisdictions and global cooperation."

It remains unclear, however, how much it will cost to register a name in terms of the new regulations, but Mpisane reassured the public that the fees, to be set in due course, will be competitive and affordable.

Deadline for written submissions - 18 December 2009

"Any ISP (local or international) interested in obtaining a .za registrar license will be granted a license as long it meets license requirements, and there is no limit to the number of registrars which may be licensed.

"We hope to play our bit to ensure that businesses, families and individuals could register .za names and have their websites at a very minimal cost," he said.

ZADNA will also hold a workshop of stakeholders and interested parties where it will present the regulations and answer questions.

"ZADNA is very keen to make the licensing process coincide with the establishment of the central registry. We will soon be releasing a tender looking for a consultant to help us scope the central registry from a systems design to implementation. The central registry will see most of the .za domains being moved to a single platform."

Closing dates for written submissions is Friday 18 December 2009.

Go to www.zadna.org.za for more information.

ABOUT ISSA SIKITI DA SILVA

Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.
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