

'ai' rides the wave of interest in AI

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- The number of registrations under '.ai' has increased by almost 73% between 20 July 2022 and mid-June this year
- The secondary market for '.ai' domain names is also exploding
- There are no eligibility requirements for '.ai'

Everywhere you look these days there is something about artificial intelligence (AI) - everything from news of members of the European Parliament endorsing the first-ever transparency and risk-management rules for AI systems, to a story about the use of the technology to recreate John Lennon's voice from a demo tape to produce one last Beatles' song. The Anguillan country-code top-level domain (ccTLD), '.ai', appears to be reaping the benefit of this intense interest, with its domain name registration numbers skyrocketing.

Anguilla is a British Overseas Territory situated in the Caribbean to the east of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, with a total area of just 91 square kilometres and a population of only around 16,000. The '.ai' ccTLD (which encompasses the top level '.ai', as well as second-level extensions '.com.ai', '.net.ai' and '.org.ai'), is run by the Registry WHOIS.AI and has been operating since 1995.

The ccTLD has, for some time, been a favourite of tech start-ups and IT entrepreneurs due to its association with the acronym for 'artificial intelligence', coupled with the fact that there are no eligibility requirements for '.ai', meaning that anyone can register a domain name in the ccTLD. However, its growth has accelerated at a significant pace just recently.

Just under a year ago, on 20 July 2022, there was a total of 143,737 '.ai' domain names registered. By mid-June of this year, this figure had reached 248,609 domain names, representing an almost 73% increase. The lucky recipient of the bulk of the revenue from these registrations (which was estimated to be up to \$2.9 million in 2018), is the Anguillan government.

It is not just the registration of '.ai' domain names that is exploding - the secondary market for '.ai' domain names is said to have reached a total sales volume of \$1 million in the first quarter of 2023. This is helped along by the registry itself, which routinely auctions off expiring '.ai' domain names. The highest reported price ever paid for a '.ai' domain name was €95,000 for the domain name 'expert.ai' in 2020, and 2023 has already seen the sale of domain names such as 'wise.ai' for \$29,009 and 'brand.ai' for \$24,555.

'.ai' has some parallels with '.io', the ccTLD for the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), a collection of seven atolls and over 1,000 individual islands in the Chagos Archipelago with a total land area of only 60 square kilometres. '.io' also enjoys popularity among tech companies due to its association with the computing term 'input/output', as well as those seeking domain hacks for words ending in 'io'. However, unlike '.ai', the '.io' ccTLD is run by a private company located outside of the BIOT and the IO ISO code even risks being abolished as a result of a dispute over sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago, which could ultimately result in the retirement of the '.io' ccTLD. In spite of this, '.io' is said to be currently enjoying an impressive 32% year-on-year growth rate and total registration numbers of over one million.

It seems unlikely that the public focus on AI will shift any time soon and, between tech start-ups looking to fly the AI flag and domain name speculators seeking to cash in on the hype, it is difficult to see the registry's '.ai' domain name numbers declining any time soon.

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