

World Trademark Review Daily

'pw' - have you got anything without spam in it?
International - Hogan Lovells LLP

Domain names

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The newly re-launched '.pw' extension has come in for some bad press recently, with one leading internet security firm reporting that, at the end of April, nearly 50% of all spam URLs had their origins in the top-level domain (TLD), and another firm encouraging its customers to block emails from the TLD entirely as it had "yet to see a legitimate piece of mail for the '.pw' domain".

It appears that the lure of a bargain basement price, along with the chance for registrants to secure a plot of virgin internet territory, proved irresistible to spammers, who wasted no time in setting about utilising their new domains. [Directi](#), the company that runs the '.pw' registry, was quick to react to the allegations by asserting that it had deactivated as many as 5,000 '.pw' domains for breach of its anti-abuse policy and by claiming that a single, now sanctioned, registrar was responsible for many of the dubious registrations.

'.pw', the country code top-level domain for Palau, was [re-launched late last year](#). Promoted by registry operator Directi under the guise of 'professional web', the revamped TLD was aimed at "professionals and businesses looking to showcase their presence online". The '.pw' namespace had lain pretty much dormant since a previous attempt at reinvention as 'personal web' in 2004 failed to garner much interest.

The most recent launch of '.pw' was rolled out in three stages:

- a sunrise period for trademark holders;
- a landrush period, during which domain names subject to multiple applications were auctioned off; and
- a general availability period that began on March 25 of this year.

Thus, Palau joined the ranks of other small nations such as Tuvalu ('.tv') - a collection of islands in the Pacific Ocean threatened by rising sea levels - and Montenegro ('.me') - member of the former Yugoslavia and home to less than a million people, to opportunistically market their TLDs as pseudo-generic extensions. In offering low-cost registrations, '.pw' also seems to have suffered something of the same fate as '.tk', the TLD of Tokelau (a group of coral islands in the South Pacific Ocean with a total land area of 10 km²) that became a [haven for phishing and spam after it offered free registrations](#).

Available via a number of accredited registrars, the competitively priced '.pw' domain names racked up more than 4,000 orders in the first 30 minutes of the opening of the general availability period, and over 50,000 registrations in the following three weeks. However, it seems that many of the professionals the registry attracted with its low prices were in fact professional spammers. Unsurprisingly perhaps, according to one analysis, around half of the 63,000-odd registrations were hosted on servers located in China and the head of Directi's '.pw' registry unit, Sandeep Ramchandani, stated that a single registrar was responsible for the majority of the abusive registrations. Ramchandani claims that registrations from this offending registrar dried up once its discount was revoked.

In any event, the '.pw' registry appears to be taking a hard line approach to abuse, professing to be operating a 'zero tolerance' policy and providing an easy to use online form on its website via which abuse may be reported.

Certain observers have been watching the outcome of the recent '.pw' launch with interest, searching for clues as to how the arrival and wider commercialisation of the new gTLDs on the Internet will play out. One can only hope that the various registries will put in place anti-abuse policies and reporting procedures as sturdy as those implemented by the '.pw' registry, so that the single biggest expansion of the Internet in recent history does not turn out to be one giant headache for brand owners.

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