

What is WHOIS?

When you register a domain name for your website via a registrar like GoDaddy, you are required to provide your identifying information, which may include: name, address, email, and phone number. This information is part of your “WHOIS” data (not an acronym), which also encompasses the technical, billing, and administrative contact information associated with your domain name.

When registering a domain name, you are **required** to provide accurate, complete identifying information based on the requirement from the registrars (companies that sell Internet domain names) and update it promptly if there are any changes during the term of your registration period. Failure to do so may result in your domain name being suspended or canceled.

Independent registrars and registries (organizations that operate generic top level domains) under contract with ICANN manage the WHOIS data. Required by ICANN’s [Affirmation of Commitments](#), they provide unrestricted, public access to this information. Anyone can use free WHOIS look-up site like [this](#) to identify you, the registrant (the domain name holder).

- Learn more about [HOW WHOIS Works](#)

Why WHOIS matters to you?

WHOIS matters to you because 1) you are obligated to provide and maintain accurate, complete WHOIS data and 2) the data is publicly available.

What are the implications?

On one hand, WHOIS data is key for fixing system problems, maintaining Internet stability, and enhancing the accountability of registrants. Accurate WHOIS data can protect you by assisting law enforcement tracking down registrants who may be posting illegal content or engaging in [phishing scams](#), for example.

On the other hand, the disclosure of private information via WHOIS may also expose you to potential spam, phishing, and identity theft. Hence, some registries and registrars offer privacy or proxy services that show only the contact information of the service to shield registrants from revealing their true identities in the database.

- Learn more about the [Privacy and Proxy services](#)

What is ICANN’s role in WHOIS?

In 1982, the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) published the protocol for directory service, which formed the basis of WHOIS. ICANN inherited the WHOIS protocol in

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1998 and took over the responsibility of implementing measures to maintain timely, unrestricted, and public access to accurate and complete WHOIS information.

To carry out this responsibility, ICANN has developed and implemented consensus policies to set up the basic framework that directs how the WHOIS service is operated. As the WHOIS protocol remains largely unchanged since 1999 in spite of its expanded uses, ICANN has had to modify WHOIS requirements over the years and assess specific issues periodically via a WHOIS Policy Review Team performed by volunteer community members, including our At-Large members. Specifically, ICANN's Generic Name Supporting Organization (GNSO) works to develop new policies to address each issue, as appropriate. ICANN's advisory committees, including the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), provide advice to revise and refine WHOIS policies.

- Learn more about the [History of WHOIS](#)
- [Learn more about WHOIS Review Team](#)
- [Learn more about the Organizational Structure of the At-Large Community](#)

What you need to know about WHOIS Policy and WHOIS Studies?

ICANN has adopted several consensus policies over the years to improve WHOIS services. Click [here](#) to read a comprehensive explanation of WHOIS related policies, practices, and procedures.

As the evolution of the Internet ecosystem has created challenges for WHOIS in every area, the GNSO has initiated a series of studies in several key issues to reform existing policies and develop new policies. Click [here](#) to learn about the issues.

How the At-Large community has contributed to WHOIS Policy?

Advocating for the interests of registrants like you, we advise on reviews and studies related WHOIS, with a keen focus on the accuracy issues and privacy rights. Through publishing Policy Advice Statement, participating in WHOIS Policy Review Team and cross-community working groups, and speaking in teleconferences and meetings, we influence WHOIS related policy and make the end-users' voice heard.

Below is a list of our Policy Advice Statement on WHOIS related issues. [the highlighted ones are featured Statements identified by Carlton]

2014

- [Draft Implementation Plan for the WHOIS Online Accuracy and Reporting System](#)
- [Study on Whois Misuse](#)

2013

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- [Thick Whois Policy Development Process \(PDP\) Recommendations for Board Consideration](#)
- [Proposed Final 2013 RAA](#)
- [Study on Whois Privacy & Proxy Service Abuse](#)
- [Thick Whois Initial Report – GNSO Policy Development Process](#)
- [Whois Registrant Identification Study, Draft Report](#)
- [Thick Whois PDP WG](#)

2012

- [ALAC Analysis of AoC WHOIS Report Recommendations](#)
- [WHOIS AC SO Request](#)
- [ALAC Correspondence Endorsing the IPC's Statement on the .com Renewal and Thick Whois](#)
- [WHOIS Policy Review Team Final Report](#)
- [WHOIS Policy Review Team Draft Report](#)

2011

- [Preliminary Issue Report on "Thick" Whois](#)
- [WHOIS Policy Review Team – Discussion Paper](#)
- [WHOIS Policy Review Team – Discussion Paper](#)
- [Whois Review Team](#)
- [WHOIS Review Team's RFC on Scope of Work and Roadmap, Outreach and Action Plans for Whois Review Exercise](#)

2010

- [Recent WHOIS Reports](#)
- [WHOIS Service Requirements Report](#)

2008

- [GNSO WHOIS Hypothesis Working Group Report](#)

Latest Development

[This section will aggregate news & announcement related to WHOIS from icann.org]

- [Second Annual Report on WHOIS Improvements Now Available](#)
- [Launch of the Implementation Advisory Group to Review Existing ICANN Procedure for Handling WHOIS Conflicts with Privacy Law](#)
- [Call for Volunteers for Implementation Advisory Group to Review Existing ICANN Procedure for Handling WHOIS Conflicts with Privacy Laws](#)
- [WHOIS Accuracy Study Preliminary Findings Reflect Improvements in Accuracy](#)
- [Registry and Registrar WHOIS Service Clarifications](#)

How can you get involved?

Want to get involved in WHOIS-related policy development and voice the interests from end-users? There are several ways for you to engage through At-Large.

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Despite your membership in the At-Large community, you (in fact, anyone!) can volunteer for our [Registration Issues Working Group](#) by sending a message to staff@atlarge.icann.org. You will be participating in conference calls and mailing list discussion about policy issues. If you just want to be an observer in the group, simply [subscribe](#) to its mailing list.

- Learn more about At-Large Working Groups
- Learn more about [Other Ways to Get Involved in WHOIS-related Policy Development](#)

Resources

- [The Beginner's Guide to WHOIS](#)
- [GNSO Council WHOIS Activities](#)
- <http://whois.icann.org/>