

Has consumer trust in the DNS improved overall since the introduction of new gTLDs?

In order to assess whether consumer trust in the Domain Name System (DNS) has improved overall since the introduction of new gTLDs, ICANN commissioned audience tracker research among global online consumer end users and global domain name registrants. Two surveys of each group were taken approximately one year apart. These surveys were aimed broadly at assessing the current Top-level Domain landscape, as well as measure factors such as consumer awareness, experience, choice, and trust with new TLDs and the domain name system in general. Reports on the survey results from the consumer segment were published in April 2015 and June 2016, and reports on the registrant surveys were published in September 2015 and August 2016.

Summary of findings

Consumers:

- The first survey found that about half of consumers trust the Domain Name industry just as much as other tech industries and the rest are more inclined to trust it more as opposed to less.
- The second survey found that trust levels had at least remained the same since 2015. The global total seemed to improve against all of the 5 reference industries, wave over wave, by an average of just over 4 percentage points. At this point however it's not possible to conclude with certainty that these levels had in fact improved.

Registrants:

- The first survey found positive results similar to those found in the consumer segment when it comes to trust in the domain name industry relative to other industries.
- The second survey found that overall trust remained high against other tech industries.

Consumer segment – first report

This survey explored findings related to perceptions of the domain name system in more general terms—ease of registration, trust in the industry, and expectations regarding the behavior of the industry.

Overall, about half of consumers trust the Domain Name industry just as much as other tech industries (ISPs, s/w companies, computer/hardware, e-commerce, web-based marketing firms), and the rest are more inclined to trust it more as opposed to less. Africa, Asia, and South America, more so than the other regions, say they trust the Domain Name industry more comparatively.

Other findings:

1. Registration is not hard, but it isn't easy either. This may be in part due to the infrequency of the task/lack of familiarity with the process, but there is clearly room to improve the ease of the registration process.
2. Half of registrants would prefer a cheaper, quicker, less complicated experience when purchasing a domain name. There is also a notable desire to make the process of registering in multiple TLDs easier.
3. While restrictions are often viewed negatively, consumers seem to suggest that they expect or assume entities are validating registrants. This suggests that Internet citizens have an expectation that the industry will police itself. There are generally high levels of trust that the domain name entities will use due diligence, although somewhat tempered in North America and Europe.
4. Trust in the industry is high. Low restriction and self-policing may be made acceptable by the fact that the domain registration industry is seen to be at least as credible and trustworthy as other tech-oriented businesses.

Consumer Segment – second report

The second survey explored findings related to perceptions of the domain name system compared to other technology-based industries.

The report made three findings:

1. Overall, trust levels had at least remained the same since 2015. The global total appeared to have improved against all of the 5 reference industries, wave over wave, by an average of just over 4 percentage points. Ratings from Africa and South America are the most stable, only showing improvement against ISPs. As noted above, there is no way to confirm that these numbers have improved over the two surveys.
2. Trust in the domain name system is highest relative to ISPs. The relative levels of trust compared to other industries is very similar to last wave. Nearly 50% trust the domain name system more than ISPs, while e-Commerce and web-based marketing companies are closer to the domain name industry's trust levels, with one in three respondents trusting the domain name system more.
3. Trust in restriction enforcement relatively strong. Globally, 70% feel either high to moderate levels of trust that restrictions will actually be enforced.

Additional findings:

- Overall, trust among consumers for the Domain Name industry has at least remained the same vs. 2015. Africa and Asia, more so than the other regions, say they trust the domain name industry.
- 7 in 10 consumers feel high to moderate levels of trust that the restrictions will actually be enforced, although this is somewhat tempered in Europe and North America.

- Reputation was the factor cited most as the reason consumers trusted the DNS more than other tech industries; it was also cited as the reason consumers trusted the DNS less than other industries.

Registrant Segment – first report

The first report looked at registrant trust in the DNS compared to trust levels in other tech industries. It found results similar to those found in the consumer segment when it comes to trust in the domain name industry relative to other industries. More so than other regions, in Asia registrants say they hold comparatively higher trust in the Domain Name industry.

Registrant Segment – second report

The second report again explored findings related to perceptions of the domain name industry and its trustworthiness:

1. Overall, trust in the industry remains high. None of the wave over wave differences are statistically significant. Asian respondents report the greatest trust in the industry
2. General reputation and self-interest drive trust. Registrants expect the industry to adhere to practices that protect its own interests and commonly note security protocols, as well as just a general positive reputation. Those who trust less cite poor security and regulations as well as general reputational issues like a lack of transparency