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ISSUE 05 – JUNE 2026

DS | THE DOMAIN STANDARD

1 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

THE VALUE DRIVING THE .AI BOOM

by Michael Law

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From Web2 Roots to Web3 Frontiers

The Domain Standard is the voice of a new era in digital identity and investment. Bridging the worlds of Web2 and Web3, each issue explores the evolving role of domain names as strategic assets, financial instruments, and cultural signifiers in the decentralized internet. With original reporting, market analysis, and expert insight, we track the forces reshaping how domains are owned, traded, and understood, from blockchain-based infrastructure to AI-driven valuation. Whether you're a seasoned investor, a curious builder, or simply navigating the naming layer of the digital world, *The Domain Standard* offers a clear lens on where the internet is going and who gets to name it.

Editorial Manager
Matteo Stettler

AI Changes Everything. Names Still Matter.

Every few years, the internet goes through a moment that feels genuinely transformative. Those of us who have been around the digital world for some time have already witnessed several of these moments: the arrival of the web itself, the rise of search engines, social media, smartphones, cloud computing. Each promised to change everything. Some did. Today, it is impossible to ignore the feeling that artificial intelligence represents another such turning point.

AI is already reshaping how people build businesses, create content, write software, and interact online. New tools appear almost daily. Entire products are being developed by tiny teams—or sometimes by a single individual assisted by AI. At the same time, questions about trust, identity, ownership, and authenticity have become more urgent than ever.

For the domain industry, this raises an obvious question: what happens to domains in a world increasingly navigated by intelligent systems rather than by humans typing into browsers?

The contributors to this issue offer a remarkably consistent answer: domains are not becoming less important. If anything, they are becoming more important.

Our cover story, "The Value Driving the .AI Boom," by Michael Law (GritBrokerage), explores one of the most striking phenomena in the domain space over the last decade. While the spectacular rise of .AI is often explained simply as a consequence of the AI boom, Michael shows that the story is more nuanced. At its core, the success of .AI has been driven by a familiar dynamic: founders searching for the best possible brand within the limits of their budgets.

This theme continues in our Quarterly Focus interview with Michaela Cruden, Director of Domains, DNS & SSL Products at the IONOS Group. Michaela offers a fascinating perspective on what she calls the emerging "agentic web": a future in which autonomous agents increasingly interact online on our behalf. In such an environment, domains and DNS may become essential trust anchors, allowing both humans and machines to verify identity and legitimacy.

Our 'Voice of the Quarter,' Lars Jensen, offers a compelling counterpoint to AI anxiety in the domain industry. Rather than a threat, he sees AI as a catalyst — one that could trigger the internet's next major growth surge by dramatically lowering the barriers to entrepreneurship. As solo founders gain the ability to launch brands, businesses, and digital ventures at speed and scale, the demand for online identity will only multiply. Every new creation, ultimately, still needs a name.

The broader 'Innovation and Tech' section explores these developments from different angles. Simone Catania examines how domains fit into the era of "vibe coding," while Nicolas Maggi presents Freename AI and reflects on how AI may reshape not only websites, but the very way we discover and navigate the web itself.

As always, this issue is also about people. In our Who's Who section, we are delighted to feature Arif Sengore, Kate Buckley, Joseph Alagna, Michael Gilmour, Ryan McKegney, and Neha Naik Raval—professionals whose work continues to shape the industry in important ways.

Readers will also find our regular market updates, including the Q1 2026 aftermarket and registration reports, an interview with Leanne McMahon of Crunch.id, and a snippet of InterNetX's latest data from the Global Domain Report 2026.

Finally, our events section takes us from Stockholm to Milan and Berlin, revisiting some of the key gatherings of the past months while looking ahead to what promises to be another busy quarter. The "Calendar Events" section includes Past Events of the Quarter, with a review of Nordic Domain Days 2026 in Stockholm by Lars Forsberg and a review of AI Week in Milan 2026 by Gherardo Varani (Head of BD at Freename); it also features the Key Event of the Quarter, the InterNetX Domain Summit in Berlin (June 16, 2026), with a review by Simone Catania (InterNetX); and concludes with a "What's to Come?" outlook on upcoming industry gatherings.

If there is one idea that emerges from these pages, it is perhaps this: technology changes quickly, but certain fundamentals remain remarkably stable. No matter how sophisticated AI becomes, the internet will still need identity, trust, and ownership. Domains continue to provide all three.

Enjoy the issue.

The Editorial Team

The Domain Standard

Introducing freename

Freename is a leading Web3 company pioneering the future of digital identity through blockchain-based domain names. With a vision to decentralize internet naming infrastructure, Freename empowers individuals, brands, and communities to register, own, and control their domains without reliance on centralized authorities.

Freename's platform allows users not only to mint and trade top-level and second-level domains (TLDs and SLDs) on-chain, but also to integrate them across Web3 ecosystems for use in wallets, websites, applications, and beyond. Built on open standards and designed for interoperability, Freename domains are fully owned by their holders, bringing transparency, permanence, and user sovereignty to the naming layer of the internet.

Founded with the belief that domains are more than digital addresses, Freename supports a growing global community of creators, developers, and investors exploring the potential of Web3-native naming systems.

To learn more, visit **freename.com** and explore how you can own your digital identity, one domain at a time.

The Freename Team

Nicolas Maggi | Head of Product
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Quarterly focus

The Value Driving the .AI Boom

Michael Law

Author

Michael Law, a Senior Broker and outbound specialist, has over 16 years of domain industry and sales experience. Known as a people person with a background in direct sales and finance, he is easy to communicate with, a great listener and problem solver with extensive knowledge of the Internet landscape. He understands the power of a great brand and why pairing that with a premium domain name is one of the most important tasks for business owners, entrepreneurs and corporate executives. Michael organized well attended domain industry events in Denver (RMDC 2011-2013) as well as launched and authored the popular domain news blog NameTalent.com. Beyond his online endeavors, he loves spending time with his family, traveling and gardening. He also enjoys the great outdoors - hiking, photography, snowboarding, fishing/hunting in his home state of Nebraska are among his favorite activities.

Over the last several years, no extension has benefited more from the artificial intelligence boom than .AI. While still technically the country code extension for Anguilla, .AI has been successfully repurposed and marketed to a global audience, becoming the default naming choice for thousands of startups building in the AI sector. Today, it is difficult to spend time around venture backed technology companies without encountering a steady stream of new businesses launching on .AI domains.

The rise of .AI is often attributed entirely to the explosive growth of artificial intelligence itself. While AI's popularity has certainly fueled demand, that explanation only tells part of the story. From a brokerage perspective, the real driver behind the .AI boom has been much simpler: value.

For decades, premium one word .COM domains represented the gold standard for online branding. They still do today. The best .COM domains are memorable, authoritative, globally recognized, and increasingly scarce. The challenge for startups was never understanding the value of a great .COM. The challenge was affording one. As competition for premium .COM domains increased, prices followed. Many of the strongest one word .COM domains moved into six, seven, and even eight figure territory, placing them beyond the reach of most early stage companies.

> **"The rise of .AI is often attributed entirely to the explosive growth of artificial intelligence itself. While AI's popularity has certainly fueled demand, that explanation only tells part of the story. From a brokerage perspective, the real driver behind the .AI boom has been much simpler: value."**

For many founders, .AI offered access to shorter, cleaner, more memorable brands at a fraction of the cost of comparable .COM domains. Instead of settling for a longer name, adding unnecessary words, or compromising on branding altogether, startups could often acquire a strong one word .AI domain that aligned with both their industry and their budget. The value proposition was obvious. A founder who could not justify spending seven figures on a .COM could still secure a premium digital identity and invest the remaining capital into hiring, product development, customer acquisition, or extending runway.

That combination of relevance, availability, and affordability fueled one of the strongest domain trends the industry has seen in decades.

What is particularly interesting, however, is not the rise of .AI itself. It is the behavior of the buyers behind it.

One of the biggest misconceptions in the domain industry is that startups are always searching for the best possible domain. In reality, most are searching for the best possible brand they can justify within a specific budget. That distinction explains much of what we are seeing in today's AI domain market.

Many founders begin the process with an ideal domain in mind. They identify a premium one word .AI domain, decide it would be a perfect fit for their business, and begin exploring acquisition options. Sometimes those conversations result in a transaction. Often they do not.

The reason is not a lack of appreciation for quality. It is economics.

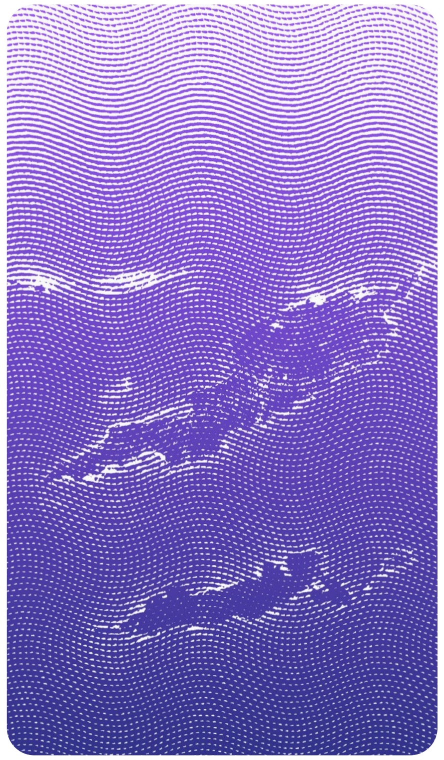
Unlike domain investors, startups do not evaluate domains in isolation. Every dollar spent on a domain is a dollar that cannot be spent elsewhere. Even well funded startups face constant decisions regarding capital allocation. Engineering talent, infrastructure, sales, marketing, customer support, and product development all compete for the same resources. As a result, startup buyers are often far more disciplined than domain owners expect.

A founder may absolutely love a particular one word .AI domain. They may agree it is the perfect brand. They may fully understand the strategic advantages it provides. Yet that same founder may still conclude that spending $250,000 or $500,000 on the acquisition does not make sense at their current stage of growth.

When that happens, startups rarely abandon their search. They adapt.

This is one of the most consistent patterns we observe in brokerage conversations. Buyers who initially focus on a specific domain often become increasingly flexible as they evaluate alternatives. What begins as a search for one exact domain frequently evolves into a broader discussion about branding, budget, and priorities.

> **"The best domain isn't always the best business decision."**



Anguilla, the Caribbean territory behind the .AI domain.

Some founders are less attached to a specific domain than domain investors assume. They are attached to outcomes. If a domain improves credibility, memorability, positioning, and customer trust, it has value. However, if a similar outcome can be achieved for a fraction of the cost, many founders will choose the more efficient path.

That flexibility played a significant role in the growth of .AI. The timing of .AI's rise was also important. Over the last decade, premium .COM values accelerated dramatically. While great .COM domains have always commanded strong prices, the market reached another level as venture capital, private equity, and large corporations increasingly viewed category defining digital assets as strategic acquisitions. Multiple eight figure .COM sales were publicly reported, including AI.com, which reportedly sold for approximately $70 million. Transactions at that level reinforced the idea that the very best digital real estate had become increasingly scarce and increasingly expensive.

For many startups, these prices were fascinating but largely irrelevant. A founder raising a seed or Series A round might appreciate the value of a premium .COM, but spending seven figures on a domain was rarely realistic. The practical question became: where can we find a strong brand that still fits within our budget?

That question helped fuel demand for .AI. Founders could often acquire short, memorable, category relevant domains that would have been financially out of reach if they existed as comparable .COM assets. As more successful AI companies launched on .AI domains, acceptance grew. Investors became comfortable with the extension. Customers became familiar with it. What initially felt like an alternative gradually became the default choice for many AI startups.
Investor sentiment toward .AI changed dramatically during this period as well. In 2021, many domain investors approached .AI cautiously. Renewal fees were substantially higher than traditional extensions and there were ongoing questions about long term adoption. Investors worried that carrying large portfolios could become expensive if demand failed to materialize. Fast forward to today and much of that hesitation has disappeared.
Demand has remained strong, public sales have increased, and investors have become significantly more comfortable with the economics of the extension. As a result, more capital has flowed into premium .AI domains, creating additional competition for the best assets and helping drive prices higher.
The market reached another milestone when Bot.ai reportedly sold for $1.2 million, becoming the first publicly reported seven figure .AI sale. Transactions like that helped reinforce the idea that premium .AI domains had evolved from speculative assets into a legitimate premium category. However, they also contributed to rising seller expectations. As more investors entered the market and more high profile sales were reported, asking prices followed.

> "Premium .AI domains had evolved from speculative assets into a legitimate premium category."

Like any rapidly appreciating market, however, not every investment will be a winner. Some investors will acquire strong assets, while others may find themselves holding domains that never attract the level of demand they expected. The reason is simple. The success of .AI was never driven solely by the extension itself. It was driven by the value proposition it offered startup buyers.

Most startups did not choose .AI because they believed it was superior to .COM. They chose .AI because it offered a better balance between branding and affordability. In many cases, the startup was never realistically choosing between the .COM and the .AI. The .COM was simply outside the budget from the beginning.
Ironically, the success of .AI is beginning to create the same challenge that originally helped drive adoption. As demand has increased, asking prices for premium one word .AI domains have risen dramatically. Domains that once sold for low or mid five figures are now routinely marketed at six figure valuations. Some of the strongest assets are priced considerably higher.
Demand remains exceptionally strong and we continue to see meaningful buyer interest throughout the sector. However, as pricing moves higher, founders inevitably become more flexible. Some pursue secondary .AI options and others revisit .COM opportunities. Many become increasingly willing to consider .IO, .CO, .XYZ, .APP, .NET and other extensions that provide similar branding benefits at potentially lower price points. Looking ahead, it would not be surprising to see new extensions rolling out over the next few years capture part of this demand as startups continue searching for value.
This is not a bearish outlook for .AI. Quite the opposite. The extension has firmly established itself as one of the most important namespaces in technology. Artificial intelligence continues attracting enormous amounts of capital, talent, media attention, and entrepreneurial energy. As long as that remains true, demand for premium .AI domains is likely to remain strong.

> "The success of .AI is beginning to create the same challenge that originally helped drive adoption."

The Evolution of .AI

- **1995** — Anguilla ccTLD
- **2015-2020** — Early startup adoption
- **2021** — Investor skepticism (high renewals)
- **2022-2024** — AI boom
- **Early 2026** — $1M+ .AI sales
- **Today** — Mainstream startup extension

The lesson for domain owners is simply that demand alone does not determine value. The success of .AI was built on offering startups a compelling balance between branding and affordability. Owners of premium .AI domains who understand that dynamic will be best positioned to capitalize on the opportunity. The goal is not necessarily to find the one buyer willing to pay any price. More often, successful transactions occur where strong demand and realistic startup budgets intersect.
For founders, the lesson is equally important. Great brands matter. Premium domains create value. But the strongest acquisitions are often the result of understanding both the strategic benefits of a domain and the opportunity cost of the capital required to acquire it.
The rise of .AI has been one of the most fascinating developments in the domain industry over the last decade. What started as the country code extension for a small Caribbean island evolved into the preferred naming convention for one of the most important technology sectors in the world. That transformation was not driven by technology alone. It was driven by value.
Technology trends will come and go. Extensions will rise and fall. Yet startup buyers consistently behave the same way. They pursue the strongest brand they can justify within the constraints of their budget. That reality helped create the .AI boom and may also shape whatever comes next.

> "Great brands matter. Premium domains create value."

.COM vs .AI | A Comparison for Startups

FACTOR	PREMIUM .COM	PREMIUM .AI
Brand authority	Very high	High in AI sector
Availability	Extremely scarce	More available
Typical acquisition cost	$$$$$$ - $$$$$$$$ 6–8 figures	$$$$$ - $$$$$$ 5–6 figures
Startup affordability	Often limited	More accessible
Industry relevance	Universal	AI-focused
Investor perception	Established asset	Rapidly maturing asset

Quarterly focus Interview

Michaela Cruden on the Future of Domains in the Age of AI

About Michaela Cruden

Michaela Cruden is Director of Domains, DNS & SSL Products at the IONOS Group, Europe's leading registrar group, which operates across retail and wholesale layers with a portfolio of 22 million domains under management. Born and raised in New Zealand, residing in Berlin, she has spent more than fifteen years in the domain industry, with leadership roles across registrars, registries, and infrastructure businesses on three continents. At IONOS she leads product strategy across the Group's domain and SSL portfolio, including the AutoDNS platform. She sits at the intersection of commercial strategy, regulatory compliance, and product innovation, with active engagement at ICANN, DENIC, and across the wider registry community. Her current focus is the meeting point of domain infrastructure, regulatory weight, and the new generation of AI-driven build platforms.

Does this current AI-driven shift feel different from previous internet transformations? What stands out to you most about this moment?

It feels different because the question underneath it has changed.

Every previous shift I have lived through was about the interface. Static to dynamic. Desktop to mobile. On-premise to cloud. The human stayed at the centre, and we kept building better windows for them to look through. The agentic web does not do that. The human steps back, and an autonomous agent steps forward to act on their behalf. That is not just a new interface, it is a new question about what humans are for in the agentic era.

There is a line attributed to Oscar Wilde, that if you know what you want to be in life, you inevitably become it, and that will be your punishment. The line has stayed with me for over two decades now. Most of us spend our careers becoming a noun and it is the entire framework upon which we construct our identity. The expert. The operator. The specialist. The director. And the noun is exactly the part AI can now do. What it cannot do is be a conscious human with agency, deciding what is worth becoming next.

If machines can navigate, verify, negotiate, and transact at machine speed, the human contribution shifts. We become the source of meaning, intent, and judgement. The agent executes. We decide what is worth executing in the first place. The internet that emerges from this is one where infrastructure does the operational work, and humans do the work only humans can do, which is deciding what matters.

From where I sit, working across an expansive ecosystem of registrar brands within the IONOS Group and a B2B platform built for automation, you can see the shift in the data before you see it in the headlines. Query patterns are changing, API volumes are climbing, and the routes people use to arrive at a domain are no longer the routes they used five years ago. Fewer typed URLs, fewer search results clicked through, more agents and assistants resolving destinations on someone's behalf. The traffic profile of a domain in 2026 is not the traffic profile of a domain in 2020, and neither is the discovery profile that gets people there. We are watching the internet quietly turn from a network of human destinations into a network of machine-readable endpoints. The infrastructure is racing forward and the interesting question is what we ask it to do.

> "The human steps back, and an autonomous agent steps forward to act on their behalf. That is not just a new interface, it is a new question about what humans are for in the agentic era."

Do you think domains and DNS are about to become more central as trust anchors in how humans and AI interact online?

Yes. And the industry has not fully caught up to what that means yet.

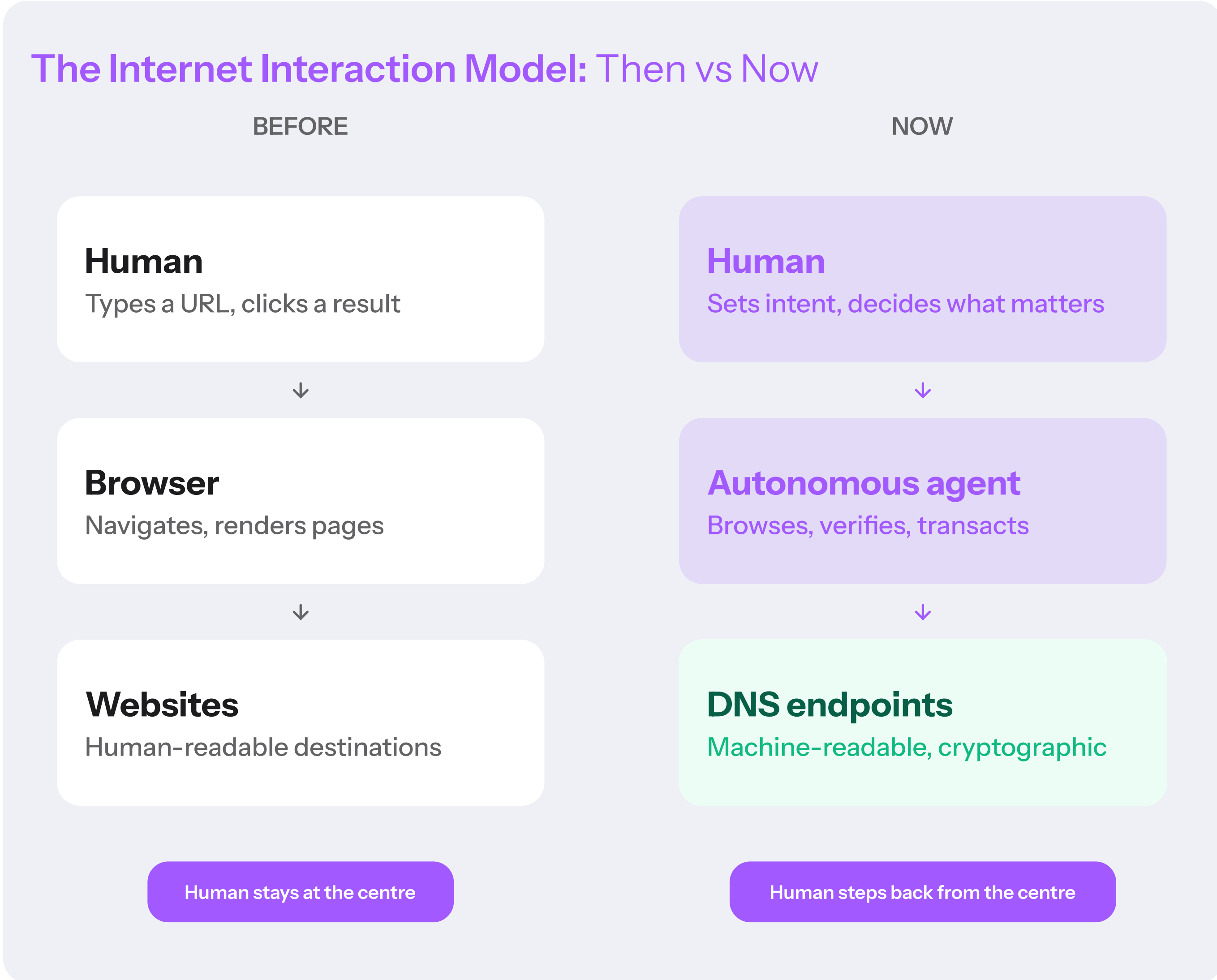
For two decades the question that the internet asked at every important threshold was the same one. Prove you are human. The CAPTCHA, the security question, the painstaking process of figuring out how much of the bicycle bleeds into one square and whether it counts, all of it was built to filter machines out so humans could get in. The underlying assumption was that being human was its own credential. A human, by way of creation and arrival in the world, was treated as more credible and more conscious than anything else trying to interact with the system. Humanity was the proxy for trust.

We are now building the inverse. The new question is no longer to prove you are human, it is to prove you are an agent that understands the rules of engagement. That is a much harder threshold, because it cannot be cleared by existence alone. The agent has to demonstrate that it knows what credibility requires, that it can act within bounds, and that it can be held to account when it does not. The hard part is that the rules of engagement are still being designed, and the industry that ends up writing them will shape how the next decade of the web actually works.

When a human visits a website, they make trust decisions visually. Logo, design, the lock in the browser. An AI agent has none of that. It cannot squint at a homepage and decide it looks legitimate or suspicious. It needs cryptographic proof that the endpoint it is talking to is the one it thinks it is, and it needs that proof at machine speed.

The DNS is the only system in the stack that can deliver it. DNSSEC, DANE, MTA-STS, BIMI, the SPF/DKIM/DMARC family, the emerging work on verifiable credentials at the domain layer, all of this turns the domain from an address into an authority. The agent does not read the website. It reads the records. That is a quiet but enormous change in what a domain is for, and the registrars who understand it will build very different products to the ones who do not.

> "The new question is no longer to prove you are human, it is to prove you are an agent that understands the rules of engagement."



> "We become the source of meaning, intent, and judgement. The agent executes. We decide what is worth executing in the first place."

Is the domain ecosystem prepared for a future where AI agents may increasingly browse, verify, negotiate and even transact autonomously? Where do you still see gaps?

The protocols are ready. The strategy, in places, is not.

Four decades of engineering have given us a DNS that scales, a registration system that works, and a policy framework that, for all its arguments, mostly holds. That is the steady-hand answer and it is genuinely true. The DNS will not be the thing that breaks.

The gap is upstream of the protocols. Too much of the industry has spent the last few years competing on price rather than strategy. Simple discount pass-throughs no longer generate meaningful traction, and the registries and registrars who are still trying are running out of room. Add the operational pressure that comes with regulatory weight, NIS2 and KRITIS at the European level, evolving KYC and abuse obligations at the global level, and what you have is an industry that needs to do two things at once. Hold the line on compliance, and remember how to do strategic, segment-led product work for a buyer who is changing fast. Across the IONOS Group's retail and wholesale layers we are doing both, and it is harder and more interesting than it looks from the outside.

> "Identity is moving back to infrastructure. Domains are the layer it lands on."

Could domains become even more important as signals of legitimacy and digital identity?

The cost of generating convincing content has collapsed. The cost of verifying its source has not. The asymmetry and tension between those two realities is the whole story.

If the content can no longer be trusted on its own merits, the source has to carry the weight. A statement attached to an authenticated domain, signed with the right records, is mathematically traceable to an owner. A statement attached to nothing is just text on a screen.

But arguably the deeper point is sovereignty. A domain is one of the few pieces of digital identity that is genuinely yours. A platform account belongs to the platform. A handle on someone else's network belongs to that network. The rules can change overnight, and most of the time you find out after the fact. A domain is registered, controlled, and operated on infrastructure with decades of policy maturity behind it. It is the closest thing to sovereign ground that exists in the digital layer.

The heavier the burden, the more real our lives become, and identity carries the same logic. Identity that costs nothing to assert is identity that means nothing. Identity attached to infrastructure you control, with policy maturity behind it and consequences for misuse, is identity with weight. That changes the calculation for brands and operators. The exact-match domain, the defensive registrations, the certificate hygiene, the DNS records that prove who you are, all of that becomes the difference between the identity you own and the identity you rent. Most brands will discover, in the next few years, that the digital identity they have built on borrowed infrastructure is not theirs. The brands that built on domain infrastructure will find theirs is. Regulators are arriving at the same conclusion from the other direction. Frameworks like NIS2 are essentially codifying what good operators have done for years, treating the domain layer as critical infrastructure that has to be verifiable, accountable, and traceable. Identity is moving back to infrastructure. Domains are the layer it lands on.

After such a long career in this space, what still fascinates you most about domains and internet infrastructure?

The fact that almost nobody knows it exists.

My educational background is in international relations, political science, and psychology, and I came into this industry by accident. What kept me here was that the work quietly engaged everything I had been curious about as a student. Domains sit across national jurisdictions, global standards bodies, technical protocols, and the limits of cross-border policy coordination. They touch language, the distribution of information, the psychology of how people remember, type, and navigate. They were created in the first place to make the internet human-readable, to give a chaotic addressing system a layer that humans could actually use. It is a profoundly humanist project disguised as a technical one, and that is what piqued the questions I had carried in from somewhere else.

Most people interact with the internet the way the prisoners in Plato's cave interact with the shadows on the wall. They see the websites, the apps, the content. They do not see the mechanism casting any of it. The domain industry is part of that mechanism. We are the layer that makes the shadows possible, and we are mostly invisible to the people who depend on us every day. I find that endlessly interesting. It is one of the few infrastructure layers where the technical, the political, the linguistic, and the human all sit on top of each other.

And then there are the people doing the work. The domain industry is niche, held together by a relatively small group of operators, registries, policy people, and the occasional brilliant troublemaker who actually care about it and want it to last. You can train someone to code. You can train someone to perform a process. You cannot train someone to have taste, perspective, or independent thought. That has to be earned, and it gets earned the way everything worth having gets earned, by years of seeing what breaks, what holds, and what the next problem actually is. The people I have learned from earned theirs the hard way, and they are still earning it. The next layer of the internet, the one built for machines to navigate, is being shaped by them. That is the part that keeps me here.

> "Most people interact with the internet the way the prisoners in Plato's cave interact with the shadows on the wall. They see the websites, the apps, the content. They do not see the mechanism casting any of it."

The Voice of The Quarter

Domains, AI, and the Next Growth Chapter of the Internet

An Interview with Lars Jensen

In every issue of The Domain Standard, The Voice of the Quarter opens a window into the minds shaping today's domain ecosystem. This feature presents in-depth conversations with the visionaries, builders, and decision-makers whose work defines how we register, trade, and imagine digital identities. From pioneering entrepreneurs and technical architects to policy leaders and creative disruptors, these are the voices setting the pace of change. Our goal is to move past headlines and market trends, uncovering the personal journeys, challenges, and convictions that drive innovation. By sharing their perspectives, we aim to give our readers a deeper understanding of where the domain industry has come from and, more importantly, where it is headed next.

In This Issue

Few moments in the history of the internet feel as structurally transformative as the present one. The convergence of artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure is not simply accelerating existing trends—it is reshaping the very conditions under which online identity, entrepreneurship, and trust are produced.
In this context, domains are re-emerging as a critical layer of the digital economy. Once understood primarily as static addresses for websites, they are increasingly becoming foundational elements of identity, verification, and coordination in a world where AI systems generate content, services, and even entire businesses at scale.
To explore these shifts, The Domain Standard spoke with Lars Jensen, Founder and CEO of ShortDot SA, one of the most active registry operators in the New Top-Level Domain space, managing extensions including .icu, .cyou, .bond, .cfd, .sbs, .qpon, and .buzz. With the next ICANN round on the horizon and AI rapidly expanding the boundaries of digital creation, ShortDot sits at the intersection of two major forces reshaping the internet.
In this conversation, Jensen reflects on how AI is redefining the role of domains, why the next wave of entrepreneurship may be radically more distributed and automated, and why—far from becoming obsolete—domains may become more central than ever as anchors of trust, identity, and visibility in an increasingly synthetic digital world.

Lars Jensen

Founder and CEO of ShortDot SA

Lars Jensen is the Founder and CEO of ShortDot SA, the registry that currently owns and operates five New Top-Level Domain Extensions: .icu, .bond, .cyou, .cfd, and .sbs. ShortDot also operates the .qpon and .buzz domain extensions and is headquartered in Luxembourg, with a distributed team of highly talented professionals across the US, EU, and India.

> "AI is not the end of domains. AI may be the beginning of the greatest growth chapter domains have ever had."

Lars, wonderful having you back on the pages of The Domain Standard. Let's start with the topic of the day: AI. AI is creating an entirely new layer of the internet, including AI agents, autonomous businesses, and synthetic brands, all needing digital identities. From your perspective, how does this change the role of domains, and where do you see companies like ShortDot fitting into that future?

Thank you - it is wonderful to be back.
I honestly believe we are standing at the beginning of one of the most exciting chapters the internet has ever seen.
AI and domains together are a fantastic, explosive combination. AI gives people the power to create faster than ever before. Domains give all that creation identity, trust, and a destination. One is the engine. The other is the address, the brand, and the anchor.
For many years, people thought of domains mainly as web addresses. I think that view is becoming too small. In the AI era, domains become infrastructure. They become the identity layer for people, companies, AI agents, autonomous businesses, digital communities, and synthetic brands.
Think about what is coming. Millions of people who could not previously build a business will now be able to launch one. A single founder can use AI to create a brand, build a website, write the copy, run customer support, create marketing campaigns, and test new ideas in days or even hours. That is a massive unlock.
For years, the bottleneck was not the domain. People could buy the domain, but then they got stuck. No developer. No designer. No copywriter. No confidence. No time. AI changes that. AI activates the domain.
That is why I do not see AI as a threat to domains. I see it as rocket fuel.
More AI means more ideas. More ideas mean more projects. More projects mean more brands, more websites, more agents, more hosting, more identity, and more domains.
Companies like ShortDot fit right into that future. We operate modern, global domain extensions like .icu, .cyou, .bond, .cfd, and .sbs. They are short, flexible, and built for a global digital economy. These names can serve entrepreneurs, creators, AI startups, communities, financial platforms, and the next generation of online businesses.
The future will not be smaller. It will be bigger. More abundant. More creative. More automated. More global.
And every digital thing still needs a name people can remember, trust, and use.

You've been operating in the domain industry long enough to see several internet shifts already. Does the rise of AI feel different to you compared to previous waves like mobile or social media? What signals are you paying attention to right now?

Yes, AI feels different - and much bigger.
Mobile changed where we accessed the internet. Social media changed how we communicated. Apps changed how we interacted with services. But AI changes who can create, how fast they can create, and how much they can operate.
That is a completely different level of impact.
I have been in the domain industry long enough to hear the same prediction many times: 'This new technology will kill domains.' Search was supposed to kill domains. Social media was supposed to replace websites. Apps were supposed to make domains irrelevant.
But that never happened.
The interface changed. The naming layer stayed.
Every wave created more digital activity, not less. And AI is the biggest creation wave we have seen so far.
One of the biggest signals I am watching is that AI may change the structure of companies themselves. Today, many huge companies have thousands of employees but only need a small number of major domain names because everything sits under one large corporate brand.
In the future, I believe we will see many more people running small, independent, highly automated businesses. Instead of one huge company with thousands of employees, you may have thousands of individuals each running several businesses with the help of AI.
That is a massive shift for domains and DNS.
A one-person business still needs identity. It still needs a brand. It still needs a destination. It still needs email, trust, and a digital home. And if one person runs

a digital home. And if one person runs ten different businesses, that person may need ten different domains.
I see this very personally with my son Davi, who is 12. By the time he is 20, I can easily imagine him running ten different online businesses. Not because he has a large team, but because AI agents will help him research, build, sell, support, and optimize.
That is the future I see: more entrepreneurs, more projects, more digital identities, and more independence from big platforms.
AI will make it much easier to start and operate your own business. You will not have to depend as much on platforms or large organizations to reach the market. You can create your own brand, own your own identity, and build your own digital presence.
So the key question is not: 'Will AI reduce typing?'
The real question is: 'How many more digital things will AI create?'
My answer is: exponentially more.

One thing people talk about a lot with AI is trust. As more content, websites, and even interactions become AI-generated, do you think domains themselves could become a stronger signal of credibility and authenticity online?

Absolutely. Trust may become the biggest opportunity for domains in the AI era.
We are entering a world where almost anything can be generated. Text, images, videos, voices, websites, offers, support agents, even entire brands. That is exciting, but it also creates a trust crisis.
People will ask: Is this real? Who is behind this? Is this the official company? Is this AI agent authorized? Can I trust this interaction?
In that world, domains become more important, not less.
A strong domain is a fixed point in a fast-moving digital universe. It gives identity to a business. It connects websites, email, authentication, certificates, reputation, security tools, and brand protection. It is one of the few things online that can say: 'This is the place. This is the identity. This is the source.'
That is why I believe domains will become trust anchors for the AI economy.
If an AI agent represents a bank, a hotel, a registrar, a lawyer, a marketplace, or a healthcare company, people will need to know that the agent is connected to the real organization. Domains can help provide that connection.
AI creates scale. Domains create accountability.
Together, they can create a more trusted, more useful internet.

> "Every wave created more digital activity, not less. And AI is the biggest creation wave we have seen so far."

Lars, let's switch gears and talk a little about the next gTLD round of applications. With ICANN opening the next application round in 2026 for the first time since 2012, it feels like we're entering a completely new chapter for the domain industry. What excites you most about this upcoming round, and how different do you think the market will look compared to the last wave of TLD launches?

I think the timing could not be better.
The next ICANN round is a fantastic opportunity for the domain industry, and especially for experienced registry operators. We have AI becoming available to everyone at exactly the same time as the next wave of new domain extensions is opening up. That combination is extremely powerful.
In 2012, the market was very different. Many people were still trying to understand what new gTLDs could become. Today, we have more experience, better data, stronger distribution channels, and a much clearer understanding of what works.
For a registry operator like ShortDot, this is a huge opportunity - and we are certainly going to leverage it.

AI can help us choose better names, analyze market demand, understand trends, create stronger branding, produce better content, and support our registrar partners more effectively. It can help us bring the value of new extensions all the way through the distribution channel to end users.
That is a major change. The next round is not only about applying for new strings. It is about building better digital infrastructure, with better tools, better execution, and better go-to-market strategies.
At the same time, the role of domains is also changing. Domains are no longer just domain names in the traditional sense. They are becoming infrastructure for AI bots, AI agents, digital businesses, and automated online services.
When AI creates more traffic, more websites, more digital brands, and more autonomous activity, that activity needs trusted destinations. It needs identity. It needs a clear place to go. That is where domains become even more important.
So I see the next round as a once-in-a-generation opportunity. The internet is growing. AI is accelerating creation. Traffic will increase. Digital identity will become more valuable. And the domain industry has the chance to provide the infrastructure for that future.
For ShortDot, this is exactly the kind of moment we have been building for.

> "Domains are no longer just domain names in the traditional sense. They are becoming infrastructure for AI bots, AI agents, digital businesses, and automated online services."

And looking ahead - if we were having this conversation again in three to five years - what do you hope will have changed for ShortDot? Whether that's growth, new TLDs, AI integration, or even how people think about domains altogether, what does the next chapter look like to you?

In three to five years, I hope people will look at ShortDot and say: they saw the opportunity early, they believed in the future of domains, and they helped move the industry forward.
I feel very lucky to be living and building in this moment. We are entering a fantastic time for the internet. There is so much opportunity and abundance ahead of us.
The reason I am so optimistic is that three powerful growth drivers are coming together at the same time.
First, more people are coming online. The global internet population is still growing, and every new user creates more demand for digital identity, businesses, communities, and trusted destinations.
Second, AI will help more people create businesses. It will be easier than ever for one person to take an idea and turn it into a real project, a real website, a real brand, or even a portfolio of ventures. The execution gap is shrinking. That is massive.
Third, AI agents will multiply activity on the internet. We are moving from one human using the internet manually to humans working with many agents that can research, create, support, sell, and operate 24/7. That means more traffic, more services, more transactions, and more need for trusted infrastructure.
That is why I believe domains are becoming more important, not less. Domains are no longer just addresses. They are infrastructure. They are identity. They are trust. They are destinations in an internet that is becoming bigger, faster, and more automated.
AI and domains together are a fantastic combination. AI creates more ideas, more entrepreneurs, more agents, and more digital activity. Domains give all of that a name, a place, and a trusted identity.
So I do not see the future with fear. I see it with excitement. We are super lucky to be building during this moment.
AI is not the end of domains.
AI may be the beginning of the greatest growth chapter domains have ever had.

Source note
"Lars Jensen, "AI and Domain Names - Why AI will drive growth, not irrelevance" (Berlin 2026).

> **"That is why I believe domains are becoming more important, not less. Domains are no longer just addresses. They are infrastructure. They are identity. They are trust. They are destinations in an internet that is becoming bigger, faster, and more automated."**

Innovation and Technology

From Phonebook to Prompt

Domains in the Age of Vibe Coding

Simone Catania
Global Content & Communications Manager,
InterNetX

Simone Catania is a communications and content specialist in DNS, domains, and the wider Internet ecosystem, currently Global Content & Communications Manager at InterNetX (a brand of the IONOS Group). He also serves as a EURALO Board Member (ICANN), contributing to multistakeholder discussions on Internet governance and policy.

> **Four decades of domain registration, and a new chapter written in natural language. A short history of how we got online — and a look at what changes for registrars now that AI agents are securing the domains.**

Every era of the internet has hidden the act of registering a domain a little more than the one before it. What started as a handwritten request to a research institute is now a sentence typed into a chat window — and an autonomous AI agent that handles the registration.

For anyone working in the domain industry today, this shift forces a profound question: *what does the user journey of domain registration look like in the age of generative AI, and what do professionals need to understand about a market in which the registrar is increasingly invisible?*

To understand the trajectory we are on, we have to look at the compression that brought us here.

The Great Compression: From Paper to Platform

1 The Phonebook Era (Pre-1993)

Picture a researcher in 1987. He wants a domain name, but he does not open a browser, because there is no browser. Instead, he writes an email to the InterNIC, or fills in a paper form. He pays nothing, as domains are still free. A few weeks later, his chosen domain name is entered by hand into a flat text file called HOSTS.TXT, the early internet's shared phonebook. Before DNS was deployed, every machine on the ARPANET kept a local copy of this file. The user experience was entirely analog: a human request, a human review, a human entry. The domain was a bureaucratic artifact, not a digital product.

2 The Web Form (1990s)

In 1993, the National Science Foundation contracted Network Solutions to handle .com, .net, and .org. By September 1995, Network Solutions began charging fifty dollars a year, and the domain became a commodity almost overnight. The 1999 Shared Registration System finally broke that monopoly, opening the registrar market. The registrar as we still know it today was born in this moment: a commercial layer between registrant and registry, competing on price, on interface, and on the bundle of services around the bare technical fact of a delegated zone. The bureaucracy had not disappeared; it had just been hidden behind a "Register" button.

3 The Dashboard Era (2000s–2010s)

This is the era in which most readers of this magazine built their careers, and it remains the dominant way domains are registered today. The web form matured into a comprehensive control panel: DNS records edited in a browser, bulk portfolio operations, and one-click hosting integrations.
Five minutes from idea to live name servers.

Yet, even as this model matured, a quieter shift began. Web builders such as Jimdo, Wix, and Squarespace folded registration into their onboarding flow. Shopify let merchants buy a domain inside a setup wizard. The registrar was still there, but the user no longer noticed it. The purchase had been absorbed into someone else's product. A new compression was on its way — and it would not look like a dashboard at all.

The Prompt: When the Domain Becomes a Side Effect of Intent

In 2024 and 2025, a new class of platform arrived, sitting somewhere between an IDE and a chat window. A person describes the application they want, and a language model produces, deploys, and connects it.
The shorthand for this is "vibe coding," a phrase popularized by OpenAI co-founder Andrej Karpathy in early 2025. As Karpathy described it, it is a workflow where "you fully give in to the vibes, embrace exponentials, and forget that the code even exists."
Industry veterans are naturally skeptical of Silicon Valley buzzwords. But look past the terminology, and the underlying mechanism represents a permanent shift. In this environment, the user journey of a domain registration looks like nothing the previous three eras would recognize.
A founder types into a chat box: build me a landing page for my advisory practice and put it live at websitename.com. Within a minute or two, the page exists, the domain resolves, an SSL certificate is provisioned, and the agent reports success. The founder has not visited a registrar. The domain has become a side effect of intent.

> **"In this environment, the user journey of a domain registration looks like nothing the previous three eras would recognize."**

Four ways to register a domain

Model	How a user registers	Time to live	What is hidden from the user
Phonebook pre-1993	Email or paper form to InterNIC	Days to weeks	Nothing - the process is fully manual
Web form 1990s	Web form at a registrar	Minutes to hours	The human reviewer behind the form
Dashboard 2000s, still dominant	Self-service control panel at a registrar or web builder	Minutes	The form, inside a full platform UX
Prompt 2024	Natural language to an AI agent	Seconds	The registrar itself

Anatomy of a Modern Registration: Beneath the Prompt

The abstraction of AI can obscure how much of the old machinery is still running. When a vibe coding platform fulfills a request involving a custom domain, a recognizable sequence executes behind the scenes:

1

User

A founder types: "Build a landing page for my consultancy at websitename.com."

2

Vibe coding platform

The agent reads the user's request, parses intent, generates the app, and prepares deployment.

3

Domain connection layer

A platform checks availability, usually through a partner that connects to several registrar APIs at once. Pricing and payment are handled dynamically.

4

Registrar (invisible)

Registration via EPP, WHOIS data submission, name server delegation, and registry compliance execute via API.

5

Live site

The platform points to the name servers to its own deployment infrastructure, configures DNS records, and requests an SSL certificate. A single confirmation appears in the chat.

Several intermediaries make this orchestration possible. InterNetX as part of the IONOS Group, for instance, has partnered with Entri, a company positioned as a dedicated domain connection layer for SaaS platforms. Other providers offer end-to-end paths from deployment to delegation, while some vibe coding platforms have struck direct registrar partnerships. The pattern is identical across the board: the registrar's API has become the product surface, and the brand has receded into the background. The protocol underneath is unchanged; the interface above it is unrecognizable.

The New Economics of the Invisible Registrar

Vibe coding hides the registrar from the end user. The instinct, when this happens to your profession, is to fight back — to argue that users should still see who registered their domain, still know their registrar by name, and still engage with the dashboard.

That instinct is understandable, but it is the wrong one. Every shift described above made the registrar a little less visible to the user, and every time, the expertise underneath stayed valuable. The professionals who built careers in the web form era did not lose their jobs when the dashboard arrived; they used the dashboard to do more, faster.

The question is not how to make the registrar visible again. The question is where domain expertise inserts itself into a stack where the user no longer asks for it directly. Three critical shifts deserve attention.

1. API Readiness is Table Stakes

A registrar whose only meaningful interface is a web dashboard is a registrar invisible to the agents now mediating registrations. The product surface that matters today is programmatic, well-documented, idempotent, and instrumented for automated reasoning.

This completely changes registrar economics. When the brand is invisible, customer acquisition costs drop, but margin pressure increases. Registrars must adapt to wholesale pricing models and volume-based API monetization.

The registrars that win the next decade will be the ones whose APIs are good enough that platforms choose them because the integration is the least painful — not because of a traditional sales relationship.

2. Shadow IT and Expanding Corporate Risk

Brand protection and corporate domain management are becoming categorically more relevant. In the enterprise world, vibe coding accelerates "Shadow IT."

When founders register domains through prompts, or when employees spin up demos on domains the security team has never heard of, the surface area of domain-related risk for any large organization expands. Defensive registrations are skipped because an AI agent did not pause to consider trademark implications. The professionals who manage that surface — brand registrars, trademark watchers, portfolio strategists — are doing vital regulatory and defensive work that the abstraction layer cannot do for them.

3. The Trust and Compliance Mandate

As AI agents execute bulk registrations at unprecedented speeds, the registrar's role as a trust and compliance layer becomes more important, not less. Agents cannot visually inspect a passport. Someone still has to verify registrant data. Someone has to handle ccTLD residency requirements.

Someone has to navigate registry policy changes, abuse reports, and the operational reality of a domain that lives in regulatory contexts the agent cannot see. In this new ecosystem, the registrar transitions into pure infrastructure for trust, much in the way that a payment processor became infrastructure for commerce.

The AI Agent and the Domain Aftermarket

There is also the unresolved question of the secondary market. Currently, an AI agent interacting with an API understands standard registration fees. But what happens when a user prompts an AI to build a storefront, and the optimal domain is sitting in a premium aftermarket portfolio for $15,000? Can an AI agent be authorized to negotiate? How do brokerages expose their premium inventory to large language models? The integration of aftermarket platforms with vibe coding agents will be one of the most lucrative technical challenges of the next five years. Registrars and brokers who figure out how to parse "intent" into premium domain suggestions—delivering high-value aftermarket options directly into the user's chat window—will capture massive new revenue streams.

Invisible, Not Obsolete

It is tempting to read this journey, from HOSTS.TXT to vibe coding, as a story of disappearance. The domain becomes invisible. The registrar fades into the background. The expertise that built this industry is quietly absorbed by AI. That reading is fundamentally wrong.

The domain is not disappearing. It is becoming infrastructure, in the specific sense that TCP/IP is infrastructure, or that electricity at the wall socket is infrastructure: present everywhere, attended to by almost no one, and absolutely dependent on a quiet population of specialists who understand it deeply.

The era ahead will reward those who can hold two pictures of the industry in their heads at once:

1) The picture of the user, who will register more domains through more channels with less conscious effort than at any previous moment.

2) The picture of the system, in which protocol, policy, commerce, and reputation continue to require the attention of people who understand domains as a living technical and commercial artifact, rather than just a side effect of a prompt.

The phonebook never disappeared. It just became something we stopped having to open. The professionals who keep the entries accurate, the structure resilient, and the system trustworthy will define the next decade of the domain industry, even as the public-facing surface of their work becomes harder to see.

That invisibility is not a defeat. It is, properly understood, the highest compliment infrastructure can receive.

Innovation and Technology

Freename AI: Rebuilding the Web from Domain to Discovery

Nicolas Maggi
Chief Product Officer at Freename

The early story of the web was a story about democratization. Anyone could publish. Anyone could be found. The garage and the global corporation would compete on the same flat field, judged on what they made rather than on what they could afford to spend getting noticed. It was a beautiful idea, and like most beautiful ideas about technology it came with a quiet asterisk. For a small number of technically fluent people, it was even true. They could register a name, stand up a site over a weekend, understand just enough about how search worked to be found, and fix things when they broke. For them the web really was the open field it advertised itself to be.

For everyone else, the field was never flat. It only looked flat from a distance, the way a mountain looks gentle until you are standing at the bottom of it. The promise assumed a level of fluency that most people running a real business simply do not have, and have no reason to have. We told a baker that the internet had removed the barriers between her and her customers, and then handed her a barrier disguised as a tool and called it empowerment.

To exist online, a business needs three things that have almost nothing to do with running that business. It needs a domain name, the address people type or tap to reach you. It needs a website, the place they actually arrive at. And it needs a way to be discovered, because an address nobody can find is no better than no address at all. None of these three has anything to do with upholstery, or plumbing, or cutting hair, or cooking a good plate of pasta. They are a separate competence entirely, and somewhere along the way each one hardened into its own industry, with its own subscription, its own vocabulary, and its own class of specialists you must either become or pay.

Look at what each of those three things really asks of an ordinary person. The domain asks you to navigate a market most people did not know existed, full of extensions and availability and renewal cycles, where the good names are taken and the explanations are written for insiders. The website asks you to choose a platform, learn its editor, make a hundred small decisions about layout and copy and images that a professional would make without thinking and that a beginner agonizes over, and then maintain the result forever. And discovery, the third thing, is the cruelest of the three, because it is invisible. You can build a perfectly good site and have it seen by no one. Being found became its own dark art, a churn of search optimization and paid advertising and shifting algorithms, a game whose rules are never published and change without notice. The shop owner does not even know this game is being played, let alone that they are losing it.

> **"For everyone else, the field was never flat. It only looked flat from a distance, the way a mountain looks gentle until you are standing at the bottom of it."**

Stacked together, these three industries form a tax. Not a tax in money alone, though the money adds up quickly, but a tax in time, in attention, and in the low and constant anxiety of paying for things you do not understand and cannot evaluate. And like most taxes that are not designed with fairness in mind, it falls hardest on the people least able to absorb it. A large company hires a team and the tax disappears into a budget line. A person with two employees and a thirty year craft pays it out of the evenings they should be spending with their family, or they do not pay it at all and simply stay invisible. Most choose to stay invisible. We then describe them, a little condescendingly, as businesses that have failed to go digital, as though the failure were theirs and not the system's.

I want to be precise about one part of this, because it sits at the heart of the problem. When you set up online through the usual channels, you are not buying much of anything. You are renting. You lease the domain year after year, you subscribe to the platform month after month, you rent visibility through advertising that stops the instant you stop paying. The whole arrangement is built on perpetual renewal, and it has worked beautifully for the companies inside it for decades. What it has not done is give the person at the end of the chain any real stake or any real footing. Miss a renewal and the address that customers, suppliers, and search engines have learned to associate with you can slip away. Cancel a subscription and the site you spent your weekends on simply ceases to exist, as if it had never been there. You built your identity on rented ground, and you were never told that the ground was rented.

Stack on top of that a website you assemble inside a platform you do not control, hosted on infrastructure you do not understand, ranked by an algorithm you cannot see, and you start to grasp why a man with thirty years of craft decided the whole thing was not for him. He was not being stubborn, and he was not being a fool. He was responding rationally to a system that asked a great deal of him and gave back very little he could actually hold onto. The rational response to a bad deal is to refuse it, and he refused it. The mistake we keep making in this industry is reading that refusal as ignorance, when it is closer to good judgment.

ing in this industry is reading that refusal as ignorance, when it is closer to good judgment.

At Freename, the question we kept asking ourselves was not how to make this system slightly cheaper or slightly easier. Plenty of good companies do that, and the world is not short of marginally better website builders. Shaving a bit off the price of a tax that should not exist in its current form is not progress, it is maintenance. The question we actually cared about was whether the underlying deal could be changed. Whether a small business could create a real presence online quickly, in plain language, without learning the vocabulary of three industries it never wanted to join, and without putting itself at the mercy of a chain of intermediaries it does not understand. Whether the first, hardest step could be taken by the machine instead of by the person, so that the person was left with the parts that are actually satisfying rather than the parts that make them feel stupid.

> **"Whether a small business could create a real presence online quickly, in plain language, without learning the vocabulary of three industries it never wanted to join, and without putting itself at the mercy of a chain of intermediaries it does not understand."**

To explain what we built, I have to describe two worlds that, until very recently, had no reason to speak to each other. The first world is the business of presence online. It is the old, sprawling, largely invisible machinery I have just described: the domains, the platforms, the discovery, the whole layered economy that decides whether a small business gets to be seen. It is enormous, it is mature, and it has spent decades optimizing for the people who can navigate it rather than the people who cannot. It works precisely as designed. The trouble is what it was designed for.

The second world is artificial intelligence, and specifically the recent leap in systems that can understand plain language and turn it into useful, structured work. This is the world I spend most of my days in. For the first time, software can take a sentence like, I run an upholstery workshop in Turin and I want people to find me, and turn it into something coherent. Not a blank template waiting for you to fill it in, which is the cruelest thing you can hand a beginner, but a real starting point. Copy that sounds like your trade rather than like a placeholder. A structure that fits the kind of business you actually run. A set of small decisions already made on your behalf, so that you arrive not at an empty room but at a draft you can react to. We think of this internally as capturing your business DNA, the handful of true things about who you are, what you sell, and who you sell it to, from which everything else can be assembled. Inside the product an assistant does this work in conversation, the way a patient and competent colleague would, asking a few good questions and doing the heavy lifting in between.

That difference, between a blank page and a real starting point, sounds small and is not. The single biggest reason small businesses never get online is not cost, and it is not even time. It is the moment of paralysis in front of an empty editor, the sinking realization that the tool assumes you already know what you are doing and has no intention of helping you if you do not. Every additional decision the software offloads onto an unprepared person is another chance for them to give up, and most of them do. Inverting that, so the machine takes the first and hardest step and the human takes the easy and satisfying ones, is the most important product decision we have made. It is also the least glamorous, because when it works nobody notices it at all.

Freename sits at the intersection of those two worlds, and that intersection is the actual innovation. Not the artificial intelligence on its own, which by now is becoming ordinary and will soon be everywhere whether it helps anyone or not. And not a better version of the old presence machinery on its own, which would only be the same tax collected more politely. The innovation is putting the two together into a single flow, so that the work of three industries is done in one place, in plain language, by software that understands what you are trying to say. And then aiming the whole thing squarely at the person who has neither the time nor the inclination to learn any of it, the person the open web was supposed to be built for and somehow never was.

> **"The single biggest reason small businesses never get online is not cost, and it is not even time. It is the moment of paralysis in front of an empty editor."**

Who's who

The People Behind the Names

The domain industry is built on relationships, expertise, and an extraordinary range of specializations. Behind every transaction, registry launch, acquisition strategy, or digital brand stands a community of professionals who have helped shape the internet's evolving landscape.

In this issue's Who's Who section, we spotlight a group of industry leaders whose careers collectively span more than a century of experience across the domain ecosystem. From high-value stealth acquisitions and premium brokerage to traffic monetization, registry services, strategic partnerships, and domain-first branding, each has contributed in a distinctive way to the growth and maturation of the industry.

Meet Arif Sengoren, whose discreet brokerage work has facilitated more than $20 million in domain transactions; Michael Gilmour, founder of ParkLogic and a pioneer in domain traffic monetization; Joe Alagna, a veteran strategist whose work helped shape the modern registry landscape; Ryan McKegney, one of the industry's most consistently recognized brokers; Kate Buckley, whose domain-first approach to branding has redefined premium brokerage; and Neha Naik Raval, whose leadership at Radix has helped grow one of the world's largest new gTLD portfolios.

Their stories reveal not only professional achievement, but also the values that sustain long-term success in the domain space: trust, innovation, resilience, ethics, and a commitment to building meaningful relationships. Together, they offer a compelling portrait of an industry that remains deeply human while operating at the very heart of the digital economy.

Arif Sengoren

Founder | SecretBrokerage.com

Years in the industry
In the domain space since 2010

Location
Turkey

Specialization
Stealth Domain Acquisitions

Notable Achievement
Completed over $20M in domain transactions

Fun Fact
Proud father and husband. Runs a small olive garden to produce olive oil in the western part of the country. Run a coffee shop for almost 4 years and exited it in February 2026. Fan of electrification, solar energy and electric cars. Love playing and watching Dota2 and Starcraft 2.

Motto
"Ethics over money"

Contacts and Websites
https://www.linkedin.com/company/secretbrokerage-com
https://x.com/SecretBrokerage
https://sengoren.com

secretbrokerage.com

Michael Gilmour

CEO/Founder | ParkLogic

Years in the industry
In the industry since 2001

Location
Melbourne, Australia

Specialization
Monetization of all traffic

Notable Achievement
ParkLogic was founded in 2007

Fun Fact
Written a science fiction book: "Battleframe"

Motto
Truth: "tell the truth". Trust: "build long-term relationships". Learning: "seek to innovate"

LinkedIn
Michael Gilmour

Joe Alagna

Chief Strategy Officer | it.com Domains Ltd.

Years in the industry
20+

Location
California (remote)

Specialization
it.com domains and Registry Services

Notable Achievement
Helped launch CentralNic from 2001 - 2012. They went public in 2013.

Fun Fact
I wrote “How to Get Your Own Top Level Domain” available on Amazon. I have two sons and seven grand-daughters.

Motto
“Doing business today requires the knowledge of online marketing. Online marketing requires the knowledge of domain names.”

www.joe.tel

Ryan McKegney

CEO | DomainAgents.com

Years in the industry
20+

Specialization
Brokerage and marketplace

Notable Achievement
Ranked the one of the Top 10 Brokers by Escrow.com for 10 years in a row

Motto
“Built on grit, directed by strategy, anchored in what is irreplaceable.”

LinkedIn
Ryan McKegney

Kate Buckley

CEO & Founder | Defining.com (Buckley Media)

Years in the industry
In the domain space since 1998

Location
Santa Barbara, California

Specialization
Ultra-premium .com domain brokerage (sales & acquisitions), corporate domain services, and domain-first brand strategy. I specialize in outbound client acquisition—bringing highly curated, high-touch brokerage to both buyers and sellers of world-class domain assets. Defining.com is also the world’s first agency combining premium domain brokerage with a full suite of top-tier branding and growth services.

Notable Achievement
Over 25 years of top-tier transactions, including the seven-figure sales of Chocolate.com, eBike.com, and the bundled sales of Sleeping.com & Snoring.com, and Bar.com & Pub.com, and those are just the ones I can mention. Named to the Forbes Next 1000 and an Official Member of the Forbes Business Council. Inaugural Poet Laureate of the City of Laguna Beach.

Fun Fact
I’m a 9th-generation Kentuckian with a background in branding + an MFA in Creative Writing who went into domains in 1998 and never looked back. When I’m not negotiating mutually advantageous transactions on behalf of my clients, I’m tending the gardens, writing poetry, or adventuring with my partner, Todd—or being bossed around by Murphy and Lila, our Cavalier King Charles Spaniels

Motto
“I see myself as an educator, consultant, and connector—far more than a salesperson. I bring neatly packaged opportunities to the front doors of very smart CEOs and CMOs, and then share the story of the opportunity.”

More in Depth:
Looking back on your career, what’s one challenge that ultimately helped you grow the most professionally?

The biggest professional growth of my career came from betting on myself before I had a playbook to follow. After nearly 15 years working with CCIN—learning the domain world from two of its best—I launched Buckley Media in 2013 with a clear vision but no established model to replicate. There was no “Sotheby’s of domain brokerage” yet. I wanted to create it.
The challenge wasn’t just building a client base from scratch, it was resisting the temptation to follow someone else’s blueprint. I had to trust that my instincts about value, storytelling, and the intersection of branding and domains were worth building a business around. Early on, that meant turning down volume in favor of curation, holding firm on pricing when others would have discounted, and treating every negotiation as a long-term relationship rather than a transaction. What I didn’t anticipate was how much that discipline would compound. The clients who came to me because I didn’t operate like everyone else became my strongest advocates. The reputation I built by doing fewer deals—but doing them exceptionally well—became the business.
The lesson: the challenge that looks like a constraint is often the thing that defines you. Not having a model to follow forced me to write my own. I’m glad I did.

LinkedIn
Kate Buckley

Neha Naik Raval

SVP, Channel Partnerships | Radix

Years in the industry	Location
20	Dubai

Specialization

Strategic Partnerships, Channel development and marketing

Notable Achievement

Neha brings over 20 years of deep rooted experience in the Internet space, focused on the Domain name industry. Today, as the SVP of Channel Partnerships at Radix, she spearheads the channel team that is responsible for growing the business that has been built ground up over the last decade. Joining the company in its fledgling stage, Neha was one of the earliest members at Radix, and has played an integral role in scaling the business to the current levels boasting over 10 million domains under management, with partners across 200+ countries.

Motto

"The domains industry is one of those rare corners of the business world where the lines between partners, competitors, peers, mentors, and friends are beautifully blurred. It is a close-knit, inclusive, and genuinely welcoming community, where people may compete fiercely during the day, but still happily share a drink, a laugh, a conference table, or a travel tip by evening. We have the privilege of working with some truly amazing people across the ecosystem. registries, registrars, resellers, platforms, investors, service providers, policy makers, and domain enthusiasts all come together in a way that feels uniquely collaborative. There is history, there is healthy debate, there is plenty of opinion, and somehow, there is always room for one more conversation. What makes this industry special is not just the business we do, but the environment we do it in. It is an industry built on relationships, trust, shared experiences, and a surprising amount of humour for something that technically runs on DNS. In a world where digital identity begins with a domain name, we are lucky to be part of an industry that feels so human."

LinkedIn
Neha Naik Raval

News from the market

Quarterly report Aftermarket

Q1 2026

Q1 2026 was one of those quarters where the market didn't feel like it changed direction, but it definitely felt like it moved. Activity was up across the board, liquidity was deeper in most segments, and pricing behavior continued to evolve in subtle but important ways.

What you'll see in this report is a market that is still clearly anchored by premium .com demand at the very top, but increasingly shaped by AI-related naming across almost every category, from legacy extensions to ccTLDs and newer gTLDs. The interesting part isn't just where the big sales happened, but how consistently activity shows up across different price bands and platforms.

There are also some clear differences in how each segment behaves. The top-end sales tell one story, but the mid-market and sub-$100k ranges tell another, especially when it comes to liquidity, venue dynamics, and how tightly pricing is clustering in certain categories. ccTLDs and new gTLDs add another layer on top of that, with their own internal structures becoming more defined over time.

Without going too far into conclusions upfront, the overall picture is of a market that is expanding in participation, becoming more segmented in pricing behavior, and gradually more structured across extensions and venues. The sections that follow break that down in more detail, from headline sales through to mid-market dynamics and extension-specific trends.

Top 25 Sales

in Q1 2026

The first quarter of 2026 felt active from the very beginning, especially at the top end of the market. We saw three seven-figure sales before the end of March, led by workspace.com at $1.45 million, followed by bot.ai at $1.2 million and midnight.com at $1.15 million. That alone made Q1 stand out, but what was equally interesting was the mix of names that buyers were willing to pay up for.

As expected, strong one-word .coms continued to dominate the upper tier of the chart. Names like workspace.com, midnight.com, pub.com, bar.com, delete.com, and umami.com all fit the profile of what end users continue chasing: clean, memorable dictionary words with broad branding potential. Even in a market that constantly talks about AI and emerging extensions, premium .com inventory still sits in a category of its own.

At the same time, AI-related demand clearly hasn't slowed down. bot.ai was the headline sale, but it wasn't alone. speed.ai and terafab.ai also posted impressive numbers, continuing a trend we've been watching for several quarters now. What's notable is that buyers are becoming more selective. The strongest prices are going to terms that feel commercially usable immediately, rather than speculative AI combinations.

Short domains also had a very solid quarter. Sales like txt.com, c4.com, tii.com, ocf.com, and yal.com show that liquid acronym and ultra-short assets remain highly sought after. These names rarely come to market, and when they do, there's usually strong competition behind the scenes. That part of the market continues to feel very healthy.

One thing that stood out to me this quarter was the amount of activity tied to betting and gaming brands. 77bet.com, ngbet.com, and kkbet.com all landed among the top public sales, which points to ongoing expansion in that sector internationally. We've seen this trend before, but Q1 reinforced how aggressive some buyers in gaming continue to be when the right keyword inventory appears.

It was also a quarter where the sales venues felt more diversified than usual. Sedo remained heavily involved in many of the biggest transactions, but platforms like Atom.com, Spaceship.com, Afternic, and even direct lander sales all showed up throughout the top 25. A growing number of meaningful deals are happening outside traditional public auction environments, which says a lot about how professionalized the aftermarket has become.

Domain name	Price	Date	Venue
workspace.com	1,450,000 USD	2026-01-28	Coogan.au
bot.ai	1,200,000 USD	2026-02-22	Sedo
midnight.com	1,150,000 USD	2026-01-05	Sedo
txt.com	502,250 USD	2026-03-29	fruits.co
pub.com	500,000 USD	2026-03-24	Defining.com
bar.com	500,000 USD	2026-03-24	Defining.com
delete.com	494,352 USD	2026-02-12	GoDaddy
openpay.com	310,000 USD	2026-03-27	DropCatch
c4.com	265,000 USD	2026-01-05	Sedo
privatellm.com	250,000 USD	2026-02-26	Afternic
circa.com	250,000 USD	2026-01-28	Sedo
agon.com	249,000 USD	2026-03-30	Atom.com
77bet.com	220,080 USD	2026-02-12	GoDaddy
crude.com	200,000 USD	2026-01-12	LegalBrandMarketing
terafab.ai	174,257 USD	2026-03-22	Spaceship.com
ocf.com	170,000 USD	2026-03-27	Atom.com
tii.com	170,000 USD	2026-01-13	Atom.com
speed.ai	165,000 USD	2026-01-12	LegalBrandMarketing
treats.com	159,888 USD	2026-01-06	GoDaddy
ngbet.com	158,000 USD	2026-03-15	Sedo
strike.co	150,000 USD	2026-03-01	NamePros Lander
mindmesh.com	150,000 USD	2026-02-21	Spaceship.com
kkbet.com	141,000 USD	2026-01-16	GoDaddy
yal.com	139,000 USD	2026-03-24	Sedo
umami.com	125,700 USD	2026-01-08	GoDaddy

Q1 2026 came in with steady, broad-based growth across TLDs rather than any dramatic spikes. Total sales reached 51.9k transactions, up 11.8% year over year, while total dollar volume across TLDs increased to $62.8m, also up nearly 12%. The market expanded in a balanced way, with more activity and higher overall spend, but without being driven by a small number of extreme outliers.

What stands out most is how stable pricing remained. The average sale price held almost flat at $1,209, essentially unchanged from Q1 2025. That suggests consistent demand across different extensions rather than a shift in pricing power at the top end.

Volatility also came down meaningfully. Standard deviation dropped nearly 18% year over year, pointing to a more even pricing environment overall. While headline sales still existed across .com, .ai, .co, and others, there were fewer extreme deviations shaping the broader dataset.

Overall, Q1 2026 across TLDs looks like a healthier and more normalized quarter. Growth was solid, participation widened, and pricing behavior was more consistent across the market rather than concentrated in a few segments or standout transactions.

Comparison between Q1 2026 and Q1 2025

Quarter	Total number sales	Dollar Volume	Average Price	Standard Deviation
Q1 2026	51.9k	$62.8m	$1,209	$11.9k
Q1 2025	46.4k	$56.1m	$1,210	$14.5k
YoY	+11.8%	+11.9%	-0.08%	-17.9%

Other Relevant Sales (below 100,000$)

This section of sub-$100k sales across TLDs in Q1 2026 shows a very active mid-market, but also a fairly disciplined one where pricing tends to cluster by category and venue rather than spread widely.

The strongest and most consistent theme is still AI-related domains across multiple extensions. Names like expressai.com at $97,948 on Atom.com, execute.ai at $90,000 on Spaceship.com, synthetic.ai at $100,000 on Spaceship.com, and fireside.ai at $72,500 on Spaceship.com show a clear pattern. Spaceship.com in particular appears repeatedly in this segment, often clearing AI assets in the $70k to $100k range with surprising consistency. This suggests a fairly established buyer base operating within that platform's ecosystem, with pricing discipline rather than speculative spikes.

Outside AI, we see steady demand for strong commercial .coms across different marketplaces. paylater.com sold for $90,095 via DropCatch, which stands out as a highly commercial keyword at a relatively efficient price point. salesperson.com also sold for $90,000 on Sedo, reinforcing that Sedo continues to be a key venue for mid-tier end-user .com acquisitions. Meanwhile, paperboy.com at $75,000 on Sedo and coscientist.com at $75,000 on Afternic highlight how established marketplaces still anchor much of the mid-market liquidity.

Shorter and more brandable .coms continue to trade steadily but within defined ranges. zmo.com at $95,000 on Sedo and fzo.com at $86,000 on Atom.com both reflect ongoing investor appetite for ultra-short inventory, with Atom.com and Sedo playing complementary roles in this segment.

We also see a wider spread of alternative TLD activity at lower price points. longevity.app at $74,988 on TOP.DOMAINS and podcast.ai at $75,611 via Namecheap show that .app and .ai continue to attract category-driven buyers, though typically at more conservative pricing than comparable .com assets. depo.xyz at $70,000 on Spaceship.com and bitcoinfoundation.org at $78,500 on Namecheap further illustrate that non-.com demand is present but more selective, with pricing generally anchored below the strongest .com comps.

Even smaller but notable sales like phase.xyz at $100,000 on DomainAgents.com and everydayelectric.com at $94,888 on DomainMarket.com show that brokered or curated channels still play an important role in pushing select assets toward the top of this sub-$100k band.

Domain name	Price	Date	Venue
phase.xyz	100,000 USD	2026-03-08	DomainAgents.com
enclave.ai	100,000 USD	2026-02-11	Spaceship.com
climb.ai	100,000 USD	2026-02-11	Spaceship.com
evo.ai	100,000 USD	2026-01-21	Spaceship.com
synthetic.ai	100,000 USD	2026-01-21	Spaceship.com
aivi.com	98,500 USD	2026-01-17	Afternic
expressai.com	97,948 USD	2026-03-23	Atom.com
zmo.com	95,000 USD	2026-03-29	Sedo
mila.ai	95,000 USD	2026-02-11	Spaceship.com
everydayelectric.com	94,888 USD	2026-03-11	DomainMarket.com
paylater.com	90,095 USD	2026-01-29	DropCatch
execute.ai	90,000 USD	2026-01-21	Spaceship.com
salesperson.com	90,000 USD	2026-01-08	Sedo
janet.ai	88,000 USD	2026-01-21	Spaceship.com
fzo.com	86,000 USD	2026-02-01	Atom.com
ploy.ai	79,000 USD	2026-01-21	Spaceship.com
bitcoinfoundation.org	78,500 USD	2026-01-13	Namecheap
campusprideindex.org	76,501 USD	2026-01-18	GoDaddy
podcast.ai	75,611 USD	2026-01-16	Namecheap
savoie-mont-blanc.com	75,500 USD	2026-03-09	DropCatch
paperboy.com	75,000 USD	2026-02-08	Sedo
coscientist.com	75,000 USD	2026-01-29	Afternic
longevity.app	74,988 USD	2026-03-19	TOP.DOMAINS
fireside.ai	72,500 USD	2026-02-11	Spaceship.com
depo.xyz	70,000 USD	2026-02-23	Spaceship.com

Q1 2026 shows a sharp expansion in the sub-$100k segment across TLDs, with dollar volume rising to $52.3m, up 55.6% year over year. That is a significant jump in liquidity and suggests much heavier overall market activity in this band compared to Q1 2025.

Average pricing also moved higher to $1,008, up 11% year over year, indicating slightly stronger pricing power even in the lower and mid-market. Buyers are not just more active, they are also paying a bit more on average across extensions.

At the same time, standard deviation increased to $3,261, up 17.4%, showing a wider spread of outcomes. While most deals remain clustered in predictable ranges, there are more higher-value outliers contributing to a broader dispersion of pricing across TLDs.

Overall, activity is up meaningfully, pricing is gradually firming, and the market is becoming more spread out rather than concentrated in a narrow band.

Comparison between Q1 2025 and 2026

Quarter	Dollar Volume	Average Price	Standard Deviation
Q1 2026	$52.3m	$1,008	$3,261
Q 2025	$33.6m	$908	$2,776
YoY	+55.6%	+11%	+17,4

New gTLDs

New gTLD activity in Q1 2026 shows a market that is no longer purely experimental, but still clearly driven by narrative, branding fit, and platform-led liquidity rather than uniform end-user demand. At the top end, prism.app at $120,000 on TOP.DOMAINS stands out as the strongest .app sale in the group, followed by phase.xyz at $100,000 via DomainAgents.com. These two transactions effectively anchor the premium tier for new gTLDs this quarter, and both reflect a clear preference for short, brandable, concept-driven names when they reach meaningful liquidity events.

The mid-tier is heavily dominated by .xyz, which continues to function as the primary speculative and startup-oriented extension in this dataset. Sales like plato.xyz at $59,888 (Afternic), instinct.xyz and intention.xyz at $50,000 each (Spaceship.com), and chap.xyz at $50,000 (Afternic) show a fairly consistent pricing band forming around strong single-word or semi-abstract terms. mrkt.xyz at $35,000 and cheshire.xyz at $30,000 extend that same pattern downward, where brandability still matters more than category clarity.

Spaceship.com appears frequently throughout this section, especially in .xyz and .app transactions such as longevity.app at $74,988 and depo.xyz at $70,000, reinforcing its role as a high-volume venue for alternative extensions. Afternic and TOP.DOMAINS also remain important liquidity points, particularly for names that sit closer to the mid-five-figure range.

Below that level, newer and more experimental extensions start to dominate. The .now namespace shows up with oxygen.now at $18,000, vegan.now at $15,000, and always.now at $14,888, suggesting that time-based branding concepts are finding a small but active niche. Similarly, functional and thematic extensions like info.chat at $18,000 (Sedo), connect.bot at $14,344 (Atom.com), and coin.bid at $10,449 (TOP.DOMAINS) point to continued exploration of utility-driven naming formats.

Lower down the range, pricing becomes more fragmented but still active. Names like play.plus at $10,000, hatch.fun at $9,999, and br.dev at $9,000 show that even at sub-$10k levels, there is steady transactional flow when the combination of keyword and extension aligns well.

Domain name	Price	Date	Venue
prism.app	120,000 USD	2026-01-17	TOP.DOMAINS
phase.xyz	100,000 USD	2026-03-08	DomainAgents.com
longevity.app	74,988 USD	2026-03-19	TOP.DOMAINS
depo.xyz	70,000 USD	2026-02-23	Spaceship.com
plato.xyz	59,888 USD	2026-02-13	Afternic
instinct.xyz	50,000 USD	2026-03-08	Spaceship.com
chap.xyz	50,000 USD	2026-02-13	Afternic
intention.xyz	50,000 USD	2026-02-13	Spaceship.com
mrkt.xyz	35,000 USD	2026-03-19	Spaceship.com
cheshire.xyz	30,000 USD	2026-01-13	Spaceship.com
oxygen.now	18,000 USD	2026-03-30	Spaceship.com
info.chat	18,000 USD	2026-01-25	Sedo
vegan.now	15,000 USD	2026-03-26	Spaceship.com
always.now	14,888 USD	2026-03-27	Hypsta.com
connect.bot	14,344 USD	2026-02-21	Atom.com
digitalcurrency.click	12,933 USD	2026-02-15	Sedo
canaria.xyz	12,000 USD	2026-03-08	Spaceship.com
windsun.tech	10,679 USD	2026-02-15	Sedo
coin.bid	10,449 USD	2026-02-02	TOP.DOMAINS
parabola.xyz	10,000 USD	2026-01-13	Spaceship.com
play.plus	10,000 USD	2026-01-11	Sedo
hatch.fun	9,999 USD	2026-03-07	Afternic
updown.xyz	9,888 USD	2026-01-18	Dynadot
br.dev	9,000 USD	2026-01-20	Sedo
falcon.bet	8,888 USD	2026-03-02	TOP.DOMAINS

New gTLD performance in Q1 2026 shows a clear step up in both activity and pricing strength, with growth coming through across nearly every metric rather than being concentrated in a narrow segment. Total sales reached 692 transactions, up 22% year over year, while dollar volume increased to $1.5m, a strong 36.3% jump compared to Q1 2025. The faster growth in dollar terms suggests that higher-value names are playing a bigger role in driving overall performance, not just increased volume at the lower end.

Average pricing rose to $2,108, up 13.5%, which indicates a meaningful improvement in what buyers are willing to pay across this category. This is particularly notable given how fragmented new gTLD demand can be, with pricing often heavily dependent on specific extension narratives.

At the same time, standard deviation increased to $8.4k, up 28.5%, pointing to a wider spread in outcomes. That usually reflects a market where a small number of stronger, higher-quality sales are pulling further away from a long tail of lower-priced transactions. In practice, it suggests growing maturity at the top end while the broader market remains uneven.

Overall, new gTLDs are showing healthier momentum than in the previous year, with more transactions, stronger pricing, and a gradually widening distribution that reflects both improving demand quality and continued segmentation across extensions.

Comparison between Q1 2025 and 2026

Quarter	Total number sales	Dollar Volume	Average Price	Standard Deviation
Q1 2026	692	$1.1 m	$2,108	$8.4k
Q1 2025	567	$1.5m	$1,857	$6k
YoY	+22%	+36.3%	+13.5%	+28.5%

Country codes

Domain name	Price	Date	Venue
wisdom.ai	750,000 USD	2025-10-13	Grit Brokerage
blockchain.ai	405,000 USD	2025-10-12	Namecheap
mb.io	220,000 USD	2025-11-23	K-Ventures
ai.tv	200,000 USD	2025-10-16	Saw.com
nova.co	160,000 USD	2025-11-05	NamePros Lander
leo.ai	150,000 USD	2025-12-18	Atom.com
intuitive.ai	125,000 USD	2025-11-15	Afternic
velocity.io	100,000 USD	2025-11-21	Private
cloudx.ai	100,000 USD	2025-11-12	Atom.com
specs.ai	85,000 USD	2025-11-13	Spaceship.com
soulmate.ai	80,000 USD	2025-11-13	Spaceship.com
ado.ai	75,000 USD	2025-11-09	Sedo
seo.uk	75,000 USD	2025-10-12	Sedo
seo.co.uk	75,000 USD	2025-10-12	Sedo
cursive.ai	70,000 USD	2025-11-13	Spaceship.com
told.ai	70,000 USD	2025-11-04	Atom.com
companies.io	65,999 USD	2025-11-23	Brands.io
gandalf.ai	65,000 USD	2025-11-13	Spaceship.com
ops.com.au	58,497 USD	2025-12-17	Afternic
accomplish.ai	55,000 USD	2025-11-19	Atom.com

Q4 2025 for ccTLDs performance shows a market heavily shaped by AI-led demand, with a clear concentration of value in .ai, alongside selective strength in .io and a smaller but steady presence from regional TLDs like .co, .uk, and .com.au.
The standout transaction was wisdom.ai at $750,000 via Grit Brokerage, followed by blockchain.ai at $405,000 on Namecheap. These two sales set the tone for the quarter, reinforcing how top-tier .ai assets continue to command strong six-figure pricing when paired with broad commercial relevance. ai.tv at $200,000 via Saw.com further highlights how AI branding is extending beyond .ai itself into adjacent extensions.
Liquidity in the mid-to-upper range was supported by a consistent flow of .ai sales across multiple venues. leo.ai at $150,000 on Atom.com, intuitive.ai at $125,000 on Afternic, and cloudx.ai at $100,000 on Atom.com show that Atom and Afternic remain key channels for mid-tier AI transactions, while Spaceship.com contributed several lower six-figure and high five-figure deals such as specs.ai at $85,000 and soulmate.ai at $80,000.
Outside .ai, .io continued to demonstrate relevance for infrastructure and tech branding. mb.io sold for $220,000 via K-Ventures, while velocity.io reached $100,000 in a private transaction, reinforcing that .io still attracts strong end-user demand in more engineering-focused use cases.
Non-AI CCTLD activity was more selective but still meaningful. nova.co at $160,000 on NamePros Lander stood out in the .co space, while companies.io at $65,999 via Brands.io reflects continued interest in highly descriptive commercial terms in .io. Regional domains such as ops.com.au at $58,497 via Afternic and the dual SEO-related sales seo.uk and seo.co.uk at $75,000 each on Sedo show that geo-targeted extensions still achieve solid pricing when the keyword is strong and highly commercial.

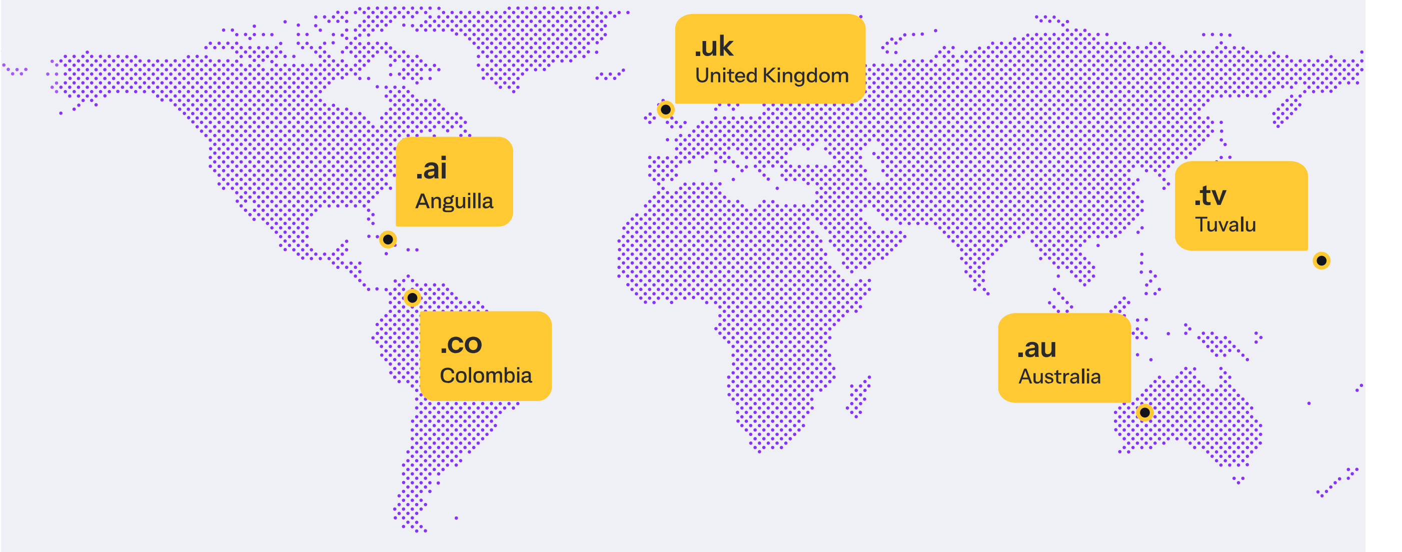
> "Q4 2025 showed a market heavily shaped by AI-led demand, with value clearly concentrated in .ai."

Q1 2026 ccTLD activity shows a market that is clearly getting busier, but also less uniform in how value is distributed across deals.
Sales volume rose to 4,284 transactions, up 15.6% year over year, while total dollar volume climbed to $10.7m, a 21.5% increase. The fact that dollar growth is outpacing transaction growth suggests stronger pull from higher-value deals rather than just more activity at the low end.
Average pricing moved up to $2,502, a modest 5.8% increase from Q1 2025. That points to gradual strengthening in underlying demand, with buyers willing to stretch slightly further for the right names, particularly in .ai and .io.
What really changes the picture this quarter is dispersion. Standard deviation rose sharply to $20.2k, up more than 80% year over year. That kind of move usually signals a widening gap between routine market transactions and a growing number of higher-end outliers that are pulling the distribution upward.
Taken together, the ccTLD space looks more dynamic than last year. There is more activity, slightly stronger pricing, and a noticeably wider spread between low, mid, and top-tier sales, suggesting a market that is maturing but also becoming more segmented in how value is realized.

Comparison between Q1 2025 and 2026

Quarter	Total number sales	Dollar Volume	Average Price	Standard Deviation
Q1 2026	4,284	$10.7m	$2,502	$20.2k
Q1 2025	3,704	$8.8m	$2,363	$11.2k
YoY	+15.6%	+21.5%	5.8%	+80.35%

Graph
Top Selling Countries by ccTLD
Based on the 100 highest-value country-code domain sales



Key Takeaways

If you step back from all the tables, the first thing that stands out is that the market is just busier everywhere. Not in a chaotic way, but in a steady, "more people are participating at every level" kind of way.
At the top end, .com still does what it always does. The biggest sales of the quarter are still classic one-word .coms like workspace.com and midnight.com, plus a few ultra-short names and acronyms. AI is right there in the mix with bot.ai leading the pack, but it still doesn't really displace .com, it just sits alongside it as a second premium lane.
Zooming out to the full TLD dataset, the story is more about consistency than fireworks. Sales and dollar volume both grow by roughly 12 percent, but average prices barely move. That's usually a sign the market isn't being pushed up by hype, it's just more active across the board. Also, volatility drops, which basically means fewer weird spikes and a more predictable spread of pricing.
The sub-$100k segment is probably where you feel the most "real world" momentum. That's where most of the growth actually comes from, with dollar volume jumping more than 50 percent. AI names dominate the quality end of that range, but what's interesting is how tightly they cluster in price. You can almost see clear "bands" forming depending on extension and marketplace, especially on Spaceship, Sedo, and Atom.
ccTLDs feel a bit more top-heavy. .ai and .io are doing most of the heavy lifting, and the gap between average deals and standout ones is getting wider. You've got solid mid-tier activity, but then a few big AI-driven sales pulling the averages and dispersion up quite a bit. It feels like a market that's maturing, but also becoming more uneven.
New gTLDs are somewhere in the middle. They're no longer experimental, but they're not fully standardized either. .xyz and .app are the closest thing to "established lanes" here, while everything else is more niche and narrative-driven. You can see clear patterns forming though, especially with repeatable pricing ranges and the same venues showing up again and again.

Methodology

All data presented in this report were derived from publicly available records on NameBio, the leading searchable database of historical domain name sales. NameBio aggregates verified sales across a wide range of venues, including Sedo, GoDaddy, Afternic, DropCatch, NameJet, and more.
For this report, we focused on domain transactions recorded between January 1 and March 31, 2026. Sales were filtered by extension (e.g., .com, .ai, .xyz, .bet, etc.) and categorized into three main groups: legacy gTLDs, ccTLDs, and new gTLDs. The data include domain name, sale price (in USD), sale date, and marketplace venue.
While NameBio does not capture every domain sale globally (particularly private and unreported transactions), it offers the most reliable and comprehensive

News from the market: Interview

Stable Averages, Shifting Signals: An Interview with Leanne McMahon on Pricing, AI, and the Evolving Domain Market

In this interview, we speak with Leanne McMahon, UK domain investor and analyst, about the latest dynamics shaping the domain aftermarket. Drawing on her experience as an investor and analyst, McMahon reflects on a market marked by steady overall growth but increasingly divergent underlying signals: flat average prices alongside rising volumes, the emergence of AI as a distinct pricing ecosystem, and the growing complexity of ccTLD and gTLD performance. From investor behavior and pricing inertia to liquidity concentration and the long-term evolution of TLD relevance, she offers a grounded reading of where value is forming and where it may be shifting next.

About Leanne McMahon

Leanne is a UK domain investor of 5 years and founder of Crunch.id, a domain sales analysis site.

Leanne, many thanks for agreeing to this and rendering your expertise available to us! Comparing Q1 2026 and Q1 2025, our latest report shows that total sales across all TLDs are up about 11.8% to 51.9k transactions, and dollar volume is up 11.9% to $62.8m, but the average price is basically flat at $1,209 year over year. When you see that kind of balanced growth without pricing inflation, how do you interpret it? Does it feel like a stable, efficient market, or more like a pause before the next shift?

It's a mix of things; more investors are entering the space and they're also pricing at traditional price points. I've been thinking a lot about pricing recently and have noticed that most domain investors' price buckets are the same now as when I entered the industry five years ago. The 'bread and butter' names are still $1,995 - $2,995. Everything else in the world has increased in price over the last few years but investors are still pricing domains the same, year after year.

One thing that really stands out this quarter is how AI shows up across every layer of the data. At the top you've got bot.ai at $1.2m, but even in the mid-market there are repeated $70k to $100k .ai sales like execute.ai, synthetic.ai, and fireside.ai. What does this say to you? Do you think AI is starting to form its own pricing structure, or is it still ultimately anchored to broader .com-driven valuation logic?

I think .ai has certainly formed its own pricing structure which has been driven by buyers themselves. I don't think we can apply any .com valuation logic to it. The sales volume of one word .ai sales over $5,000 is almost double that of .com* (.com has higher dollar volume and average price). This is likely driven by an abundance of inventory. Most one word .com of any quality were off the market a long time ago, but as little as 3 years ago, good, one word .ai were still available to register and are now selling for 5 figures.

The sub-$100k segment is interesting because it's where most of the growth actually is. Dollar volume is up 55.6% year over year from $33.6m to $52.3m, while average price only rises from $908 to $1,008. A lot of that activity seems to flow through Spaceship, Sedo, and Atom.
Do you think that kind of venue concentration is actively shaping price discovery, or just reflecting where liquidity already happens to sit?

I don't think it's platform specific. I think there are many more investors (web3 brought a lot of investors into web2) which leads to more listings, more sales and more innovation with new and existing marketplaces. Also, it's harder to track Sedo retail sales as their auction events and retail sales are all under the Sedo tag on NameBio.com.

*source: namebio.com

On ccTLDs, if you compare Q1 2026 to Q1 2025, sales volume is up 15.6% to 4,284 transactions and dollar volume is up 21.5% to $10.7m. At the same time, standard deviation jumps sharply from $11.2k to $20.2k, which is roughly an 80% increase year over year. From your perspective, what does that kind of widening distribution usually point to first: deeper strength at the top end, or a market that's becoming more uneven in how value is spread?

I think a move to one word SLDs with less importance on the TLD is driving this. .ai, .io, .co are all ccTLDs and one word sales of those are healthy (although .io and .co have taken a slight hit with the rise of .ai). I also think .ai is skewing the data currently, so we don't have a clear picture when looking more generally like this.

Zooming out across .com, ccTLDs, and new gTLDs, there's clearly a mix of stable averages, rising volume, and very different dispersion patterns depending on the segment. When you're doing your own analysis work, what do you tend to look at first to understand the "shape" of a market like this: volume, pricing, or something like concentration and variance?

Volume is the first thing I check, that indicates the demand, which is a very important signal for domain investors. We often see investors trying to promote a keyword or TLD they're heavily invested in but buyers decide the trends, not investors. Once a volume increase has been established, pricing naturally rises as the good SLDs start to be snapped up and supply and demand comes into effect.

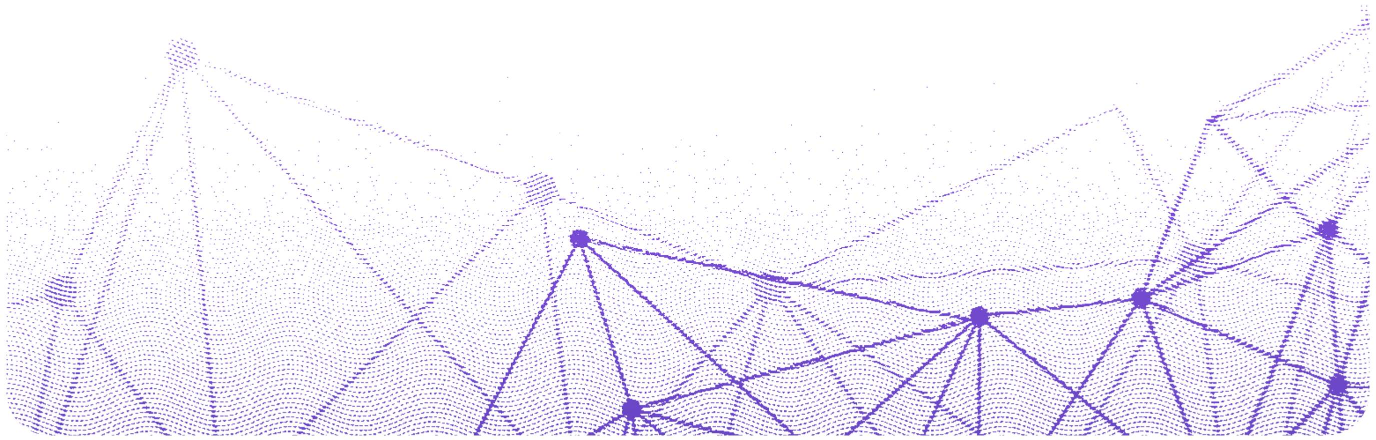
And finally, stepping back from the numbers a bit, how do you see the domain aftermarket evolving from here? Based on the kind of patterns we're seeing in 2026 so far, where do you think things are headed over the next couple of years, and what feels most important for people in the industry to pay attention to right now?

I think the TLD is becoming less important as ccTLDs and gTLDs become more familiar to the general public. Younger people are much more familiar with gTLDs as many apps and games use them, so as that audience matures and some start businesses of their own (as is starting to happen now), gTLDs are and will gain much more traction.

Domain Aftermarket — Q1 2026 vs Q1 2025

Year-over-Year Comparison · All TLDs

METRIC	Q1 2025	Q1 2026	YOY CHANGE
Total Transactions	46.4k	51.9k	+11.8%
Dollar Volume	$56.1M	$62.8M	+11.9%
Average Price	$1,210	$1,209	-0.08%



News from the market

Quarterly report | Registrations Q1 2026

All TLDs

In the first quarter of 2026, the total number of registered domain names across all top-level domains reached 392.5 million, up by 5.6 million from 386.9 million in the previous quarter, representing a 1.45% quarter-over-quarter increase. Compared to Q1 2025, when 368.4 million domains were registered, this marks a yearly increase of 24.1 million, equivalent to an annual growth rate of 6.5%.

Trend of the last four quarters

Between Q2 2025 and Q1 2026, total domain registrations rose steadily from 371.7 million to 392.5 million, an increase of 20.8 million domains. Growth remained positive each quarter but showed signs of gradual slowdown. Quarterly growth peaked at +2.21% in Q4 2025, after +1.83% in Q3, before easing to +1.44% in Q1 2026. This pattern suggests a broadly stable market with sustained demand, but with momentum softening slightly toward the end of the period, possibly indicating a maturing or stabilising phase.

	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Registrations	371.7	378.5	386.9	392.5
Growth % compared to previous Q		+ 1.83%	+ 2.21%	+ 1.44%

Most Important gTLDs

By the end of March 2026, the combined domain base for .com and .net reached 176.1 million registrations, reflecting an increase of 2.6 million domains, or 1.50%, compared with 173.5 million at the end of December 2025. On a year-over-year basis, this total rose by 6.2 million, representing growth of approximately 3.65% from the 169.9 million registered in March 2025.
Looking at the breakdown, .com domains accounted for 163.6 million registrations, while .net domains totaled 12.4 million. New .com and .net registrations amounted to 11.5 million in Q1 2026, up from 10.7 million in Q4 2025 and 10.1 million in Q1 2025.

Trend of the last four quarters

Between Q2 2025 and Q1 2026, .com and .net registrations increased from 170.5 million to 176.1 million, a net gain of 5.6 million domains. Growth remained consistently positive across all quarters, indicating stable demand for legacy gTLDs.
Quarterly growth accelerated gradually over the period, rising from +0.82% in Q3 2025 to +1.16% in Q4, and reaching +1.49% in Q1 2026. This pattern suggests a mild strengthening of momentum after a relatively subdued start, with .com and .net showing resilience and a slight re-acceleration in demand compared to broader market trends.

	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Registrations	170.5	171.9	173.5	176.1
Growth % compared to previous Q		+ 0.82%	+ 1.16%	+ 1.49%

ngTLDs

At the end of Q1 2026, new generic top-level domains (ngTLDs) reached 49.6 million registrations. This represents an increase of 1.8 million, or 3.77%, compared with 47.8 million at the end of Q4 2025.
Compared with Q1 2025, when 37.8 million ngTLDs were registered, the total grew by 11.8 million, reflecting a year-over-year increase of approximately 31.22%.

Trend of the last four quarters

Between Q2 2025 and Q1 2026, new gTLD registrations rose from 39.5 million to 49.6 million, a strong increase of 10.1 million domains over the period. This segment shows the most dynamic growth among the main domain categories.
Quarterly performance was particularly strong in late 2025, with growth accelerating from +8.6% in Q3 to a peak of +11.4% in Q4, before slowing to +3.7% in Q1 2026. This pattern suggests a burst of expansion momentum in the second half of 2025, followed by a notable cooling in early 2026, though growth remains robust overall. New gTLDs thus continue to be the primary driver of expansion in the domain name market, albeit with some volatility in their growth trajectory.

	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Registrations	39.5	42.9	47.8	49.6
Growth % compared to previous Q		+ 8.6%	+ 11.4%	+ 3.7%

ccTLDs

By the end of March 2026, the total number of country-code top-level domain (ccTLD) registrations had reached 146.3 million. This represents an increase of 0.7 million, or 0.48%, compared with 145.6 million at the end of December 2025.
Compared to Q1 2025, when 142.9 million ccTLDs were registered, the total grew by 3.4 million, reflecting a year-over-year increase of approximately 2.38%.

Trend of the last four quarters

Between Q2 2025 and Q1 2026, ccTLD registrations increased modestly from 143.4 million to 146.3 million, a total gain of 2.9 million domains. Growth remained positive throughout the period but at a consistently low pace compared to other segments.
Quarterly growth slowed steadily, from +0.97% in Q3 2025 to +0.55% in Q4 and +0.48% in Q1 2026. This suggests a highly mature and relatively stable segment, where demand persists but expansion is limited. Overall, ccTLDs appear to be in a low-growth equilibrium, driven more by renewal stability than by significant new registration momentum.

	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Registrations	143.4	144.8	145.6	146.3
Growth % compared to previous Q		+ 0.97%	+ 0.55%	+ 0.48%

Other Legacy gTLDs

By the end of Q1 2026, legacy generic top-level domains (gTLDs), excluding .com and .net, reached a total of 20.5 million registrations. This represents an increase of 0.5 million, or 2.50%, compared with 20.0 million at the end of Q4 2025.
On a year-over-year basis, these legacy gTLDs grew by 2.6 million registrations, marking a 14.53% rise from the 17.9 million recorded in Q1 2025.

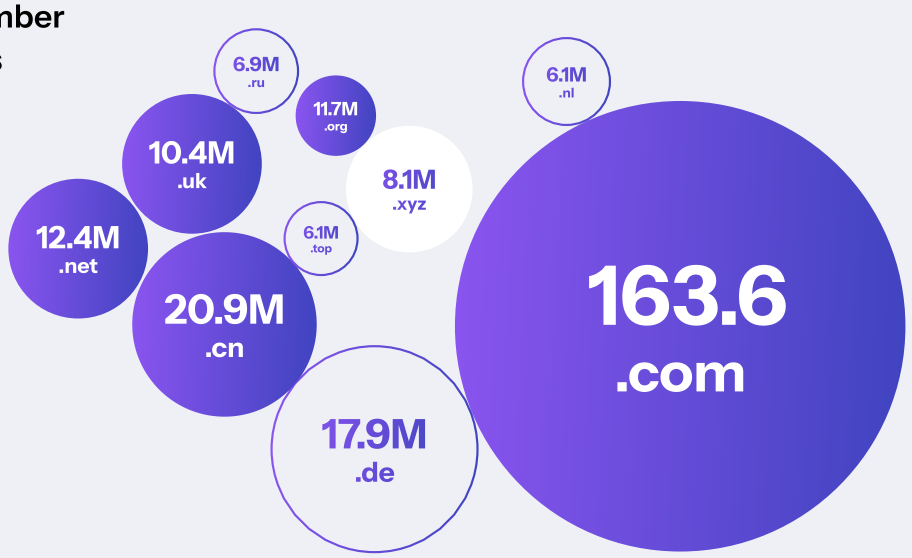
Trend of the last four quarters

Between Q2 2025 and Q1 2026, other legacy gTLDs (excluding .com and .net) increased from 18.3 million to 20.5 million registrations, a total gain of 2.2 million domains. This segment shows modest but consistent expansion over the period.
Quarterly growth strengthened notably in Q4 2025, reaching +5.82% after +3.27% in Q3, before easing to +2.5% in Q1 2026. This suggests a brief acceleration phase in late 2025, followed by a return to more moderate growth levels. Overall, the segment remains relatively small compared to major gTLDs, but it demonstrates steady incremental demand with occasional short-term bursts of activity.

	Q2 2025	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q1 2026
Registrations	18.3	18.9	20	20.5
Growth % compared to previous Q		+ 3.27%	+ 5.82%	+ 2.5%

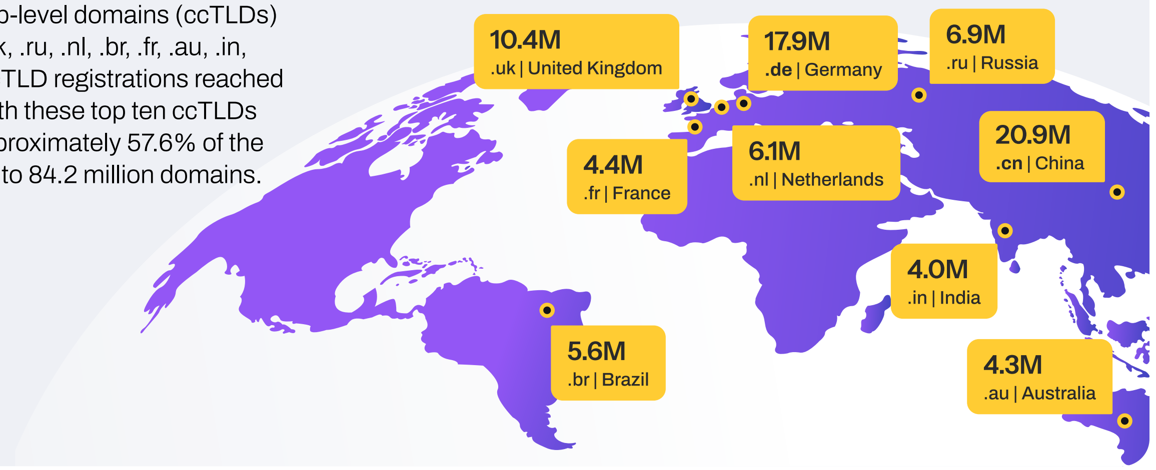
Top 10 Largest TLDs by Number of Reported Domain Names

As of March 31, 2026, the ten largest TLDs by number of registered domains were .com, .cn, .de, .net, .org, .uk, .xyz, .ru, .top, and .nl. Collectively, these TLDs accounted for approximately 67.3% of all domain registrations, out of a total of 392.5 million domains.



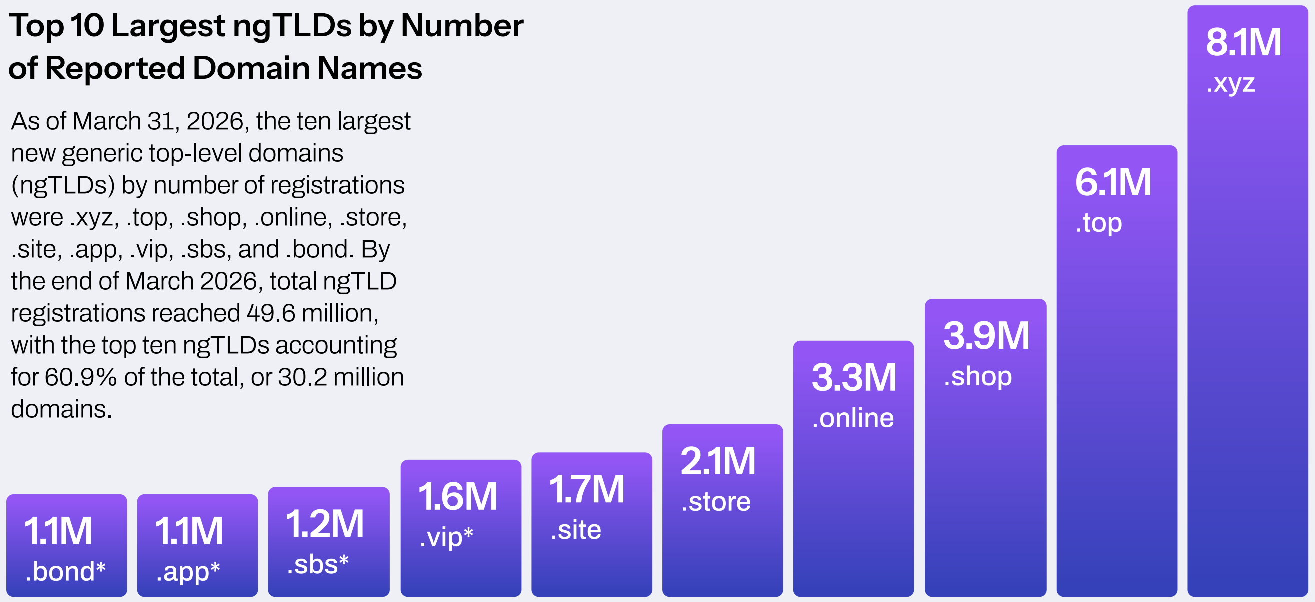
Top 10 Largest ccTLDs by Number of Reported Domain Names

As of March 31, 2026, the ten largest country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs) were .cn, .de, .uk, .ru, .nl, .br, .fr, .au, .in, and .eu. Total ccTLD registrations reached 146.3 million, with these top ten ccTLDs representing approximately 57.6% of the total, equivalent to 84.2 million domains.



Top 10 Largest ngTLDs by Number of Reported Domain Names

As of March 31, 2026, the ten largest new generic top-level domains (ngTLDs) by number of registrations were .xyz, .top, .shop, .online, .store, .site, .app, .vip, .sbs, and .bond. By the end of March 2026, total ngTLD registrations reached 49.6 million, with the top ten ngTLDs accounting for 60.9% of the total, or 30.2 million domains.



Source: ABTdomain queries on the zone files. See https://abtdomain.com/top-tlds/

Key Takeaways

The first quarter of 2026 confirms a domain name market that continues to grow, but with increasingly differentiated dynamics across segments. Overall registrations surpassed 392 million, marking steady expansion both quarter-on-quarter and year-on-year, although growth momentum is gradually moderating.

A central structural feature is the increasing segmentation of growth. New gTLDs remain the clear engine of expansion, combining strong annual growth with the highest volatility, including a rapid acceleration in late 2025 followed by a marked slowdown in Q1 2026. This suggests a market that is still in an adoption phase but increasingly sensitive to short-term demand cycles.

By contrast, .com and .net demonstrate resilience and a mild re-acceleration, with growth gradually strengthening across the last four quarters. While their overall expansion is modest compared to newer extensions, their stability confirms their continued role as the core of the domain name ecosystem and a reliable source of incremental growth.

ccTLDs remain structurally stable and low-growth, with consistently declining quarterly growth rates. This segment appears largely mature, with demand driven more by renewals and geographic digital saturation than by new adoption waves. It functions as a stabilising layer of the global domain space rather than a growth driver.

Other legacy gTLDs (excluding .com and .net) occupy a middle position: smaller in scale but showing steady, incremental growth with occasional short-lived acceleration. Their performance suggests niche but persistent demand, without strong structural momentum.

Taken together, the data points to a two-speed market: on one side, innovative and diversified extensions (especially ngTLDs) driving expansion; on the other, legacy infrastructure (.com, .net, and ccTLDs) providing stability and maturity. The balance between these forces suggests a market that is still growing overall, but increasingly shaped by maturity in core segments and cyclical bursts in newer ones.

> "The first quarter of 2026 confirms a domain name market that continues to grow, but with increasingly differentiated dynamics across segments."

Conclusion

The Q1 2026 data points to continued but moderating growth in the domain name market. Overall registrations keep increasing, but momentum is increasingly uneven across segments.

Looking forward, total growth is likely to remain in the low single digits, driven mainly by new gTLDs, which will continue to act as the main expansion engine but with noticeable volatility. .com and .net should maintain slow, steady growth, supported by their entrenched global position, while ccTLDs are expected to remain largely stable with minimal expansion. Other legacy gTLDs will likely continue their pattern of modest, incremental gains.

Overall, the market appears to be entering a mature phase: growth persists, but it is increasingly cyclical and concentrated in newer extensions rather than broadly distributed across all TLD categories.

> "The market appears to be entering a mature phase: growth persists, but it is increasingly cyclical and concentrated in newer extensions."

About **The Quarterly Report | Registrations**

The Domain Standard Quarterly Report - Registrations provides an in-depth analysis of global domain registration trends across all top-level domains (TLDs) for each quarter. It offers insights into the performance of the most prominent generic TLDs (gTLDs), country-code TLDs (ccTLDs), and new generic TLDs (ngTLDs), providing a comprehensive view of the state of the domain name market.
This report is designed for investors, analysts, and industry professionals who require up-to-date data on the registration patterns and growth trajectories of domain names. It tracks key metrics such as the total number of domain registrations, quarter-over-quarter growth, year-over-year changes, and the performance of individual TLDs. Furthermore, it highlights significant trends, emerging opportunities, and shifts in the market, making it a valuable resource for decision-makers in the domain and digital property sectors.
The report offers both a high-level overview of the global domain landscape and detailed insights into specific segments of the market, including the continuing dominance of .com and .net, the growing popularity of localized ccTLDs, and the explosive rise of ngTLDs. By analyzing these trends, the report aims to inform strategic decisions, uncover investment opportunities, and guide stakeholders through the ever-evolving domain name ecosystem

Learn more →

For comments or questions about The Domain Standard's Quarterly Report,
email **matteo@freename.com**

Methodology

The data presented in this report is based on domain registration statistics obtained from a combination of industry sources and internal analysis. Unless otherwise stated, we use and elaborate on data published by the Domain Name Industry Brief (DNIB), a recognized and authoritative source on global domain trends. Whenever necessary, the data comes from Freename's own queries on publicly available zone files, which are open resources widely used across the industry to monitor domain registrations. This mixed-method approach ensures both accuracy and real-time relevance, allowing us to deliver up-to-date insights into the domain name ecosystem.

Calendar of events

Tracking the Domain Industry in Motion

The domain industry functions through a dense, global circuit of conferences, policy forums, and community gatherings that together shape how technical standards, market strategies, and governance priorities are articulated and negotiated. More than a sequence of isolated meetings, this calendar operates as a shared infrastructure of coordination: a recurring space where developments in DNS, digital identity, artificial intelligence, and Internet governance are interpreted in real time by the actors who actively build and regulate this ecosystem.

As always, this section is structured around three layers: past events, which reflect on the most recent gatherings through dedicated reviews; the key event of the quarter, which captures the most strategically significant moment in the current cycle; and future events, which map the next set of industry milestones that will shape ongoing debates and priorities.

Among past events, AI Week in Milan, with a review by Gherardo Varani (Head of BD at Freename), illustrates the scale and operational maturity of AI deployment across sectors and its increasing overlap with digital infrastructure. Nordic Domain Days in Stockholm, covered in this issue through a report by Lars Forsberg, highlights a different but equally important dimension of the industry: the sustained value of tightly curated, in-person community exchange, where informal interactions often carry as much weight as formal programming. ICANN86 in Seville anchors the governance side of the spectrum, focusing on DNS policy development, security, and coordination within the multistakeholder model. At the center of this issue, the InterNetX Domain Summit in Berlin, examined through Simone Catania's review, stands out as the key event of the quarter, bringing together strategic perspectives on the evolving domain landscape, registrar–registry dynamics, and emerging infrastructural shifts.

Looking ahead, the calendar includes Domain Summit Europe in Kempten, NDDCamp Paris, and TLDCON in Tashkent, each representing distinct regional and functional inflections within the broader domain ecosystem. Together, these contributions offer more than event reporting: they provide interpretive lenses through which the current state of the industry can be understood as a connected and evolving system rather than a set of discrete occurrences.

Past Events

AI Week

19-20 May 2026 | Milan, Italy

For more information: https://www.aiweek.it/

AI WEEK 2026 once again confirmed its position as one of Europe's largest and most influential gatherings dedicated to artificial intelligence. Hosted at Fiera Milano Rho, the event brought together a vast international audience of professionals, founders, developers, investors, and policymakers to explore the rapid evolution of AI technologies and their impact across industries.

Across two days of keynotes, panel discussions, and hands-on sessions, the summit highlighted both the acceleration of AI adoption in business and the growing attention to governance, infrastructure, and responsible innovation. Particular emphasis was placed on applied AI use cases, emerging startup ecosystems, and the integration of AI tools into everyday digital workflows.

With its scale and diversity of participants, AI WEEK continues to function as a key meeting point for understanding how artificial intelligence is reshaping the broader digital economy—including areas such as online identity, platform ecosystems, and the future of digital infrastructure.

AI Week confirmed its status as Europe's largest business-focused AI conference, and the scale was unmistakable. Thousands of attendees, with a strong Italian and European core, alongside international players from across the globe. The floor wasn't hype-driven - it was operational. Established companies embedding AI into their core business, fast-growing startups building the infrastructure layers that others will rely on for years, and Italian players punching well above their weight on a European stage. Every vertical was represented: manufacturing, finance, marketing, healthcare, digital identity, professional services. The signal across all of them was consistent, the market isn't waiting anymore. Opportunities are concrete and present, and moving now still carries a real edge. One standout moment: an AI confessional booth in the middle of the venue - The Algorithm Creed - which, beyond the artistic provocation, asks a genuinely interesting question about where the boundaries between interface, trust, and human-machine relationship are actually heading. The takeaway is clear: the Italian and European AI landscape is accelerating, and AI Week is its most accurate mirror.

Gherardo Varani
Head of BD at Freename

Nordic Domain Days

24-26 May 2026 | Stockholm, Sweden

For more information: https://nordicdomaindays.com/

Nordic Domain Days 2026 once again brought the global domain name community to Stockholm for three days of concentrated industry exchange, discussion, and networking. Designed as a fully in-person event, with all sessions delivered live and not recorded or streamed, the conference maintained its distinctive focus on presence, immediacy, and direct engagement.

The program covered the full breadth of the domain ecosystem, from registry and registrar developments to investment strategies, DNS operations, policy discussions, and emerging technical challenges. Across keynotes, curated panels, and informal conversations, the event highlighted both the maturity of the industry and the ongoing shifts driven by security, regulation, and new market dynamics.

Beyond the stage, Nordic Domain Days continued to distinguish itself through its strong emphasis on community interaction. Structured networking, social gatherings, and shared informal moments played an equally important role as the formal agenda, reinforcing the event's position as a central meeting point for long-standing participants and new entrants alike.

With its combination of focused content and deliberately unmediated exchange, Nordic Domain Days remains a key reference point for understanding where the domain industry stands—and where it is heading next.

Nordic Domain Days 2026 was, put simply, our best event yet. Over three days at the Clarion Stockholm, 450 people from 77 countries came together, and the energy in the room was something special. 35 speakers delivered sessions, master classes and workshops across a program that covered everything from domain industry trends and investment strategy to DNS abuse policy, crypto agility and the future of the internet.

What made this edition stand out was the depth of the conversations that happened around the program. The event was designed around that idea: we keep the size intimate (no bigger than roughly 450), we do not stream or record, and we make sure there is plenty of time for the corridor conversations that often matter more than what happens on stage. The feedback we got was that people came for the sessions and stayed for the connections.

On the social side, we leaned into what makes NDD different. 35 tattoos and 20 piercings happened right on the show floor across the three days. The Grand Social on Monday night featured live performances by Da Buzz, Basic Element and Dr. Bombay, courtesy of our partners .one and OpusDNS. Swedish meatballs were served. Karaoke was sung. And the Living Room Bar was, once again, the place where half the deals at the conference were probably made over a glass of wine and a handshake.

What I take away from NDD 2026 is that this community continues to grow in the best possible way. More countries, more perspectives, more first-timers who tell us afterwards that they felt welcome from the moment they walked in. That is exactly what we set out to build when we started Nordic Domain Days back in 2015, and eleven years later it feels like we are just getting started.

Nordic Domain Days returns June 6 to 8, 2027, at the Clarion Stockholm. We are already deep into planning, and we cannot wait to welcome this incredible community back to Sweden.

Lars Forsberg
Founder and Curator of Nordic Domain Days

ICANN86 Policy Forum

ICANN86 Policy Forum | Seville, Spain

ICANN86 marked the first ICANN Public Meeting ever hosted in Seville, bringing together the global Internet governance and domain name community for a four-day Policy Forum focused on working-level discussions within ICANN's multistakeholder model. Held at the FIBES Conference and Exhibition Centre, the hybrid event combined in-person and remote participation, enabling broad international engagement.

The agenda concentrated on active policy development across core areas of the DNS ecosystem, including DNS security and stability, abuse mitigation, registration data access, Internationalized Domain Names, and Universal Acceptance. As a Policy Forum, the meeting format emphasized structured working sessions and cross-community collaboration rather than ceremonial or promotional programming.

Alongside formal policy work, ICANN86 provided space for outreach initiatives such as NextGen@ICANN and Fellowship programs, supporting engagement from students and early-career participants in Internet governance processes.

The Seville meeting reinforced ICANN's role as a global coordination platform for critical Internet infrastructure, with discussions reflecting ongoing tensions between technical governance, regulatory expectations, and the operational realities of a rapidly evolving DNS ecosystem.

For more info:
https://meetings.icann.org/en/meetings/icann86/

Key event of the quarter

InterNetX Domain Summit

June 16 2026 | Berlin, Germany

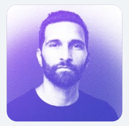
For more info: https://www.domainsummit.com/

The InterNetX Domain Summit 2026 took place in Berlin, bringing together invited guests from across the domain name industry for a one-day, in-person gathering focused on current developments in the DNS ecosystem. The event was held at Fotografiska Berlin and positioned as an exclusive, invitation-only meeting for InterNetX clients and industry partners.

The Summit centered on discussions around the future of domains, including the evolving relationship between traditional DNS infrastructure and emerging Web3-related developments. It served as a forum for exchange among registrars, registries, and other domain industry stakeholders, with an emphasis on trends, innovation, and strategic perspectives shaping the sector.

As an industry-facing gathering, the event combined high-level networking with a curated program designed to reflect ongoing changes in the global domain landscape, continuing InterNetX's series of summits dedicated to professional exchange within the domain ecosystem.

The InterNetX Domain Summit 2026 brought the international domain industry together in Berlin for a day built around one bold theme: Digital Metamorphosis. Across keynotes, panels and workshops, the conversation made one thing clear — the domain is no longer just an address, but an identity, asset and trust anchor for a machine-mediated web. From the state of the industry in 2026 and the expanding namespace to agent discovery, domains as an asset class, blockchain and the sovereignty of ccTLDs, the day mapped out where the industry is really heading. And it closed on the most human question of all: what are people for in an agentic world? The metamorphosis is well and truly underway.



Simone Catania
InterNetX

What's to come?

Domain Summit Europe 2026

August 17-18, 2026 | Kempten, Germany

Domain Summit Europe 2026 is a business-first event for the global domain name industry, taking place in Kempten (Allgäu), Germany, with a focus on the DACH market. The conference is held in English and is designed as a smaller, highly selective gathering limited to around 60 participants.

The event brings together registries, registrars, hosting companies, security experts, lawyers, and domain investors for structured discussions and business-oriented networking. Its stated mission is to foster more meaningful connections and higher-quality business exchange within the domain ecosystem.

The program includes conference sessions and networking on 17–18 August, preceded by an informal group visit to Neuschwanstein Castle on 16 August and followed by a brewery tour on 19 August, extending the event into a broader social and community experience.

With its limited capacity, invitation-led attendance model, and emphasis on direct professional exchange, Domain Summit Europe continues to position itself as a focused meeting point for decision-makers across the domain industry.

For more info: https://kempten26.domainsummit.eu

NDD Camp

11 September 2026| Paris, France

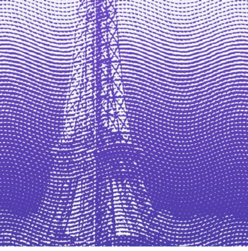
NDDCamp Paris 2026 is a forthcoming edition of one of the key recurring gatherings for the French-speaking domain name community, bringing together professionals from across the sector, including registrars, registries, domain investors, legal experts, SEO specialists, and DNS and cybersecurity stakeholders. The event is scheduled to take place in Vincennes, near Paris, and follows the established NDDCamp format held multiple times per year in different French cities.

The program is structured around thematic conferences and expert panels addressing current issues in the domain industry, including market developments, legal and technical challenges, cybersecurity risks, and best practices in domain management and digital strategy. The format explicitly avoids promotional or sponsored presentations in favor of knowledge-sharing and community discussion.

Alongside the formal sessions, the event includes networking opportunities and informal exchanges between participants, reflecting its role as a community-driven meeting point for professionals and stakeholders in the domain name ecosystem.

With its recurring presence in Paris, Rennes, and Strasbourg, NDDCamp continues to function as a reference platform for dialogue on the evolution, risks, and opportunities of the domain name sector.

For more info: https://www.nddcamp.com/



TLDCON 2026

23-24 September 2026 | Tashkent, Uzbekistan

TLDCON 2026 is the 19th International Conference for ccTLD registries and registrars of CIS, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, taking place in Tashkent at the Panarams Tashkent Hotel. The event brings together national domain registries, registrars, technical operators, policy specialists, cybersecurity experts, lawyers, and other stakeholders involved in the management and development of country-code top-level domains.

Organized by the Coordination Center for TLD .RU, TLDCON serves as a long-running platform (established in 2008) dedicated to the exchange of operational experience and cooperation between national registries and registrars across the region.

The 2026 program is expected to focus on core issues affecting national domain zones, including domain legislation and regulation, cybersecurity, DNS abuse, registrar–registry relations, and broader developments in domain name markets. Additional topics include professional training for registry and registrar staff and emerging technical areas relevant to internet infrastructure.

Held over two days, TLDCON 2026 continues the conference's established format of structured discussions, expert presentations, and sector-specific exchange aimed at strengthening cooperation within the global DNS ecosystem, with a particular focus on national internet segments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

For more info: https://tldcon.ru/en/

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