BEHIND THE DOT

· ──────────────── · ────────────────

state of the .au domain

ONLINE SUCCESS

Our nation's best websites - 8 common traits p8

.au zone ahead
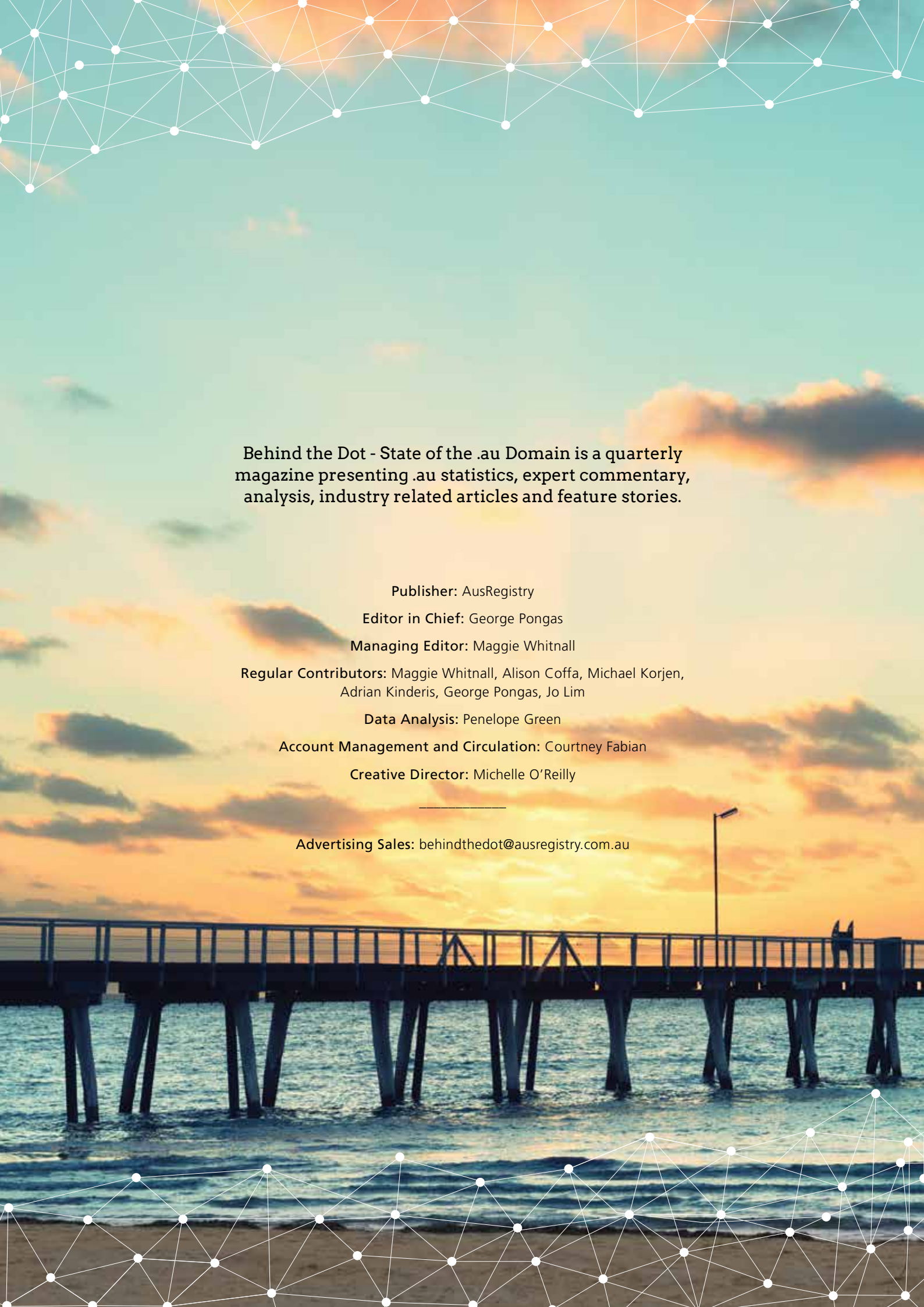
A comprehensive analysis of the .au zone file p3

WEBSITE CONTENT

Why Aussie websites are missing prime content opportunities p9

SEARCH OPTIMISATION

How do Aussie websites fare? p10

Behind the Dot - State of the .au Domain is a quarterly
magazine presenting .au statistics, expert commentary,
analysis, industry related articles and feature stories.

Contents

Visit our website to view more reports
ausregistry.com.au/research-au

2,998,364
.au domain names
currently registered

30 September 2015

Foreword

Welcome to AusRegistry's industry report, Behind the Dot: *State of the .au Domain.*

Remaining relevant in a fast-paced industry such as technology requires agility, innovation and a commitment to constant improvement. To this end, AusRegistry conducts regular research such as the annual .au Survey, to gain real-world insights that drive meaningful strategies.

In this edition of *Behind the Dot*, we are pleased to present the inaugural .au zone file analysis – a comprehensive examination of the namespace's 3 million domain names and their websites. This is the first time an analysis of this kind has been conducted and presents insights that have never before been publically available.

By cross-examining this data with other sources ranking the top-performing websites in the .au namespace, we've also been able to gain a fascinating view of the strategies employed by the 'best of the best' in .au. Several of these findings have been explored in greater detail throughout *Behind the Dot*.

The data collected from this research creates a benchmark for analysis in the future on the trends of website development and best practice design in Australia.

Continuing the theme of innovation and collaboration, the last few months have been an exciting and eventful time for the .au namespace as a whole, with industry events bringing together the wider Australian Internet community and encouraging collaboration and growth.

October saw more than 20 executives from .au Registrars meet in Melbourne for AusRegistry's .au Registrar Executive Day. It also brought the au Internet Governance Forum (auIGF), hosted by .au Domain Administration (auDA) at the Park Hyatt hotel in Melbourne.

Sessions were held that represented all aspects of the online experience – from the technical aspects to social and cultural elements. One clear highlight was the opening session on Gender and the Internet, featuring an incredibly engaging and intelligent panel of experts and commentators including journalist and broadcaster Tracey Spicer and Head of Public Policy, Australia & SE Asia for Twitter Julie Inman-Grant.

The AusRegistry team was also well-represented at the auIGF with General Counsel David Carrington moderating a panel on metadata retention in Australia and Information Security Officer Mark Culhane a highly-praised member of the 'Security in .au' workshop panel.

The questions and comments posed by attendees throughout the auIGF demonstrate not only the dynamism of our industry but also the high levels of engagement and passion within this community. Events like the auIGF provide a valuable forum for members of this wider group to gain more information and contribute their thoughts, ideas and skills to the betterment of our industry.

In this spirit, we are pleased to present the fifth edition of *Behind the Dot: State of the .au Domain*. We welcome your feedback and input on the magazine and thank you for reading.

Adrian Kinderis
CEO, AusRegistry

![ausregistry]

Under the Microscope

The .au namespace has continued to add domains albeit at a lower growth rate during this past quarter. The total domains under management (TDUM) at September 30 2015, was 2,998,364. After a sustained period of 6% growth, a contraction in net.au domains and a small decrease in com.au growth has confirmed the trend observed last quarter with annual domains under management growing 4% year on year.

.au Domains Under Management

— TDUM Growth Rate   — Sum of TDUM
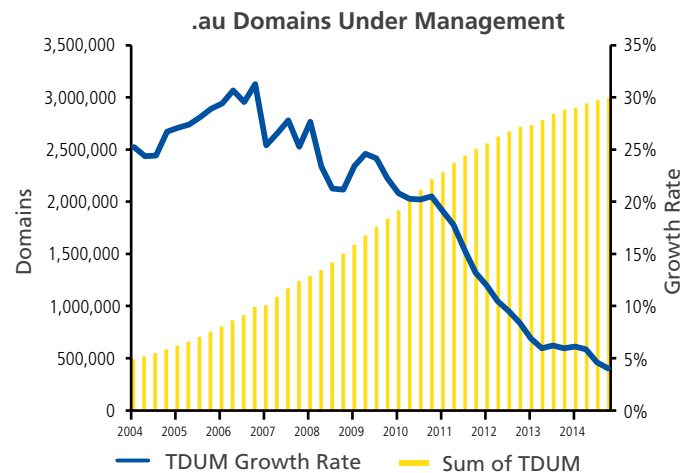
Total net.au domains under management shrank from 323,274 on 30 September 2014 to 318,200 on 30 September 2015. This is due to the continuing reduction in new net.au creates while renewal rates hold fairly steady. The smaller namespaces of id.au and asn.au have also declined.

Despite this, com.au and org.au continue to grow at 4.9% and 2.7% respectively with the open namespaces finishing the quarter at 2,998,364 domains under management (with an additional 20,747 domains in the closed edu.au and gov.au zones).
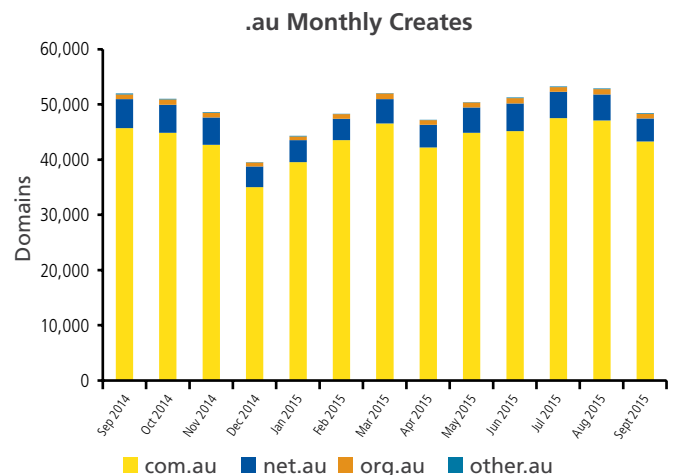
.au Monthly Creates

■ com.au   ■ net.au   ■ org.au   ■ other.au

Of the 2,880,831 .au domains scanned (com.au, net.au, org.au, id.au and asn.au), 1,878,767 or just over 65% returned a response of either 'Available' or 'Redirect', indicating that it pointed to a website or webpage. The remaining domains returned a 'Host not found' or 'Access denied' response.

Source: The first comprehensive .au zone file analysis, p3

The trend of slowing growth is also evident in creates, with September 2015 almost 6% lower than September 2014. The reduction in net.au creates means that the proportion of new creates being in com.au has risen to 89.2% and net.au creates have dropped below 9%. Heading into the traditionally lower December quarter, this trend seems unlikely to reverse.

The weakness in creates is not replicated in the renewal market however, as renewal rates remain consistent at 66.2% in August 2015. With the growing number of registrants already attached to the namespace, renewals (required every two years in order to retain a domain name in the .au namespace) are an increasingly important indicator of namespace health.

The age of the domain remains the strongest indicator of propensity to renew with only very small changes in the renewal rate within age categories.
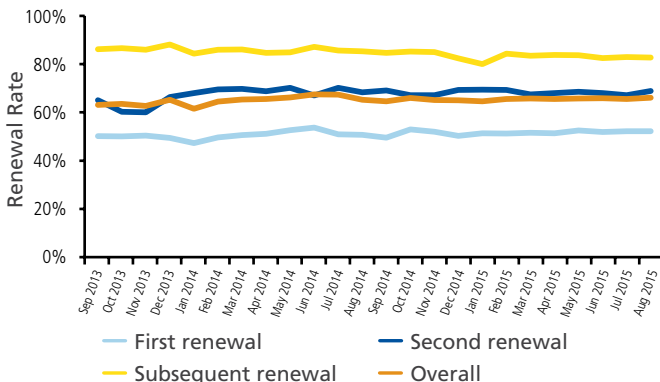
Renewal Rates by Domain Age

Asia Pacific Top-Level Domains (APTLD) is the organisation for country code Top-Level Domains (ccTLDs) in the Asia Pacific region, which includes .au as a member. The countries represented in the APTLD graph were selected on the basis of data availability and to represent the range of APTLD ccTLDs. Information about APTLD is available at www.aptld.org

Comparing Australia to other countries in the APTLD organisation suggests we are a country highly engaged with our ccTLD.

Australia has a high number of .au domains per capita, although in the absolute number of domains it is dwarfed by that of .cn. From this sample, only New Zealand (.nz) has a comparable per capita ownership rate – a rate that has overtaken that of Australia since the introduction of direct registrations at the second level.

Domain Numbers in the APTLD Region

* as at 31 August
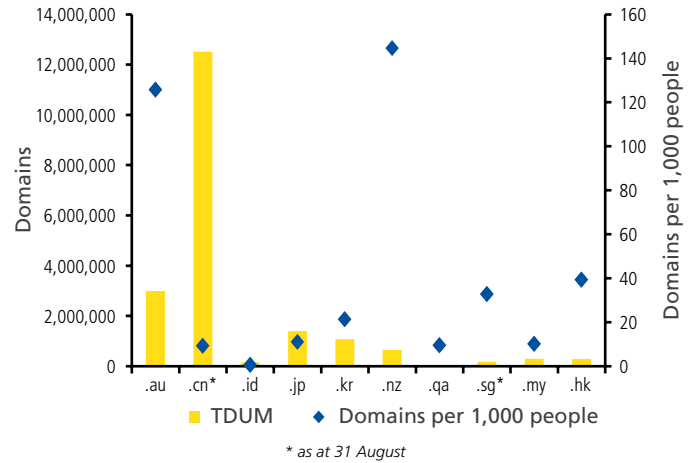
.au Research and Surveys

AusRegistry and .au Domain Administration (auDA) perform yearly surveys to gain a strong understanding of domain utilisation, user interaction with .au and to gauge satisfaction levels with the policy, governance and technical direction of the .au namespace.

The 2015 .au Survey ran for approximately two weeks in late May to early June, attracting a total of 3,101 responses from the Australian population.

There were notable shifts in .au domain utilisation from 2014 to 2015. 79% of .au holders surveyed in 2014 used their domain name for a business website, whereas in 2015 this number dropped to 51%. Conversely there was a 7% increase in information/education/community website utilisation in 2015 from 17% to 24%. Blog sites increased slightly in 2015 from 12% to 14% and email use increased from 39% to 52%.

What do you use your .au domain for?
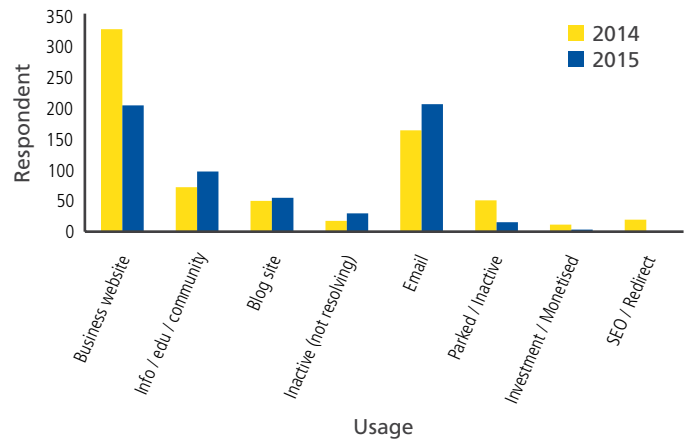
The first comprehensive .au zone file analysis

By **Maggie Whitnall**
Senior Client Services Manager

With over 3 million .au domains under management it raises the question, how are they utilised? How many websites fly the .au flag? What type of websites are they? Are they secure and technically up-to-date?

For those that operate online businesses, information about domain utilisation provides a useful benchmarking tool. It identifies the strengths, weaknesses, commonalities and differences in websites and most importantly highlights the features of a website that are consistent amongst the most well-known businesses and websites with the highest traffic.

For providers of Internet related services, utilisation data presents opportunities to engage customers with targeted offerings based on the analysis of their website, i.e. a website may have a low search engine optimisation score or perhaps be rated technically poor and therefore benefit from changes to their current enterprise.

From a research perspective, analysing how the Domain Name System (DNS) works and is used provides useful data that supports marketing activities, policy direction and technical operations.

To answer the many questions raised, AusRegistry embarked on its first ever .au zone file scans in June and August of this year.

The .au zone file contains every domain registered in .au. When analysed the zone file reveals a large amount of information about domain usage and website ownership.

The zone file scan returned 110 data elements of varying application to the Australian market. Whilst the various metrics are interesting the true value lies in the areas where there is context to the information presented.

From the 110 data elements AusRegistry selected a number of elements to investigate further. These include: Response Type, Website Page Numbers, Website Type, E-commerce, Content Management System, Technical Evaluation and Search Engine Optimisation.

Our Discoveries

The information from the .au zone file scan confirmed some existing beliefs about .au domain usage and website ownership as well as challenging others. In some instances data extracted from the zone file analysis was cross referenced with additional Registry data to provide deeper insights. Domain name age and renewal data are such examples that were cross referenced against the domain response type analysis.

The following seven categories from the zone file findings have been expanded upon for this report.

1. Domain name resolution – Response Type
The Response Type is the answer that a spider (proprietary software that searches or 'crawls' the web) gets when requesting to resolve a domain name. The response can be: Available, Host not found, Access denied or Redirect.

- **Available:** The domain resolves to a website with content. If a website contains content it can be further broken down in categories and website types.

- **Host not found:** The spider could not resolve to a website. This can occur when the DNS is not configured or the server is unavailable.

- **Access denied:** Access is not allowed and the spider cannot resolve the domain name

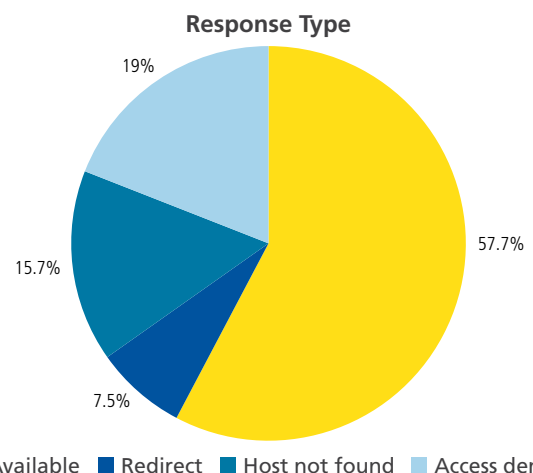- **Redirect:** A server-side redirect exists, e.g. status codes 301, 302, 303 or 404.

Response Type

19%
57.7%
15.7%
7.5%

🟨 Available 🟦 Redirect 🟦 Host not found 🟦 Access denied

Table 1: Response type. 2,880,831 .au domains (open 2LDs).

Of the 2,880,831 .au domains scanned (com.au, net.au, org. au, id.au and asn.au), 1,878,767 or just over 65% returned a response of either 'Available' or 'Redirect', indicating that it pointed to a website or webpage. The remaining domains returned a 'Host not found' or 'Access denied' response.

Response Type by Term

When Response Type was cross referenced with the age of a .au domain, we noted that as a domain name ages it is less likely to be 'Access denied' and 'Host not found' and more likely to be 'Available'.

Response Type by Term
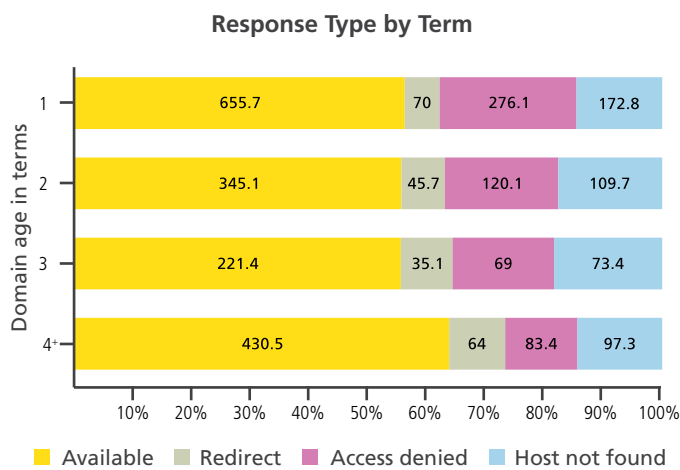
* Figures on chart are shown as thousands
Table 2: *Response type by age. Total 2,880,831 .au domains (open 2LDs).*

There is little difference in the utilisation rate between first, second and third terms. This somewhat refutes the notion that people don't renew because they haven't done anything with the domain. Instead, there must be other factors beyond utilisation that impact renewals. Perhaps it is perceived secondary market value, or possibly 'auto-renew' keeps the domain registered far beyond the registrant's actual desires.

Generally speaking, the older domain names are more likely to have a hosted website – but this effect takes several terms to be significant.

Note:

The standard domain name licence period for a .au registration is two years. 1st Term refers to all domains under management that fall between initial registration and time of expiry. The 2nd term includes domains that have been renewed up until time of expiry. 3rd Term domains refers to domains that have been renewed for a second time up until expiry. 4th+ term refers to domains that have been renewed for a third and subsequent times up until expiry.

Response Type by Zone

When we cross referenced Response Type with the Zone Type of a .au domain name we observed that com.au has a much higher utilisation than net.au.

Response Type by Zone
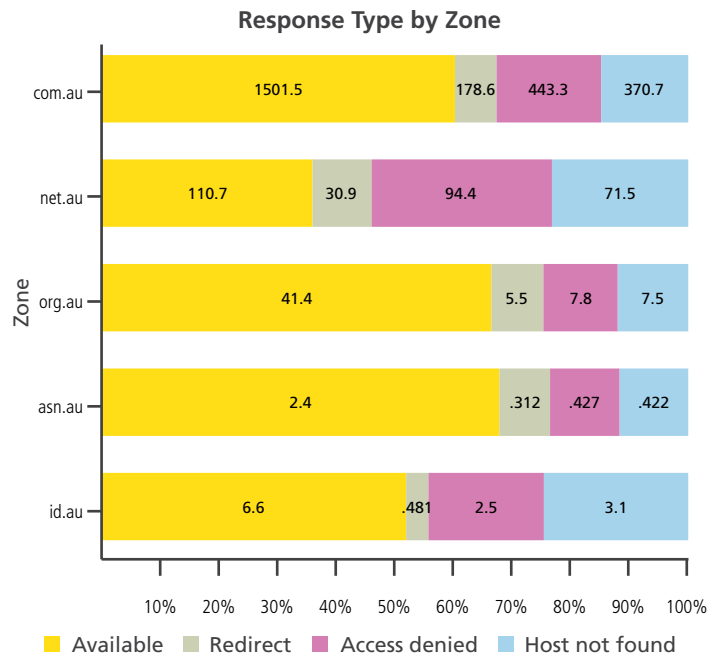
* Figures on chart are shown as thousands
Table 3: *Response Type by Zone. Total 2,880,831 .au domains (open 2LDs).*

As assumed the net.au redirect proportion is higher than other 2LDs and has low 'Available' and high 'Access denied' scores, likely indicating defensive registration behaviour.

Despite much lower registration volumes, org.au and asn. au are both highly utilised with the highest 'Available' and lowest 'Host not found' and 'Access denied' scores. This is likely a result of the policy and compliance checks periodically performed by .au Domain Administration (auDA).

New Zealand internet data portal

In September 2015 New Zealand Registry Services (NZRS) launched 'Internet Data Portal' (https://idp.nz/) publishing various Internet-related data including:

- .nz zone scan
  - » Multiple metrics obtained for the monthly zone scan run across all .nz domain names in the .nz registry
- Internet Connections
- Internet Service Providers
- .nz Registrations

2. Websites – Number of Pages

The Number of Pages refers to the amount of pages the spider detects while indexing the website. The spider indexes 10 to 30 pages and reviews the internal links in an attempt to estimate how many pages the website contains.

Website Page Numbers & Domain Name Age

When we cross referenced Website Page Numbers data with the age of the .au domain names we noted that a very high proportion of websites hosted on domain names in the first registration term were single page sites. As the domain name increased in age so did the number of website pages.

Website Page Numbers by Age
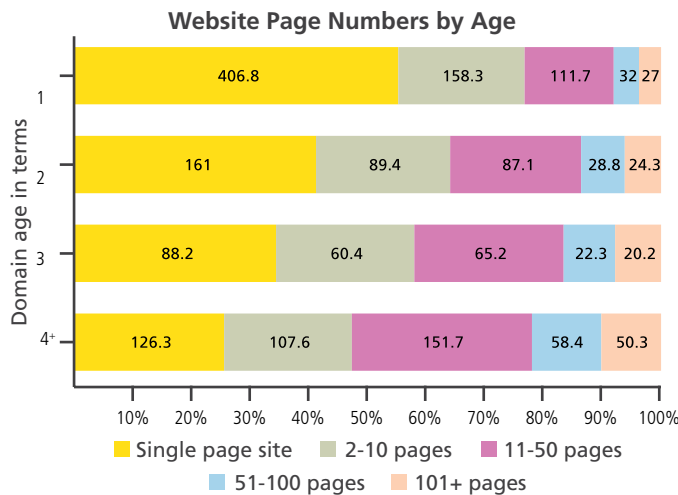
*Figures on chart are shown as thousands
Table 4: Website Page Numbers by Age. Total 1,878,767 .au domains (open 2LDs returning a 'Available' or 'Redirect' response).*

Further analysis was conducted on a sample of the single page websites and we found that in reality, about a third were likely to be actual websites. The remaining websites were mostly a combination of Registrar placeholder pages and 'server not found' pages.

Type of Website	Number of websites
Fully Functioning Website - Multiple Pages	29
Hosted - No Design	16
Personalised Business Contact Details Page	10
Personalised Coming Soon Page	4
Re-Direct to Master Website	2
Registrar Holding Page	37
Server not found page / Error Page / blank	24
Sponsored LinksDomain For Sale	13
Grand Total	135

Table 5: A sample of websites deemed to be 'single page sites'.

3. Website Type

There are many varieties of websites, each specialising in a particular type of content or use. The term 'Category' is used to divide certain types of content such as 'work', 'home and garden', 'IT' (nearly half of the .au websites were 'unidentified' due to methodological difficulties in determining the website category) and 'Website Type' to divide the websites with a certain type of use. Currently the website types are identified as: Blog, Forum, Business (websites from company with phone number and a physical address), eCommerce (website selling products or services online), Placeholder (default page from registrar after registering a domain name) and Parking (domain for sale, reserved for future use or only showing advertisements).

Website Type

Legend:
- Content
- Business
- Placeholder
- Empty
- Disallowed
- Framed
- Parking
- e-Commerce
- Blog
- Forum
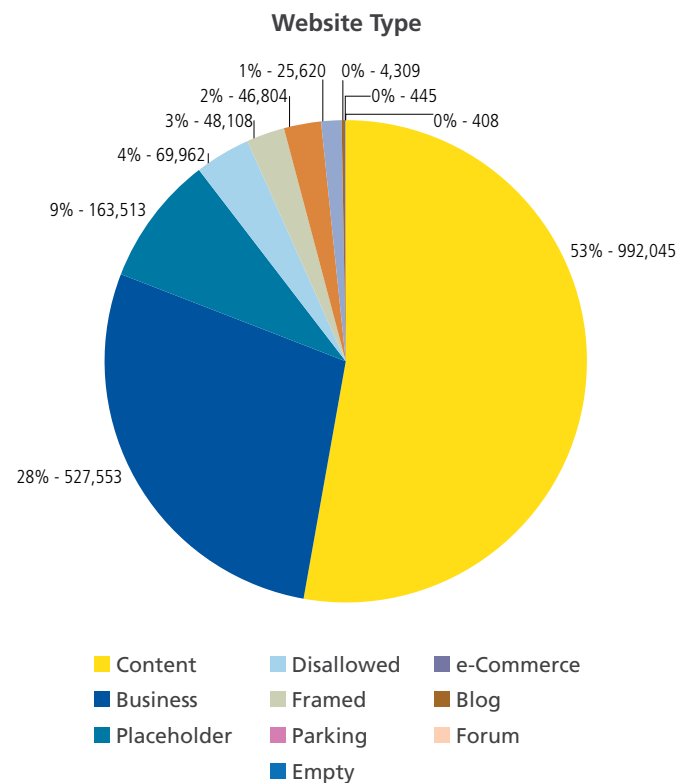
Table 5: Website Type. Total 1,878,767 .au domains (open 2LDs returning a 'Available' or 'Redirect' response).

'Content' type is by far the most typical website type at 53%. Broadly this is described as a website that provides specific information on a topic. The next highest category is 'Business', which aligns with expectations given the high number of com. au registrations in the .au namespace, a domain reserved solely for commercial enterprise.

At 9%, 'Placeholder' websites are the third highest website type.Further zone scans will determine if this is a consistent utilisation statistic.

4. E-commerce

E-commerce refers to whether or not the website is or contains an online store. Over 100 variables are taken into account such as payment method, average price, and shopping cart system. These variables and a machine learning system are used to determine whether or not a website classifies as e-commerce. This is achieved by classifying hundreds of thousands of websites into e-commerce stores and non-e-commerce stores. The computer system is then 'trained' to recognise e-commerce and non-e-commerce stores by showing it many examples of online stores. E-commerce refers not only to online stores but also store pickup, whereby you can purchase products online and collect it from the store of your choice.

E-Commerce Likelihood
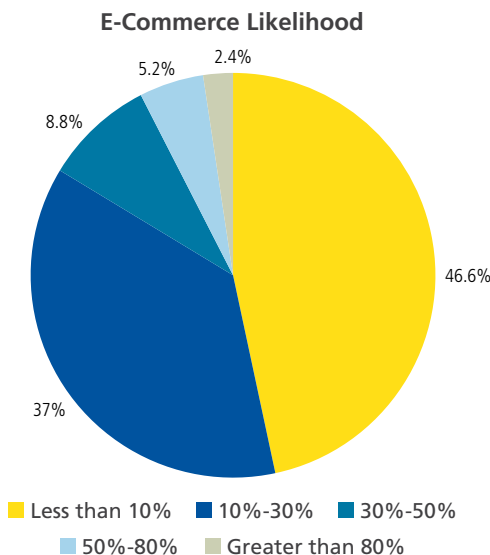
Table 6: E-Commerce Likelihood. Total 1,878,767 .au domains (open 2LDs returning a 'Available' or 'Redirect' response).

The results for e-commerce likelihood were surprising. Incredibly 84% of all .au websites have a 30% chance or less of having e-commerce. With the proliferation of online shopping in Australia we anticipated higher e-commerce adoption. In actuality, only 2.4% of .au websites have a greater than 80% chance of being an e-commerce site.

5. Content Management System

The HTML code of a website can be hand coded, created with desktop software or generated with a Content Management System (CMS) – an application used to create, edit and generate the website. The spider is trained to detect the CMS used by examining the HTML code of the homepage.

Content Management System

■ No CMS ■ Detected CMS
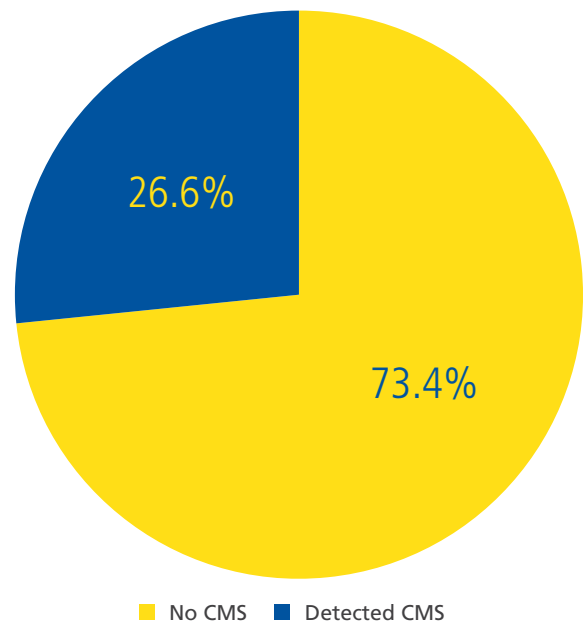
Table 7: Content Management System. Total 1,878,767 .au domains (open 2LDs returning a 'Available' or 'Redirect' response).

Of the 26.6% of .au websites that have a content management system, WordPress accounts for 19%, with Joomla (2.6%) and Wix (1.7%) the only other providers of note.

WordPress is the most popular blogging system in use on the Web, at more than 60 million websites. As of January 2015, WordPress was used by more than 23.3% of the top 10 million websites worldwide. (Source: *"Usage Statistics and Market Share of Content Management Systems for Websites"*. *W3Techs. January 2015*)

Unfortunately Australian retailers share of Australia's e-commerce revenue is only forecasted to reach 15% by 2020 (in 2015, Australian retailers represent 5%, USA 50%)

Source: NAB online retail sales, The Future Laboratory, Ernst and Young

6. Technical Evaluation

The Technical Evaluation metric refers to how technically well a website is built. The spider takes 34 factors into account to calculate this. The Technical Evaluation is a grade between one (low) and 10 (high). Websites that use old technology (frames, tables and deprecated HTML tags) rank lower then websites that use advanced new techniques (table-less design, semantic web).

Technical Evaluation
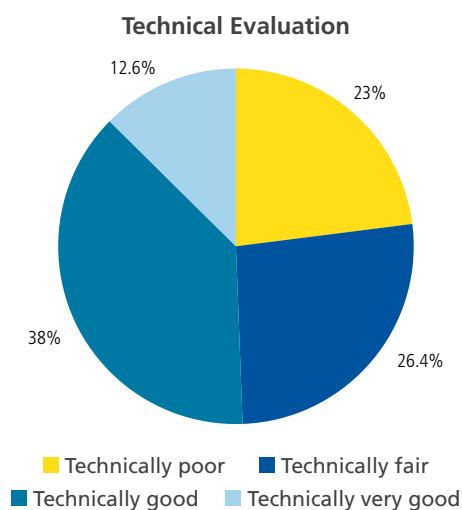
Table 8: Technical Evaluation. Total 1,878,767 .au domains (open 2LDs returning a 'Available' or 'Redirect' response).

Nearly half of all .au websites (49.4%) received a poor to fair technical evaluation. Websites that use old technology or do not upgrade regularly are at risk of providing a poor user experience and adversely affecting their search ranking and conversion rates. There is opportunity for web designers and hosting companies to deliver services to help customers correctly configure their sites.

Data provider zone file scan

The .au zone file scan was conducted at the approval of .au Domain Administration (auDA).

Thank you to Dataprovider (www.dataprovider.com), the company engaged by AusRegistry to conduct the zone file scan and analysis. Dataprovider's category descriptions have been included in this article.

AusRegistry will continue to report on the findings of this and subsequent zone file analyses in future editions of *Behind the Dot*.

AusRegistry invites comment on the zone file findings and encourages requests for further information. Please contact us at info@ausregistry.com.au

7. Search Engine Optimisation Score

The Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) score is an indication of how well a website is built or optimised to adhere to the requirements or ranking algorithms of search engines. In practice, this basically means how well the website builder can explain to a robot (Google or Bing) what his website is really about. One way this can be done is by consistently using the same keywords in HTML tags like the title, description or headings of a page. The SEO score is a percentage from 1% (low) to 100% (high). The higher the percentage, the better the website is optimised to rank highly in search engines for a certain keyword.

Search Engine Optimisation Score
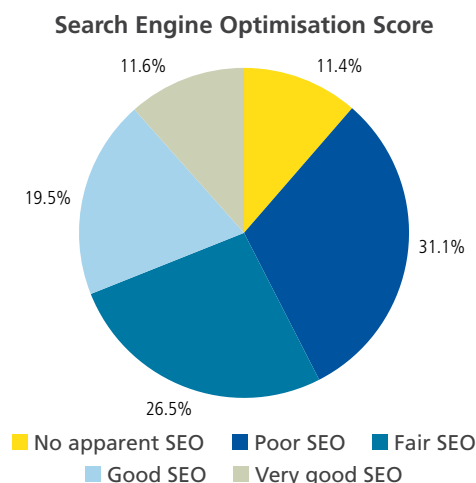
Table 9: Search Engine Optimisation Score. Total 1,878,767 .au domains (open 2LDs returning a 'Available' or 'Redirect' response).

A large number of .au websites (42.5%) are considered to have a poor to no SEO score. There is great potential for website owners to improve SEO and increase the success of their enterprise. Additionally for service providers, there is opportunity to provide SEO services to existing customers as well as market SEO services to potential customers.

Note:
For an interesting look at SEO and Australian websites see the article 'Domains in search strategy: how Aussie websites are performing on search optimisation' in this edition of Behind the Dot pg10.

5 Essential SEO tips from digital marketers

Reach Local:

1. Have a mobile website
2. Include local information
3. Get social
4. Optimise your listings
5. Measure true ROI

http://www.blog-reachlocal.com.au/blog/5-essential-seo-tips/

Our nation's best websites - 8 common traits

By Michael Korjen
Public Relations Manager, AusRegistry

An Australian-first examination of the country's top ranked and most visited websites has found the vast majority have a strong focus on social media, mobile-friendly design and best practice security standards, according to AusRegistry's .au zone file analysis.

After comprehensively crawling the websites of all 3 million .au domain names, and matching this data against the top 100 Alexa (a website traffic analytics tool) ranked .au websites in Australia, our analysis found almost a dozen unique characteristics that are common to the highest performing websites.

The top 100 .au websites included major brands like the Commonwealth Bank, SEEK and Telstra, Government agencies like the Bureau of Meteorology and the Australian Taxation Office, and media outlets like news.com.au, the Sydney Morning Herald and Gizmodo.

Results from our analysis showed that Australia's best websites recognise the importance of social media to engage with their audiences. Eighty percent of the top 100 .au websites have social media embedded in their website, compared to less than one third across the whole namespace.

Facebook is the social media platform of choice for Australian website owners, present on 71% of the top 100 websites (and 24% of all .au domains). Twitter came in second, present on 70% of the top 100 (and 11% of all .au domains).

Another major distinguishing characteristic between top performing websites and the rest of the .au namespace was mobile responsive design. Our analysis found that almost all of the top 100 .au websites (91%) had a mobile friendly version, compared to only 38% across the namespace.

Given the ever increasing number of website visitors getting online via mobile devices – and the importance of mobile responsive design, this figure suggests that Australian website owners would do well to invest in a mobile friendly version.

As expected, the results also showed that Australia's best websites take security far more seriously. Of the top 100 websites, 78% were found to have SSL Certificates (Secure Sockets Layer Certificates), which allow for encrypted connections to share secure information like passwords and credit card details.

Our analysis found that a website in the top 100 was 13 times more likely to have an SSL Certificate than the average across the entire .au namespace.

One area with a less significant disparity was the presence of video content on Aussie websites. While the top 100 still performed better – with 35% having some form of video content on their website – the average across the .au namespace was 14%, which was much closer than every other element examined.

A possible explanation for this is the emerging nature of video content as a best practice digital marketing tool. The explosion in popularity of YouTube and the preferential treatment of videos by Facebook has forced brands to rethink their approach to content. As the use of video content matures, the number of websites featuring video content should also rise.

Our analysis found a more obvious indicator of a top performing website was the number of incoming links a site received. Incoming links are the hyperlinks created by other websites to direct visitors to your website. They are an important metric in search engine optimisation, with search engines using the number of incoming links as one of the mechanisms to determine which websites rank higher.

Unsurprisingly, 97% of the top 100 .au websites had greater than 10 incoming links present on their domain name, compared to only 33% across the average of the .au namespace. The fact these websites tend to be media outlets, government bodies and major brands heavily influence the results.

The 3% of top 100 websites without incoming links had permanent redirects present on their domain names, meaning that incoming links were not present on their primary domain name.

This was also the case when we analysed the composition of content on websites. For instance, two thirds of the top 100 had a contact us page, while half had pages dedicated to product information. A further 83% had a legal disclaimer.

This type of corporate content is not always necessary on smaller or lower volume websites.

AusRegistry's .au zone file analysis is the first of its kind to comprehensively examine the namespace's 3 million domain names and their websites. By comparing the broader results with those of the Alexa top 100 .au websites, we are able to gain valuable insights into best practice and trends among the top-performing websites in Australia.

Australian websites miss prime content opportunities

By **Alison Coffa**
Associate Communications Specialist, AusRegistry

A clear and memorable domain name in a trusted namespace such as .au is a solid foundation for any business' website. Beginning with the address through which they access it, a customer's experience with an organisation's site can determine how long they remain on the page, how likely they are to make a purchase and whether or not they'll return in future.

Not every visitor who lands on your site will be immediately ready to purchase from you. Ensuring that visitors are receiving something of value when they visit your site increases the chance that they'll view the experience positively and by extension, can improve their perception of your brand.

Social media and video for example, are simple ways of keeping website content fresh and updated regularly.

Results of the 2015 .au zone file analysis indicate however that many Australian websites are missing out on these key factors that can contribute heavily to good website content and a positive user experience.

Social Media

In May 2015, Sensis released its Social Media Report detailing consumer and business use of social media in Australia. Of the 800 consumers surveyed, 49% reported using social networking sites every day, with Facebook the clear choice at 93%.

The way these consumers interact with businesses on social media however, presents some valuable insights for organisations looking to tap in to a wider audience online.

Twenty-four percent of respondents indicated that they 'follow or find out about particular brands or businesses in general' on social media, while 20% 'follow particular brands to access offers or promotions'.

Despite this, only 30% of small businesses and 32% of medium businesses in the survey reported having a social media presence.

Data from the zone file analysis showed that 27% of .au websites had a social media presence. It is worth noting that for the zone file analysis to detect social media, it needed to be integrated into the website in some manner, such as through 'follow us' buttons or embedded timeline widgets.

Of this 27%, Facebook was the most highly represented, with 24% of websites showing signs of a Facebook profile. Interestingly, when compared with the top 100 .au websites (by website traffic, sourced via Alexa), the proportion of websites with a social media presence was significantly higher, at 80%.

By building and maintaining a simple social media presence, a company's website can remain more up to date and offer an additional layer of value to its visitors – keeping them on the site longer and improving their perception of the brand.

Video

There is solid reasoning behind the headlines today that read '6 reasons you need to use video marketing' and 'Why online video is the future of content marketing'.

It is becoming more and more apparent that visual content, particularly video, is one of the most powerful marketing tools online. In May 2015, Cisco predicted that "consumer internet video traffic will be 80% of all consumer internet traffic in 2019, up from 64% in 2014."

Software company HighQ reports that 55% of people watch videos every day and sites which include video have on average an extra two minute dwell time compared to sites which don't.

Despite the obvious demand and benefits, the .au zone file analysis showed that only 14% of Australian websites had video elements on their site. The majority of this appears as YouTube integration or embedding into the sites, with 13% featuring YouTube.

Simple testimonials, product demonstrations or sales promotions in video format can become invaluable content pieces to boost your website's value for visitors.

While some Australian websites are improving user experience with diverse website content, many are as yet missing out on a significant opportunity to boost traffic.

Particularly for small to medium sized businesses, valuable website content needn't be a burden on marketing resources – and the benefits it returns are well worth the investment.

Search optimisation performance of Aussie websites

By Alison Coffa
Associate Communications Specialist, AusRegistry

PERFORMANCE
analysis

An organisation's domain name is its most important digital asset, upon which all other marketing strategies and tactics are built.

This includes everything from your content marketing strategy that hosts blog posts and news articles on distribution networks, directing traffic back to your website; to a large billboard bearing a call-to-action to type in the domain name and find you online.

One such tactic is Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), which is growing in importance as many consumers use search as a web navigation method rather than direct access through a domain name. In fact, data from the 2015 .au Survey (presented in *Edition 4 of Behind the Dot*) indicated that 37% of respondents used search only to navigate online – a 12% increase year-on-year. SEO can however be a challenging practice, with the goal posts moving on what seems like a daily basis.

In February 2015, Google announced an update to its search algorithm that would see responsive websites – that is, websites that have a mobile-friendly version – receive a boost in search rankings.

Despite scepticism at the time from SEO experts, the update rolled out and some businesses did notice a hit to their search ranking. In fact, Bryson Meunier of Vivid Seats wrote in *Search Engine Land* that there is a significant difference between desktop rankings and mobile rankings, which has been impacted by this update.

This marks the importance of mobile responsiveness for those who rely on their website to attract business.

Similarly Google has highlighted security as a 'top priority' and in late 2014, announced that sites using "secure, encrypted connections" would be used as a ranking signal for search results. In particular, it now looks to SSL Certificates as an indicator, as part of a goal Google refers to as "HTTPS everywhere".

While the jury is still out on the scale and significance of these updates, the suggestion from SEO experts is that where possible, steps should be taken to address these factors – at the very least to avoid being penalised in search.

So how many websites in Australia have listened to this advice and how many are missing out on a rankings boost?

Results from the 2015 .au zone file analysis indicated that 38% had a mobile version of the site available. Indicating a

rate of just more than one in three responsive websites, this is a good benchmark but certainly presents an area of potential growth for Australian website owners.

Interestingly, when this figure is compared with the top 100 .au websites (by website traffic, sourced via Alexa rankings), 91% of the latter group have a responsive or mobile-friendly website. If these 100 websites are looked to as one indicator of best practice, it can be easily assumed that mobile-friendliness is a significant indicator of quality and performance.

In looking at website security and SSL Certificates in particular, only 5.6% of .au websites have an SSL Certificate attached to their site. This lower proportion is reflected in the top websites as well, with 78% of the most visited .au websites having an SSL Certificate.

This is certainly an area of note for Australian businesses and website owners. Data from the 2015 .au Survey indicated that 76% of respondents are likely to trust a website and provide accurate personal information if it's a secure site. Combined with an overall increase in security awareness ('high' security awareness increased by 7% while 'low' security awareness decreased by 8%), the addition of an SSL Certificate to a website could provide a significant boost to Australian websites.

So what does this mean for domain names?

Importantly, an increasing focus on SEO strategy does not mean the death of domain names. Similarly, consumer trust is the cornerstone of the .au namespace and there is no better way to achieve this in your online presence than by combining a .au domain name with an SSL Certificate.

As mentioned above, domain names form the foundation on which your wider digital strategy is built. In fact, studies have found that domain names have a significant impact on SEO, so the two tactics are intrinsically linked.

For example, a comprehensive study by SEO company Searchmetrics found that "success in search and content is also a domain based factor" and that short and highly relevant domain names have the equivalent worth of "thousands of keywords" in search rankings.

These results, combined with the additional boosts that can be provided by SSL Certificates and mobile-friendly design, provide some valuable areas of focus for Australian website owners looking to strengthen their online presence and insure their website (and domain name) for the future.

Channel Talk

By **George Pongas**
Director Product Management, AusRegistry Naming Services, and auDA Board Director

"Targeted, practical and results-focused."

This was the brief for the .au Registrar Executive Day, held at the Park Hyatt in Melbourne on October 5, 2015. More than 20 top executives from .au Registrars gathered for a marketing and sales-themed day, designed to provide a forum for collaboration and clear steps forward for the growth for the .au namespace.

As MC for the day, AusRegistry CEO Adrian Kinderis set the tone early, gathering 'hopes and fears' from those in attendance to allow for a clear agenda and objectives.

A diverse array of speakers attended the Executive Day, each providing a unique viewpoint on business in the online world. Having conducted a comprehensive audit of Registrar websites to assess for usability and conversion rates, Nathan Stewart of eMarketing company Alkemi presented a high-level overview of the results and some advice on areas for improvement.

Mr Stewart's presentation highlighted some interesting findings such as a large proportion of desktop traffic to Registrar websites, despite broader industry trends indicating that mobile is increasingly becoming the dominant browsing method. He was even able to pinpoint the particular page that causes the highest exit rate of visitors, providing a highly targeted suggestion for ways to improve website performance.

Entrepreneur and Founder of Red Balloon, Naomi Simson also spoke about her experience in starting and growing an online business, and the opportunities and challenges of working in such a dynamic space.

Henry Guhl and Brendan Sanders of media agency Nunn Media then shared some interesting insights into media buying trends and where marketing dollars can be best spent for the greatest return on investment.

As well as this, the AusRegistry team presented an update on the .au namespace, trends, marketing strategy and recent research findings, including an overview of the 2015 .au zone file analysis.

Being a day of collaboration, the floor opened to broader discussion between the AusRegistry team and Registrars, allowing for feedback to be given and frank conversations to be held. The input and response from Registrars helped identify a number of action points for the .au community with regards to innovation, efficiency and future growth.

Following the day's formalities, the Registrars and AusRegistry team met at Grossi Florentino in Melbourne's CBD for a beautiful dinner and Whiskey Master Class with Fred Siggins from The Humble Tumbler.

Future Registrar Executive Days will be developed based on the feedback from participants, aiming to maximise the value for attendees and push for a mutually beneficial event.

DNS & Security

Q&A with Adam King, Chief Technical Officer,
.au Domain Administration

DomainPulse's David Goldstein spoke to auDA's Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Adam King following a 'Security in .au' panel session at the auIGF in Melbourne.

The .au (Australian) ccTLD implemented DNNSEC at the end of 2014, joining the vast majority of TLDs, including all new gTLDs. Adam King, auDA's Chief Technology Officer, spoke at the Australian Internet Governance Forum (auIGF) in Melbourne, Wednesday, which is organised by the .au policy and regulatory body. Adam was on a panel speaking about DNSSEC and online security in Australia. I spoke to Adam on the sidelines of the auIGF after his presentation on auDA's experiences in implementing DNSSEC.

DG: *In December 2014 auDA implemented DNSSEC – What was the reason for introducing this new security?*

AK: We needed to sign DNSSEC to enable .au to move forward and become a more secure namespace. So far all the ccTLDS of OECD member countries are signed with DNSSEC, so from both a security perspective and to remain competitive with other ccTLDs, it needed to happen. And of 1071 TLDs, 908 including all new gTLDs as mandated by ICANN, are currently signed.

DG: *How was the process?*

AK: The technical side of signing wasn't the difficult part. The difficult and time consuming part was developing the policies and processes for signing the zone and how auDA would manage the cryptographic keys. That's because you're now dealing with private key information and you're using it to create a layer of trust, so this information must be kept secure.

DG: *What's the difference for domain registrants?*

AK: At the moment not too much because it's not ubiquitous, but auDA needed to sign .au to create the opportunity for registrants to be able to sign their own domain names. But it's a process with several steps.

To make the service widely available, hosting companies need to start making DNSSEC signing services available to their customers. DNSSEC validation is on by default in all the current versions of name server software therefore any ISP (or business operating their own resolver) running the latest versions are performing validation – unless they are using a Windows resolver or have explicitly turned validation off. For hosting companies it is a little more involved, they need to replicate the processes auDA went through (generating key pairs, developing policy and signing procedures to protect their private keys) but obviously on a larger scale as they may have hundreds or thousands of zones to be signed. It's certainly possible, Comcast in the USA were able to achieve this. Comcast provide validation for 17.8 million residential customers and have signed all 5,000 domain names under their management.

DG: *When all this is done, what will the benefits be to .au domain registrants and internet users?*

AK: Once it's enabled everywhere, as long as the ISPs or corporate resolver has DNSSEC validation enabled, it will perform all the validation checks to protect internet users from two of the main DNS attack vectors – cache poisoning and man-in-the-middle attacks. The checks occur without the end user doing anything. It all goes on behind the scenes and is so quick the user doesn't even realise it's happened. It guarantees that the answer to the question asked, that is the domain name requested, has not been modified or tampered in transit from the authoritative server to the ISP's resolver.

What it doesn't do is that it doesn't provide encryption, so what one looks up and visits is still visible in the DNS, and it doesn't protect from viruses or DDOS attacks.

So it's not a silver bullet for protection online, but what it does protect against, it does so very well. And internet users are much safer as a result.

auDA is the host of the auIGF each year and announcements on the 2016 security focused panels will be announced at the start of the year. You can register to hear more about how to get involved by emailing **auigf@auda.org.au** to be added to the mailing list.

> **Note:**
> This piece was first published as 'What Was Involved In Making .AU More Secure With DNSSEC' on Domain Pulse. Established in 2001, DomainPulse is a news service about the Domain Name Industry. Updated daily, it brings the latest news and views from all corners of the globe.
> http://www.domainpulse.com/2015/10/07/making-au-more-secure-dnssec/
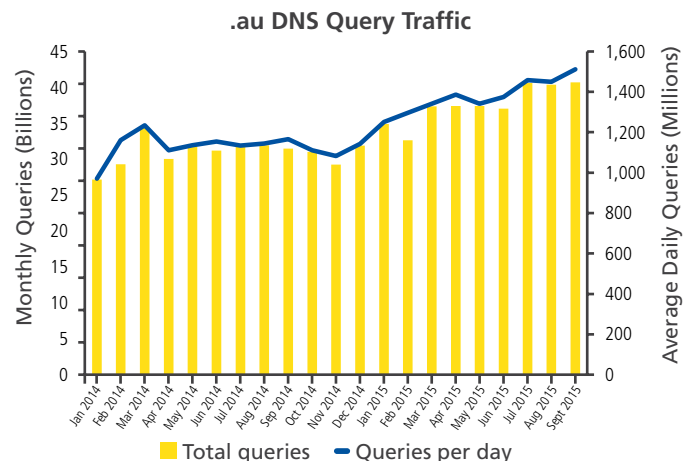
.au DNS Query Traffic

Governance & Policy

Wrapping up the 2015 Australian Internet Governance Forum by Jo Lim, Chief Operations & Policy Officer, .au Domain Administration

The .au Domain Administration (auDA) is responsible for setting and enforcing the policy rules governing .au domain name registrations. auDA conducts open and transparent policy development and review processes on a regular basis, to ensure that .au policy rules take account of market trends and reflect the changing needs of the Australian Internet community.

Every year auDA runs the Australian Internet Governance Forum (auIGF), where individuals, community groups, industry leaders, government representatives, academics, students, media – in short, all Internet users – gather to discuss Internet-related issues in Australia. This year's auIGF took place in October and was attended by 250 people, who came together to participate in plenary sessions and workshops under the theme "How the Internet is transforming Australian society".

auDA staff conducted workshops on two key issues related specifically to the .au domain – security and dispute resolution. The security workshop focused on DNSSEC implementation in .au and other ways of enhancing Internet security, while the dispute resolution workshop explained the various avenues that are available for people to take action against .au domain names that may be infringing their legal rights. Both workshops were well-attended with a high level of audience engagement.

Attending the auIGF is one way for people to discover more about what auDA does and get involved in the .au community. Another way is to become a member of auDA and participate in the election of directors to the auDA Board. This year's Board election will take place at auDA's AGM on 30 November, which is open to members and non-members to attend. Whilst voting rights are the key reason for becoming a member of auDA, there are a number of other benefits including free entry to the auIGF each year and invitations to other industry networking events.

See www.auda.org.au/about-auda/membership/ for more information about the benefits of auDA membership and how to join.

Keynote Speaker: The Hon. Tony Staley AO – Chair, auDA Board

Julie Inman-Grant, Head of Public Policy, Australia & SE Asia Twitter, speaking at the 'Gender and the Internet' plenary session.

Glossary

Abbreviations

2LD
Second Level Domain

ANZIAs
Australia and New Zealand Internet Awards

auIGF
Australian Internet Governance Forum

auDA
.au Domain Administration

ccTLD
Country Code Top Level Domain

DNS
Domain Name System

DNSSEC
Domain Name System Security Extensions

gTLD
Generic Top level Domain

IANA
Internet Assigned Numbers Authority

ICANN
Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

IDN
Internationalised Domain Name

TLD
Top Level Domain

Definitions

Australia and New Zealand Internet Awards (ANZIAs)
The ANZIAs are a collaboration between auDA and InternetNZ. An annual event celebrating the achievements of organisations, businesses and individuals who excel in delivering accessible, innovative, informative and secure resources to a diverse and wide community on the Internet.

.au Domain Administration (auDA)
The policy authority and industry self-regulatory body for the .au domain space.

Australian Internet Governance Forum (auIGF)
Developed by auDA, the auIGF provides a unique opportunity for all who use the Internet in Australia to share ideas and experiences, discuss Internet-related policy, identify issues and engage with each other in a multi-stakeholder forum.

.auLOCKDOWN
.auLOCKDOWN a security measure for .au domain names that provides an added level of security for domain name Registrants. Domain names are locked at the Registry level, and changes are only possible through direct communication between the Registrar authorised contact and the Registry, by following a strict authentication process.

AusRegistry
The Registry Operator for the open 2LDs (com.au, net.au, org.au, asn.au, and id.au); the community geographic 2LDs (act.au, nsw.au, nt.au, qlzd.au, sa.au, tas.au, vic.au and wa.au); and two closed 2LDs (edu.au and gov.au).

Country Code Top Level Domain (ccTLD)
A TLD that is used to represent a country or external territory. Some examples of ccTLDs are '.uk' for the United Kingdom, and '.au' for Australia.

Domain Name/Domain
An identification string that defines a realm of administrative autonomy, authority, or control on the Internet. Domain names are formed by the rules and procedures of the DNS. Any name registered in the DNS is a domain name.

Domain Name System (DNS)
A hierarchical distributed naming system for computers, services, or any resource connected to the Internet or a private network. It associates various information with domain names assigned to each of the participating entities. Most prominently, it translates easily memorised domain names to the numerical Internet Protocol (IP) addresses needed for the purpose of locating computer services and devices worldwide.

Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC)
Domain Name System Security Extensions (DNSSEC) is a security extension that facilitates the digital signing of Internet communications, helping to ensure the integrity and authenticity of transmitted data.

**Generic Top Level Domain (gTLD)/
Top Level Domain (TLD)**
The name at the top of the DNS naming hierarchy. It appears in domain names as the string of letters following the last (right-most) 'dot', such as 'net' in 'www.example.net'. Most TLDs with three or more characters are referred to as generic TLDs, or gTLDs. They can be subdivided into two types; 'sponsored' TLDs (sTLDs) or 'unsponsored' (uTLDs).

Hold / Holding / Held (a domain name)
Hold and its derivatives are terms that have been used throughout this report to denote the act of licencing a domain name. As per auDA's Domain Name Eligibility and Allocation Policy Rules for the Open 2LDs (2012- 04) there are no proprietary rights in the Domain Name System (DNS). A registrant does not 'own' a domain name. Instead, the registrant 'holds' a licence to use a domain name, for a specified period of time and under certain terms and conditions. www.auda.org.au/policies/auda-2012-04

Internationalised Domain Name (IDN)
A domain name that includes characters from scripts other than the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet (a–z). An IDN can

contain Latin letters with diacritical marks, or may consist of characters from non-Latin scripts.

Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA)
A department of ICANN, which oversees global Internet Protocol (IP) address allocation, autonomous system number allocation, root zone management in the DNS, media types, and other IP-related symbols and numbers.

Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)
IETF is a large open international community of network designers, operators, vendors, and researchers concerned with the evolution of the Internet architecture and the smooth operation of the Internet

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)
The global DNS administrator, formed in 1998, is a non-profit public-benefit corporation with global participants dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable and interoperable. It promotes competition and develops policy on the Internet's unique identifiers.

Registrant
An entity or individual that holds a domain name licence.

Registrar
An entity that registers domain names for Registrants and in the case of the .au ccTLD, is accredited by auDA.

Registry
The registry comprises of a database of domain names registered in each 2LD and a public WHOIS service for looking up the identity of the registrant of a domain name.

Reseller
An entity appointed by accredited Registrars to increase the retail channel of .au domain names.

Second Level Domain (2LD)
The alphanumeric string before the dot and the TLD. AusRegistry is the Registry Operator for the open 2LDs (asn.au, com.au, id.au, net.au and org.au); the community geographic 2LDs (act.au, nsw.au, nt.au, qld.au, sa.au,tas.au, vic.au and wa.au); and two closed 2LDs (edu.au and gov.au).

Total Domains Under Management (TDUM)
Total number of domain names registered in the namespace.

Zone
A portion of the namespace in the DNS for which administrative responsibility has been delegated.

Zone File
A file on a root server that contains domain name registration information. Zone files contain information necessary to resolve domain names to IP addresses and contains all information related to one domain.

YOU'RE IN THE BUSINESS...
SUPPORT THE BUSINESS.

Join the only organization fully dedicated to Promote, Advance, and Support the common interests of the Domain Name Industry.
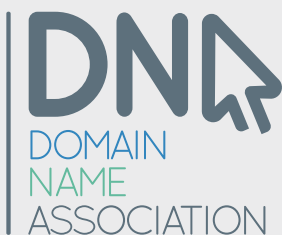
For membership information please visit **www.TheDNA.org** or contact **info@thedna.org**. See great examples of Domain Names in use at **www.inthewild.domains**

DNA
DOMAIN
NAME
ASSOCIATION

www.TheDNA.org

CURRENT MEMBERS

- Donuts
- GoDaddy
- Google
- InterNetX GmbH
- Rightside
- au Domain Administration Ltd
- Amazon
- Neustar, Inc.
- SIDN
- Web.com Group, Inc.
- .Club Domains, LLC
- .nz Registry Services
- 1&1 Internet AG
- 101domain, Inc.

- 1API GmbH
- Afilias Limited
- Allegravita LLC
- Asiamix Digital Ltd.
- Boston Ivy
- Brights Consulting Inc.
- CIRA
- Domain.com
- Dominion Enterprises
- DotGlobal Domain Registry Limited
- fTLD Registry Services, LLC (.bank)
- ICM Registry LLC

- MarkMonitor
- Minds + Machines
- Motion Picture Domain Registry
- National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (.pharmacy)
- NCC Group
- nic.at GmbH
- Nominet
- PeopleBrowsr Group
- Public Interest Registry
- Radix
- Second Genistry

- Sedo GmbH
- TLD Registry Ltd.
- Trademark Clearinghouse
- Uniregistry, Corp.
- Valideus
- Architelos
- Escrow.com
- Innovative Auctions Limited
- NamesCon
- RightOfTheDot, LLC