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Demco's domain deal will pay big dividends: Computer whiz started tallying stats for Golden Bears

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He had a Masters degree from University of Alberta, but a funny thing happened to John **Demco** on his way to a doctorate at University of British Columbia.

He became master of the dot-ca domain -- the country code which identifies thousands of Web sites as Canadian and is about to undergo dramatic changes.

Now, 12 years after his handful of volunteers registered the University of Prince Edward Island with the very first dot-ca name (upei.ca), the group is turning over control of the 98,000-name domain to a new organization, the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA).

Demco, a 47-year-old bachelor who gets back to his hometown of Vegreville once a year, could receive up to half of the \$4.4 million CIRA will pay to acquire administration of the domain from UBC.

``On one hand I did this, and everyone on the domain committee who helped me did this, for the good of the community and good of the country -- nobody was asking for payment," said **Demco**. ``At the same time, it is pretty clear the intellectual property has a lot of value."

When CIRA takes over Nov. 1, rules will change. Current names must be reregistered by Dec. 1. Firms need not be incorporated, and will be able to register more than one name.

They will pay between \$29 and \$69 annually to register each name. The money goes to one of 18 authorized registrars, who in turn pay \$20 per name to CIRA.

The number of registered names could double to nearly 200,000 by Christmas.

Demco grew up as one of three kids in a Vegreville family, then earned his Science degree at U of A in 1973 and Masters degree in 1975.

In his spare time he lugged a DEC portable computer to U of A Golden Bears hockey games and designed the first real-time stats program -- tallying shots, faceoffs won and lost, plus-minuses, bad passes and the like.

Demco's buddies were Randy Goebel and Nick Cercone, who went on to become chairs of computer science at the U of A and University of Waterloo respectively.

``I consider myself the failure of the group," said **Demco**, UBC's computing facilities manager.

He started his doctorate at UBC, but in 1982 got distracted by a project writing some of the very first e-mail software for people on different computers and different networks.

``Along with that project we started a little network of our own called CdnNet. It kept growing and we were licensing the software within North America and around the world, and as a result I got involved with research networking people in the States and Europe and Japan."

In 1980 **Demco** visited friends at the University of Washington who had a connection to the ARPA Internet, an Advanced Research Project Agency communications network funded by the U.S. defence department. "Defence did a lot of research, it wasn't just bombs," he said.

In 1985 **Demco** tried the Internet himself.

"There was such an appeal to it. To see the possibility to exchange e-mail with a friend and get an answer back in a few minutes ... anybody would see the potential. I didn't see myself as being particularly visionary."

In May of 1986 he tried to get an ARPA Internet connection. In 1988, after ARPA had been dropped from the name, UBC got the third connection in Canada, joining the University of Toronto and McGill University.

But long before even thinking about an Internet connection, **Demco** had visions of dot-ca.

"Physicists were using one kind of network, computer scientists were using another kind of network, and so on. I saw using dot-ca as a way to give a common naming structure to people on these different networks, so it would help them to communicate with each other."

He toyed with using dot-cdn. But the association handling such matters, headed by Internet founder Jon Postel of California, suggested countries go with the two-letter code of the International Standards Organization.

"I figured why rock the boat," said **Demco**. In May of 1987 he received authority for dot-ca, one of the first 10 country codes assigned. It went into use the next January, with 60 names registered the first year.

Things got busy with commercialization of the Internet in 1992, and became chaotic when people discovered the World Wide Web in 1994, five years after it had been created.

In 1997, **Demco** knew dot-ca had outgrown his little volunteer group, and negotiations began involving UBC, CIRA and the Canadian government.

He's still on CIRA's board, and said "if they want to make me a registrar emeritus, some greybeard to give them advice, I'd certainly entertain that."

Illustration:

- Photo: File Photo / John **Demco**, a University of Alberta student in the mid-70s, compiles statistics for the Golden Bears hockey team. **Demco** developed an early computer system for keeping sports statistics.
- Colour Photo: Southam Newspapers, Vancouver Province / John **Demco**

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