
THE VANCOUVER SUN

He put the .ca in Canada: John Demco is Canadian, eh, and he wants you to show that you're a Canuck, too

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Byline: Gillian Shaw
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Canada was nowhere on the Internet map until John Demco put it there. Today, while dot-com is an expression that has fallen out of favour in investment circles, .ca is the new darling of patriotic Canadian Web masters.

It all started in an office at the University of British Columbia's computing science department where facilities manager Demco decided someone had to take charge of registering Web sites ending with .ca, or it just wasn't going to happen.

"It was something I really thought was important and worthwhile," said Demco, who ran .ca as a volunteer until last year, when registration responsibility was shifted to private sector companies.

"I can't imagine I would have had a more fulfilling past 10 or 12 years," said Demco.

Whether it's to identify your family's Web site so relatives can surf their way your vacation snapshots, or to establish a link to a multi-gazillion-dollar corporate entity, the .ca domain name shouts 'I am Canadian,' all over the World Wide Web.

"We feel strongly about the importance of .ca as a brand for Canada," said Steve Smith, president of webnames.ca, a domain registration company he started with Demco late last year when .ca registration was commercialized.

"As an enabler for e-commerce, .ca is a very important brand, for companies, small home businesses and even families. It's a great way to identify yourself or your business on the Internet."

Domain names are used to identify addresses on the Internet -- .com stands for commercial; .ca identifies Web sites as Canadian.

Other countries have their own codes. Called country code top-level domains, these range from .ac for Ascension Island to .zw for Zimbabwe.

By the time companies and organizations here were beginning to sign up for .ca names, .com had already taken off on the World Wide Web.

In the United States, Network Solutions, (since acquired by VeriSign, Inc., which bills itself as the world's largest Internet trust services provider) won a competitive bid from the National Science Foundation to register .com, .net, .org, .edu and .gov for the Internet.

By 1997, Network Solutions announced the one-millionth-domain registrant on the Internet, by the following year that number had jumped to three million.

Most recently VeriSign announced that its registrar has begun accepting domain name registrations in more than 180 new languages, bringing the total number of languages in which Domain Names can be registered to more than 350.

This allows companies and individuals worldwide to register domain names in languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Thai and Urdu. It now manages more than 28.2 million .com, .net and .org generic top-level domains.

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When .com registration was moving at the pace of a high-speed information highway, Canada was bumping along its own brick road.

Canadian registrations were limited to companies, government groups and organizations and there was a tediously long list of rules that had to be met before you could affix .ca to an URL (Universal Resource Locator).

Getting a .com designation was easy by comparison. You could simply register fred.com if it wasn't already taken. But if you wanted to register fred.ca, and you met the corporate criteria, you could end up with a Web address something like fred.bc.ca.

That all changed late last year when the rules were considerably simplified and getting a .ca address became about as easy as being allowed to place a .com at the end of your URL.

There are now about 90 registrars to take your .ca registration and registrations are growing daily.

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In Canada, **Demco** -- who had already shown himself to be selfless in his dedication to the Internet cause -- didn't try to keep a stranglehold on registration when it became commercialized. Instead, he opted to take his chances with new competition on the scene.

Demco handed control of the registry over to CIRA, the Canadian Internet Registration Authority, a not-for-profit organization with the mandate to operate Canada's .ca top-level domain.

Demco is one of the founding board members of CIRA and he running again in this June's elections.

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There are more than 200,000 .ca addresses on the Web, a drop in the bucket compared to the 20-million-plus .coms.

(Oh, and sorry, Fred, we checked-somebody already took fred.ca although when we last looked, thefred.ca was available).

According to CIRA, about 5,000 new dot-ca domain names are registered each week.

``This is brand new, it has been happening just since December," said Smith. ``Canadians don't get it yet, they don't understand the potential of what's available to them.

``We want people to understand the brand potential of .ca," said Smith, adding that most of the Fortune 500 companies have .ca addresses registered with webnames.

webnames.ca grew out of the volunteer work of **Demco** and others at UBC and so far, their confidence in competing in an open marketplace is paying off. The company expects to earn about \$4 to \$5 million in revenues this year and now has 15 people working for it.

The cost of registering for your own domain name varies with the company offering the service. We've seen .com registrations as low as \$15US a pop and up. At webnames, a one year registration will set you back \$50 plus GST.

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Demco, already an Internet hall of fame, recently won Canarie Iway's community service award. However, while he accepts the plaudits gracefully, it's clear his passion remains in seeing the Internet grow and develop.

"I'm interested in seeing good commercial registrars offer service to the public," he said. "And it's fun.

"I really enjoy learning new things."

gshaw@pacpress.southam.ca.

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DOMAINS AND NAMES ON THE INTERNET

- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

www.icann.org

A non-profit corporation formed to assume responsibility for the Internet protocol address system, including functions like domain name system management. This is the way Internet leaders grapple with administering a global network that doesn't fall into any single jurisdiction.

- ICANN accredited registrars

www.icann.org/registrars/accredited-list.html

A list of companies that can handle your registration for such domains as .com, .org, .edu, etc.

- The Canadian Internet Registration Authority

www.cira.ca

A not-for-profit organization that operates the .ca top-level domain. CIRA became the official .ca registry on Dec. 1, 2000.

Domain names

These are names that correspond to IP (Internet Protocol) numbers and they are the addresses of the Internet. An Internet domain name system (DNS) includes a directory that is organized in a hierarchy.

Once you register a domain name, the information about the registration is made available publicly on a Whois site -- a site where you can punch in, for example, [.southam.ca](http://www.whois.southam.ca) and find out details of its registration.

The domain name at the end of Web site and e-mail addresses. It makes finding sites on the Net easier than if we had to remember a long string of IP numbers for every site we wanted to visit.

Who needs a domain name?

It may be as simple as wanting an e-mail address that will follow you around no matter what Internet Service Provider you're using or what company e-mail address you have. Individuals can register their own name -- for example [whatsitfamily](mailto:whatsitfamily@whatsitfamily.ca) (although it's a bit late for that one). Then your e-mail address could be john@whatsitfamily.ca and it could follow you wherever you go.

For companies, non-profit organization, government bodies and many other entities, a Web address today has come to be expected.

If you're running a company and you want people to be able to find your Web site, it's far better to have it identified by its own name, followed by .ca, rather than a complicated string of names ending with an ISP's address.

Illustration:

- Color Photo: Ward Perrin, Vancouver Sun / Draped in the Canadian flag, John **Demco** kids around with Matthew Lane (left), Stephen Smith and Cybele Negris of his new domain name company, webnames.ca

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Name: JOHN **DEMCO**

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