Canadian registrars making money with .mobi

The frontier of the World Wide Web expanded in September with the public launch of a domain geared to viewing on mobile devices. Far from the dot-com gold rush mentality of a decade ago, however, registration is largely happening at a more measured – but still respectable – pace.

"Definitely it was pretty quick uptake," says Cybele Negris, co-founder and COO of **Webnames.ca**, a Vancouver-based Internet registrar which signs up clients for a number of top-level domains including the two-month-old .mobi domain for mobile devices.

With an impressive group of backers including **Ericsson**, **Google**, **Microsoft** and **Nokia**, the .mobi domain was perhaps born with something of a silver spoon in its mouth. After becoming generally available on September 27, global registrations for the domain hit 200,000 within a month.

Negris says that while the .ca domain still accounts for the majority of Webnames.ca's business – 55% of total sales last month – .mobi now accounts for 21% of the firm's domains sold, putting it solidly in second place. By comparison, the .com domain accounted for 18% of domain sales.

To date, Negris says many of the early buyers of .mobi domains have been corporations looking to protect their intellectual property in this new frontier, while others have been "domainers": investors who get in early and build a portfolio of domains they believe have potential for resale in the future. One of the latter was Florida's Rick Schwartz, who paid US$200,000 for the flowers.mobi domain at a conference in October.

Richard Schreier, CEO of Ottawa-based registrar **Pool.com**, says that while there likely aren't many other .mobi domains that will carry that kind of price tag, "I think it at least demonstrates that there are buyers or investors who expect the [.mobi top-level domain] to be successful in the future."

Like Negris, Schreier says Pool.com has been doing a brisk trade in .mobi registrations since registration opened. "We had originally more than 10,000 unique back-orders for .mobi domains from 58 countries around the world," he says.

The new domain isn't without its detractors, however: in May 2004, no less a high-profile Internet personality than Tim Berners-Lee urged the **Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers** (ICANN), the global non-profit agency overseeing the Internet domain registration system, not to create the .mobi domain. As director of the **World Wide Web Consortium** (W3C) and acknowledged inventor of the Web, Berners-Lee garnered considerable support for his objections that the .mobi domain would lead to further fragmentation and commercialization of the Web – and that registrars' fortunes would grow as a result.

It's an argument Negris has heard before. To the critics, the .mobi domain is "just a marketing ploy for the registries and for ICANN to get more dollars from other people's pockets," she says.

Negris acknowledges some of the criticisms made by others – namely, that WAP browsers can access a .com page just as easily – but points out that the .mobi top-level domain also includes a set of standards, including the use of XHTML for site design. That means a .mobi-optimized site will still load faster on mobile devices, something that's important in Canada with a dearth of the all-you-can-eat mobile data packages that are so popular in the US, Europe and the Pacific Rim.

And though it might seem that .mobi, at four letters, might be more cumbersome than three-letter domain extensions to type on the often-tiny keypads of mobile device, Schreier notes that most mobile devices can be set up to automatically fill out the ".mobi" at the end of a URL on behalf of the user. "The one really strong factor is the support from the manufacturers of mobile devices who promise some level of integration with .mobi," he says. With that support, .mobi's future may be all but assured.

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Ad-supported TV/Web business grows

Last month saw some major announcements from the growing number of Canadian marketers looking to harness the convergence of television and the Web. Toronto-based marketing agency **Savers Plus International Inc.** inked a deal to access the content of Beverly Hills CA's **No Good TV** (NGTV), a subversive, ad-supported digital media network aimed at the 18-34 demographic. NGTV plans to launch as a broadband video site this month, with a subscription video-on-demand offering becoming available to US cable and satellite networks sometime next year. Savers Plus International's Eye Rock ad-supported TV network, which also plans to launch sometime this month, will feature material such as ex-Baywatch beauty Carmen Electra's *Naked Women's Wrestling League* and a news magazine hosted by former Playboy model Yvette Lopez in addition to NGTV's content.

Meanwhile, another Toronto e-marketing firm, **BlueRush.TV Inc.**, has received an infusion of investment from a publicly traded capital pool company. BlueRush.TV investors – led by company founder and president Laurence Lubin and VP and director Len Smofsky – will together sell all the issued and outstanding shares of their firm to **Soyers Capital Ltd.** in exchange for a total of 20,000,000 common shares of Soyers Capital, which is a Tier 2 company listed on the TSX Venture Exchange. After the transaction is completed, Soyers Capital plans to apply for a listing as a technology firm on the main TSX Venture Exchange. Lubin and Smofsky will also sit on the board of directors at Soyers Capital after the deal is concluded. Referring to itself as an "on-demand marketing" firm, BlueRush.TV offers rich-media marketing solutions, including dedicated on-demand broadband video channels, for a variety of sectors and businesses.

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