WSWG Technical Survey Requirements Meeting
TRANSCRIPTION
Friday 01 June 2012 at 13:00 UTC

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Nathalie Peregrine: So good morning, good afternoon, good evening everybody. This is the Whois Working Group Technical Survey Requirements Webinar on the 1st of June.

We have got audio streaming available in the Adobe Connect room but in order to ask a question please join the audio bridge. Please let me know, indeed, (unintelligible) if you need connection details.

Please also remember to mute your lines and speakers are not speaking to avoid any background noise. Thank you very much and over to you, Don.

Don Blumenthal: Appreciate it, Nathalie. I'm just looking at the chat room here see - see some - it's been a weird morning, sorry folks - some familiar names. In any event I'm Don Blumenthal just to clarify with the Public Interest Registry and have been working on Whois issues since the late 90s when I was with the Federal Trade Commission and we were wrestling with improving securing accuracy and availability of Whois records. And it's nice to know 13 years later that I'm still dealing with familiar issues; it makes my life a lot easier in some ways.

Really briefly though I'm on the Whois Survey Working Group and we were chartered about a year ago to come up with a survey to examine Whois requirements. Our charter drifted a bit over time so now we're ready to issue the survey which is out there, as you know.

Oh, yes, I'm sorry, I forgot that I've got control of the slides. Thanks, Berry.

We've been at it for a while now. It's been a cross - and that's a dangerous term to use in ICANN lexicon - it's been a broad-based effort. This is a GNSO-backed project but we have had representatives from the ALAC - or at least one. We have had representatives from a broad range of GNSO constituencies, IPC, the intellectual property folks, the business folks, registrars; I'm with the registries.

No, not quite ready there. And we've come up with a set of questions that we think covers a good solid range of technical requirements but also more broader service requirements; what should be possible within the Whois system.

Oh good. That's kind of my broad overview. Let me step back a little bit. As you can see here in 2009 the GNSO council asked the policy staff to come up with a set of potential technical requirements for Whois service. Now that was generally to accomplish two things; it was to address known problems in the current service as I said.

And while Whois accuracy and availability isn't necessarily part of the types of things we address there have been deficiencies in the Whois service, I think it's fair to say, since the Internet went commercial. And the old system was just - was being used for just more than just contacting another network administrator to try to figure out why there was a problem online.

Beyond that, though, there have been a number of policy initiatives over time; some of them in the past; some that are still ongoing. So the need - there was a need to look at technical requirements that might address...

((Crosstalk))

Don Blumenthal: Getting some background noise there. Newcomers could put yourself on mute. Thanks. But also address just evolving needs as they've been identified over time and into the future.

The staff issued its report in July of 2010 but then in 2011 the Council set our working group up to develop a survey to really try to estimate the level of consensus, or lack of consensus obviously, on what requirements there are out there in the GNSO community and kind of a semi - no that's the wrong term - within the GNSO community but to the extent that we separate out ALAC as part within that group also.

I think the title of this slide is very well put. It's got one critical word in there, important. We think it's - we really believe that it's something different from what's gone before. I know within the ICANN community there's sometimes a thought of oh no not another Whois effort. I'm on a number of working groups or maybe that's - that's too broad a term but I've been on a number of projects involving Whois and I've only been with PIR for about two years now.

This is - this really is different. It's going to look at the community's view of what requirements are. It's not - it's really quite broadly focused. In one sense it covers a number of areas but it's also quite narrowly focused in the sense that the questions get into the details of Whois operations.

The details of business operations and how they might use Whois and how they might want to use Whois; the details of say the intellectual property community's view of what Whois can offer, of what other groups might want

to do with Whois in terms of limiting the ability to - for different groups to get access to data. It's really quite broad-ranged.

And what's important it gives the community a chance to get involved in the debate because no small group whether it's, no, I should say no small group can really have a sense of what the - of the broad set of interests that are out there in the ICANN community or in the more general community; people use Whois who don't have a clue what ICANN is if they've ever heard the acronym.

But it lets everybody get involved - everybody to submit their opinions and everybody a chance to help guide efforts as they go along. You know, obviously this isn't going to be used - whatever the results are, whatever the survey analysis is won't be used in a vacuum. Whatever our analysis is at the end, and that is one change - this group will be handling the analysis - just sitting and identifying what the requirements are doesn't accomplish anything.

This information will be used outside just our small (here), our small mandate. You know, it could be useful for the ongoing IETF protocol efforts, the WEIRDS group. That's the acronym if anybody's aware of it. I won't even take a shot at remembering what WEIRDS stands for.

But it's just an assistive tool for lack of a better term. It's just an inventory of what the community sees as - would be useful as Whois goes along. What capabilities would be useful but no more than that. It's a technical inventory.

What should be there, what actually is there down the line is going to come down to be a policy issue. It's going to come down to be an operational issue. So this fundamentally is a neutral effort, an assistive effort that hopefully will have much broader use once we're finished.

Now we've finished our initial draft - as you know or you wouldn't be here - that refers to the initial report from - excuse me - that refers to the initial

report. We've narrowed things down or divided things, that's a better way to put it, into 13 requirements with 60 - over 60 questions.

We opened the comment session just a few days ago and thought that these Webinars would be useful for people who want to get clarification before diving into the survey itself to get a handle up front on what's going on and ask questions that might help guide answers or clarify what we're doing or whatever else.

Now the opening slide here is the survey tool. It'll be obviously much more readable if you pull the survey up itself or potentially much more readable if you download the slides later. Berry Cobb, from ICANN staff, and I talked about at least trying to - launching the survey to see if it's usable and to give you a live view - no the survey is usable - to see if the live view would be usable.

So, Berry, if you could just do that and we'll see if it - thank you - provides anything. Keep in mind that the survey should come up a lot more quickly live. The little circle there was just one of those ongoing quirks of Adobe Connect.

Yeah, I'm not sure that is - really gives - I'm not sure that gives folks a better idea specifically but that's it live. It has the pull down lists. So I'm going to stop talking and let Berry do this demonstration of the different features.

Okay. As you can see we have a mix of just checkmarks, pull down boxes but also give you the opportunity to give more freeform comments - so a mix of possible tools. You know, they click through fairly easily. There are a lot of questions but doesn't necessarily have to take hours and hours to get through.

We did automate it as much as possible. I want to give credit where it's due; Wilson Abigaba, who's part of the working group, did a wonderful job of

taking our - taking the questions and putting them into a nice useable survey tool. Yeah, that's the one other kind of ranking type question.

Then again as Berry just showed off on the right the jump around the links rather - I haven't had coffee this morning, I apologize if I'm a little unfocused.

Why don't we move on back to the substance? But that's just going to give you a feel for what'll be going on as you click through. So briefly I'm just going to go over the sections of the survey. After that I'll be glad to take questions or add more explanation, whatever.

We'll start off with just a profile, something basic; nothing that's going to run afoul of anybody's privacy laws. That is somebody who teaches privacy law at the University of Michigan. It's just to give us an idea of what communities, what interest groups, are providing different types of input. That information is always helpful in gauging the responses.

The first section deals with just the basic issue of providing an accessible list of domain names, a list of domain names that is (parsable), truly usable basically. It's worthless to just throw up a whole bunch of information without figuring ways to make it accessible and usable.

But in order to accomplish if it's usable we've got to look at the narrower thesis. We have a number of questions that look at definitions of a query structure. We look - we want to look at a standard structure for Whois responses, some kind of baseline for what should be there when queries are submitted.

Well to add to my entertainment my mouse battery is dying. That explains the jiggling there.

One interesting ongoing problem on the Net in general is trying to figure out what's happened when something doesn't work. So we are - we have

questions related to what should a user get back if something doesn't work; have a set of error messages and some kind of standard set of error conditions that'll generate messages.

We have questions in there for parameters for submitting Whois queries. What should be in structured data models, what should be in a structured data model for the information. We have a number of questions that address what's really a very important issue in ICANN these days; the whole notion of internationalized registration data. But not saying other issues aren't important but this one is particularly topical given some ongoing efforts.

For a long time there have been discussions of baseline access to data which led to the subsections under Question 8 - or Section 8 rather. Coming up with an authentication framework and once you authenticate you authorize, which is again straight out of the classroom, and then coming up with a framework and a baseline set of metrics for implementing 8.2 and 8.3 and for other uses also.

Then we also are going to look at a question that's - is floating in other circumstances now - some questions just - the extent to which the entire system should be drifting to a thick Whois; all registries or at least all GNSO registries should be going to a thick Whois.

Finally the - we raise some issues concerning the idea of a WhoWas which obviously has a lot of uses for business, law enforcement, consumers even who use Whois for consumer protection purposes.

And then finally some more general questions involving Whois and Whois databases run by registrars or registries. We are - well let me just - yes, we are talking here about the Domain Name System so we're not talking about the number system but there is some crossover. And I think down the line there may be lessons for both sides to learn from the other as efforts continue.

Once everybody submits their comments we'll review them obviously. Some cynics - no we really will review them. Create a proposed final draft, release the survey for 30 days, analyze the results and then submit to the GNSO Council.

These links at the bottom will take you to the survey itself and also to the Whois Survey Working Group - the DT is our old name - drafting team - so that you can follow along and as things move.

I appreciate it. Again apologize for a little bit of stumbling here, number one, some glitches this morning, number two, late night flight through storms and, number three, I've been on these before but it's the first time I've conducted one. And I think we have a typo in that URL there unless there's a country code TLD that I'm not aware of. The appendix is something different.

With that I'm glad to take your questions. Just raise your hands in the - excuse me - in the Adobe tool or - okay, Sarmad - and you can submit either...

Sarmad Hussein: Yes.

Don Blumenthal: ...in the chat or verbally; either is fine with me.

Sarmad Hussein: Yeah, so I guess one question was concerning privacy and proxy services and whether you would be - whether Whois information would perhaps indicate whether the data is being shared or hidden through a proxy or a privacy service - through a (flag) or something within the Whois data?

Don Blumenthal: That could be a possible data element, sure. That would be - that would be subsumed under the issue of the data elements - data structure. Yeah, that's an issue that a number of us have had long-time experience with and is, you

know, is important to a lot of us and certainly, you know, would be on the table as a possibility.

Oh Thomas.

Sarmad Hussein: Yeah.

Thomas Rickert: First of all, Don, thanks for the presentation. I have to admit I haven't read or gone through the questionnaire on the Website that you have linked to. But I was wondering whether you also ask people for their expectations when they currently use Whois? You said that you ask about the background of people who are using Whois but also are you asking them what their expectations are or what exactly they need it for?

Don Blumenthal: Interesting question. I'm not sure that we - well let me answer the reverse of what I was about to. I think a lot of that could be analyzed from survey responses but I'm not sure we ask it specifically. Berry, if I can ask for some help here?

Berry Cobb: Hi, Don. Yes, this is Berry. I think for the most part the goal of the working group was to try to make this survey strictly technical requirements focused. When we started getting into expectations and some of those other types of questions we start to fall into the policy side and it's definitely a mandate in our charter that we distinguish between the two and that we only focus on the technical aspects.

Don Blumenthal: Yeah, that was generally my memory but there were some earlier discussions and, I apologize, I'd lost track a little bit of where we wound up. And, yes, I did go through the survey but off the top didn't remember. Certainly in analysis we'll look at sets of answers and what they might indicate in terms of the different types of expectations of the different communities.

But let us take that under advisement as a possible addition because it might help drive the final recommendations. Good idea.

Thomas Rickert: I mean, - this is Thomas again. Don and Berry, thanks so much for answering the question and certainly if your chartered with asking for the technical requirements or defining those then that's your mandate and, you know, you shouldn't go beyond that within this group. But nonetheless I think that, you know, it's at least worthwhile considering what we're ultimately - or what you are ultimately doing this exercise for.

If it turned out just theoretically that the vast majority of people are using Whois for purposes of enforcing legal positions or to catch criminals then I think, you know, the requirements can be as good as comprehensive as they can be but, you know, then you can't really come up with the proper results without also looking at the Whois accuracy and when talking about Whois I'm asking myself, you know, are we - do we need it at all.

So I think I wouldn't go as far as asking the question, you know, would you like to have the Whois service continued? You know, because unless you actually do an authentication for each and every domain registration, you know, by improving Whois we might give raise to expectations that Whois never can fulfill. And maybe we would need to look at other tools to appropriately help law enforcement to catch criminals which is what they should do. Thanks for listening.

((Crosstalk))

Thomas Rickert: ...off topic.

Don Blumenthal: Please submit that. And, you know, in general to everybody please do submit your thoughts into the comment - the formal comments. But interesting concepts there, appreciate it. Thanks.

Anybody else? Any other questions from the same people? Okay well I guess we can wrap things up then. I really, really appreciate your participation. We made a conscious effort early on, as a matter of fact, I don't know if I have a formal title but my vice chair role was specifically to deal with outreach so it's gratifying to have some folks on the call and participating.

Again please submit your comments through the formal process. Urge anybody that you can think of whose input you think would be useful to participate. We really are trying to get as broad a sense of the community as we can. And we'll be doing this again at four o'clock if you know of anybody who might be interested - four o'clock Eastern - US Eastern Time. I think it's UTC -4. Anybody who might be interested but either didn't know about the nine o'clock session or wasn't able to make it.

Thanks again.

Thomas Rickert: Thank you. Bye-bye, everybody.

Don Blumenthal: So long.

Berry Cobb: Thank you, everybody. Nathalie, you can terminate the recordings please.

Nathalie Peregrine: Of course. (Tim), could you please stop the recordings? Thank you.

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