

Domain Name Administration Tasks

As the proud (or not so proud) owner of your domain name, there are a number of administrative tasks you may wish/need to perform relating to the maintenance and use of your name.

NOTE: Since all Registrars have slightly different procedures and interfaces for carrying out administrative tasks on the domain names you own, the focus of this section is on helping you to understand WHAT you can do - for specifics on the HOW, you'll need to see the support section of your Registrar's site.

A) Supplying / Changing DNS server information

Before a domain name can be used for a website, information needs to be supplied explaining how to link the domain name with the IP address of the website. The Domain Name Servers take care of this linking or association process. They essentially translate your domain name from a string of text into a series of numbers that a computer can understand.

Every time you change IP address you need to change the DNS information for your domain name. This happens when you change your web hosting provider, but there can be other cases in which you need to change IP address.

Each domain name generally has 2 DNS servers associated with it, the Primary and Secondary DNS servers. Sometimes, additional Secondary servers can also be associated with a domain name for additional reliability. When a domain lookup is carried out, the Primary DNS server is consulted first with the Secondary server or servers following.

A DNS entry will look something like this:

Primary DNS: ns.nameserver.com
Secondary DNS: ns2.nameserver.com

Your web hosting company will provide you with the exact format for the DNS entries appropriate to the services it offers. Armed with these DNS entries, you can then log in through your Registrar's control panel and update the DNS settings for your domain name.

You can check that your DNS changes have been reflected in your domain name record using a Whois lookup tool. After 24 hours or so, you should see the new DNS entry at the bottom of your domain name's whois record.

It's important to remember that DNS settings take TIME to propagate whenever you make a change. The changes you make are reflected at the Root Server level either once or twice daily (depending on the Registrar) and then they gradually "fan out" across the Internet (the process is automatic!)

In other words, even though you change the DNS on a domain name, it can take at least 48 hours and in some cases as long as 72 hours or more before EVERYONE on the Internet gets to see the new DNS record associated with your domain name (and hence find the site it is linked to) This means that if you change web hosts and change your DNS settings at the same time, you will see your traffic drop almost to zero for the first 24 hours, then recover to about 50-60% of its normal level after 48 hours before gradually coming back to normal over the following days.

This propagation delay is generally out of your Registrar's hands - it's essentially a function of the DNS system itself - so angry emails to tech support won't help. The only cure for DNS resolution problems once you've made a change (as long as you're sure the change has been recorded by your Registrar) is to wait until the change filters through to all corners of the Internet.

B) Changing Technical or Billing contacts

You may wish to change the Technical or Billing contacts associated with a domain name. The Technical contact is usually the person who will receive copies of email notifications issued to document changes to your domain name record, such as a change of DNS servers or a change to the contact details (this varies

slightly from Registrar to Registrar). The Billing contact is the person or entity to which the domain name renewal invoice will go.

Most Registrars will let you change this information fairly readily through their domain name control panel - after all, Technical and Billing contacts do not exert control over a domain name. Control rests with the Admin contact.

C) Changing Admin contact

The Admin contact is the person/entity entrusted with the ability to make significant changes to a domain name such as transferring ownership of that domain name to a different party. As such, many Registrars implement additional security steps when processing Admin contact change requests. These may range from requiring a response to a confirmation email to requiring a fax on company header or an official change instruction notarized by a lawyer.

If your Registrar has particularly complex rules surrounding making changes in the Admin contact record, you may find it simpler to move the domain name to a different Registrar, making the required changes during the transfer.

D) Deleting a domain name registration

Although this administrative operation is rarely required, there may be circumstances in which you wish to delete a domain name registration entirely.

Domain name registration deletions are ALWAYS irreversible - once you give the final instruction to proceed with the deletion, the domain name WILL NO LONGER BE YOURS!

It's also worth noting that you cannot get a refund for the remaining term of a domain name registration when you delete a domain name - that money is lost (essentially a penalty you must pay for deleting your domain name early)

Since domain name deletions are so rarely required (and so FINAL), your Registrar may not have an automated process in place to handle them. In that case, you will have to contact their support department with your deletion request. You may have to fill out paperwork or sign a waiver document releasing them from responsibility once your name has been deleted.

NOTE: Domain name deletions can take weeks or months to process. If you REALLY need a domain name deleted urgently, you may have to pay an additional fee to expedite the deletion - check with your Registrar for details.

What happens to your domain name when it is deleted will depend on the Registrar. Some will release it into the pool of available domain names almost immediately. Others may hoard it for weeks or months before finally making it available for others to re-register.

E) Renewing a domain name registration

When you purchase a domain name, what you're actually purchasing is a series of rights associated with a name, for a finite and defined period of time (typically one or two years). You'll be able to use the domain name for a web site, simply keep it in reserve for future use, and transfer it or control over it to a 3rd party (i.e. sell or lease the domain name).

Once the subscription to that domain name runs out, you either have to pay a renewal fee or relinquish control over the domain name (at which point ANYONE is free to re-register it!)

Most registrars will send you an EMAIL invoice shortly before it is time to pay the renewal fee. Some kindly jog your memory by sending you a whole series of reminders leading up to the final warning that you have to pay or lose the domain name.

Some registrars will let you pay even after the official renewal date has come and gone, during an additional "grace period". Since this varies from Registrar to Registrar and is not an official practice, you're much

better off paying to renew your domain name well before it expires. The tools in the Useful Software section of this site can help you keep track of when domain names are due up for renewal.

Many registrars deal with their customers entirely electronically, to the point that you'll never receive any paper documentation from them.

You must therefore ensure that the email addresses associated with your domain name are reachable AT ALL TIMES since that's generally the only way you'll receive a renewal invoice. It's no good complaining to your Registrar if you lose a domain name because you did not receive an invoice (well, you can try but you generally won't get anywhere) since their Terms of Service usually include a provision requiring functional email contacts.

This information is part of:

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