



Highlights of [GAO-06-165](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Courts, the Internet, and Intellectual Property, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

Individuals or organizations seeking to register the names of their Web sites may provide inaccurate contact information to registrars in order to hide their identities or to prevent members of the public from contacting them. Contact information is made publicly available on the Internet through a service known as Whois. Data accuracy in the Whois service can help law enforcement officials to investigate intellectual property misuse and online fraud, or identify the source of spam e-mail, and can help Internet operators to resolve technical network issues.

GAO was asked, among other things, to (1) determine the prevalence of patently false or incomplete contact data in the Whois service for the .com, .org, and .net domains; (2) determine the extent to which patently false data are corrected within 1 month of being reported to ICANN; and (3) describe steps the Department of Commerce (Commerce) and ICANN have taken to ensure the accuracy of contact data in the Whois database.

## INTERNET MANAGEMENT

# Prevalence of False Contact Information for Registered Domain Names

### What GAO Found

Based on test results, GAO estimates that 2.31 million domain names (5.14 percent) have been registered with patently false data—data that appeared obviously and intentionally false without verification against any reference data—in one or more of the required contact information fields. GAO also found that 1.64 million (3.65 percent) have been registered with incomplete data in one or more of the required fields. In total, GAO estimates that 3.89 million domain names (8.65 percent) had at least one instance of patently false or incomplete data in the required Whois contact information fields. The table below shows the estimated number of instances of patently false data for each of the three types of contact information within each generic top-level domain.

Of the 45 error reports that GAO submitted to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) for further investigation—one for each domain name with patently false contact data that GAO found in a random sample of 900—11 domain name holders provided updated contact information that was not patently false within 30 days after GAO submitted the error reports to ICANN. One domain name, which had been pending deletion before submission to ICANN, was terminated after GAO submitted the error report. The remaining 33 were not corrected.

Commerce and ICANN have taken steps to ensure the accuracy of contact data in the Whois database. In addition to implementing a Registrar Accreditation Agreement that requires registrars to investigate and correct any reported inaccuracies in the contact information, they have amended their memorandum of understanding to require ICANN to continue assessing the operation of the Whois service and to implement measures to secure improved accuracy of data.

Commerce and ICANN officials generally agreed with a draft of this report.

**Prevalence of Patently False Contact Information** (in millions; percentages in parentheses)

Data	Registrant			Administrative contact			Technical contact		
	.COM	.ORG	.NET	.COM	.ORG	.NET	.COM	.ORG	.NET
Not patently false	33.13 (92.65)	3.29 (93.69)	5.34 (94.26)	31.90 (89.20)	3.15 (89.77)	5.21 (91.88)	32.18 (89.98)	3.18 (90.63)	5.29 (93.37)
Patently false	1.18 (3.30)	0.10 (2.97)	0.05 (0.89)	1.86 (5.20)	0.22 (6.25)	0.18 (3.13)	1.50 (4.18)	0.19 (5.51)	0.16 (2.76)
Incomplete	0.27 (0.76)	0.07 (2.09)	0.17 (2.98)	0.83 (2.31)	0.11 (3.09)	0.18 (3.13)	0.91 (2.54)	0.10 (2.97)	0.11 (2.01)
Unable to access Whois data	1.18 (3.30)	0.04 (1.25)	0.11 (1.86)	1.18 (3.30)	0.04 (1.25)	0.13 (2.24)	1.18 (3.30)	0.04 (1.25)	0.13 (2.24)

Source: GAO analysis of test results.

Note: Margin of error is ±5 percent or less at the 95 percent confidence level. Some domain names contained both patently false and incomplete information and so percentages do not add up to 100.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-165](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-165).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Linda Koontz, 202-512-6250, koontzl@gao.gov, or Keith Rhodes, 202-512-6412, rhodesk@gao.gov.