

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

What's Dot and What's Not: Domain Name Registration Scams

What's in a name? Plenty, if you want to register a website. A new scam is targeting would-be website owners by offering the opportunity to pre-register new top level domain names. Domain names, such as "ftc.gov," are the unique terms that enable Internet users to locate a specific website. The top level domain is the final extension, such as ".com" or ".org."

According to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, scam artists are taking advantage of the news that the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) has made new top level domains available to the public. The new top level domains are .aero, .biz, .coop, .info, .museum, .name, and .pro.

The FTC says consumers are getting fax and email solicitations that offer a chance at a new top level domain name, for a fee, as soon as it becomes available. Some registration services are guaranteeing new top level domain names or promising preferential treatment in the registration process. But, the agency cautions, these offers may be misleading.

The FTC advises consumers to protect themselves by:

1. Avoiding any domain name pre-registration service that guarantees particular top level domain names or preferential treatment in the assignment of new top level domain names.
2. Avoiding doing business with people who send unsolicited faxes — regardless of the offer. Unsolicited faxes are illegal.
3. Staying on top of the news about top level domain names at the ICANN website, www.icann.org.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint, or to get free information on any of 150 consumer topics, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the online complaint form. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies worldwide.



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