

# Update report on GNSO-requested WHOIS studies

Liz Gasster, Senior Policy Counselor

June 2010



# Goals of WHOIS studies



- WHOIS policy has been debated for many years
- Many competing interests with valid viewpoints
- GNSO Council hopes that study data will provide an objective, factual basis for future policy making
- Council identified several WHOIS study areas to test hypotheses that reflect key policy concerns
- Council asked staff to determine costs and feasibility of conducting one or more of those studies

# GNSO Council-requested WHOIS studies - Cross reference to original study numbers

Study Area/Topic	Specific studies defined (work in progress)	Current status	Other Information
1. WHOIS Misuse Studies  Extent to which publicly displayed WHOIS data is misused	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Experimental: register test domains and measure harmful messages resulting from misuse</li> <li>2. Descriptive: study misuse incidents reported by registrants, researchers/ law enforcement</li> </ol>	RFP approach. 3 responses received. Staff analysis complete to the GNSO Council on 23 March 2010. Cost: 150,000 Time: 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Study can count and categorize harmful acts attributed to misuse and show data was probably not obtained from other sources</li> <li>▪ Some acts might be difficult to count</li> <li>▪ Difficult to tie WHOIS queries to harmful acts, which makes it difficult to prove that reductions in misuse were caused by specific anti-harvesting measures</li> <li>▪ Difficult to assess whether misuse is “significant”</li> </ul>
2. WHOIS Registrant Identification Study	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gather info about how business/commercial domain registrants are identified.</li> <li>2. Correlate identification with use of proxy/privacy services.</li> </ol>	5 responses received to RFP. Staff analysis complete on 23 March 2010. Cost: 150,000 Time: 1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Will classify ownership and purpose of what appear to be commercial domains without clear registrant information, and measure how many of those domains were registered using a Proxy/Privacy service</li> <li>▪ Might provide insight on why some registrants are not clearly identified</li> <li>▪ Use of P/P services by businesses</li> </ul>
3. WHOIS Proxy and Privacy “Abuse” Study	Compare sample of P/P-registered domains associated with abuse with the overall frequency of P/P registrations	RFP was released on 18 May, responses are due by 20 July.	See: <a href="http://www.icann.org/en/announcements/announcement-2-18may10-en.htm">http://www.icann.org/en/announcements/announcement-2-18may10-en.htm</a>
4. WHOIS Proxy and Privacy “Reveal” study	Analyze relay and reveal requests sent for Proxy and Privacy-registered domains to measure associated delays and failures	RFP Terms of Reference are under development. Staff hopes to release RFP by end of July.	

Note: Study areas 1-5 reflect all the studies initially requested by the GNSO Council 4 March, 2009. Study area 6 was requested by the Council 7 May, 2009.

# 1. WHOIS Misuse Studies

Two possible studies to assess whether public WHOIS significantly increases harmful acts and impact of anti-harvesting measures.

1. One would survey registrants, registrars, research and law enforcement orgs about past acts.

2. Another would measure variety of acts aimed at WHOIS published vs. unpublished test addresses.

Used RFP approach, 3 responses

ToR: <http://gnso.icann.org/issues/whois/tor-whois-misuse-studies-25sep09-en.pdf>

# Analysis - Misuse studies

- Estimated cost -- \$150,000
- Roughly 12 months to complete
- Study can count and categorize variety of harmful acts attributed to WHOIS misuse and show that data was probably not obtained from other sources
- Some acts may be too difficult to measure
- Cannot tie WHOIS queries directly to acts, which makes it difficult to prove that reductions in misuse were caused by specific anti-harvesting measures
- May be difficult to assess whether measured misuse is “significant”

## 2. Registrant Identification Study



- How do registrants identify themselves in WHOIS?
- To what extent are domains registered by businesses or used for commercial purposes:
  - 1) Not clearly identified as such in WHOIS; and
  - 2) Related to use of privacy and proxy services?
- Also used RFP approach, 5 responses received
- ToR: <http://gnso.icann.org/issues/whois/tor-whois-registrant-identification-studies-23oct09-en.pdf>

# Analysis - Registrant ID Study

- Estimated cost -- \$150,000
- 6-12 months to complete
- Researchers can classify ownership and purpose of what appear to be commercial domains without clear registrant information, and can also measure how many were registered using a Proxy or Privacy service
- Study seems tractable, though some # of domains will be hard to classify
- Several ways results might be useful:
  - Insight on why some registrants are not clearly identified
  - Frequency of P/P service use by businesses

# 3. Proxy and Privacy Abuse Study



- Would study the relationship between domains associated with illegal/harmful Internet acts and P/P abuse to obscure perpetrator identity, if any
- Would study broad sample of domains associated with many kinds of acts and compare to the overall frequency of P/P registrations
- RFP posted 18 April, responses due 20 July



# 4. Proxy/Privacy Services “Reveal” Study



- Study would help measure the delay incurred when communication “relay” and identity “reveal” requests are made for Proxy and Privacy service-registered domain names
- Draft RFP delayed - July 2010 or later
- Issues:
  - Finding complainants willing to participate
  - Relay and reveal?
  - Proxy and Privacy services?

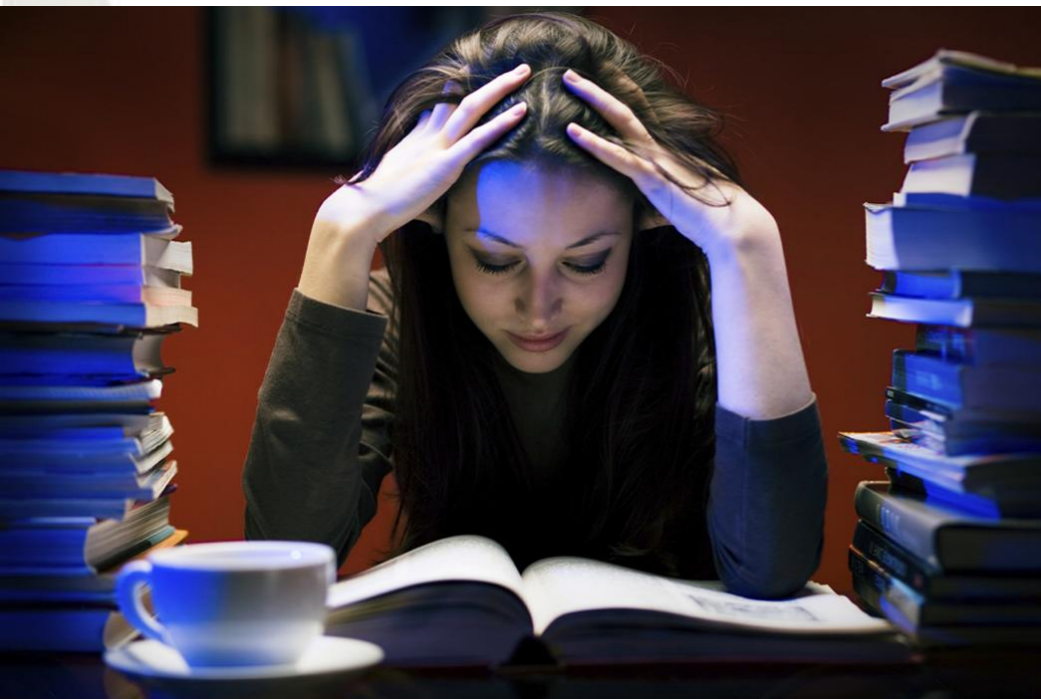
# Timeline and Next Steps



- Council discussion and decision on first two study areas
- Await responses and staff analysis on Privacy/Proxy “Abuse” RFP
- Develop RFP terms of reference on Proxy/Privacy “Reveal” studies
- Staff Contact: Liz Gasster - [policy-staff@icann.org](mailto:policy-staff@icann.org)

# Which WHOIS studies should be done?

- Which studies would best inform intractable policy questions?
- Which studies are most tractable and would be likely to produce intended information?
- What can we learn that we really need to know?



Questions?



# Thank you

