

## SMALL-BUSINESS MARKETING

# Own a domain name? Beware of these scams



BY ERIC CAWLEY

If you own a domain name, you're bound to receive a letter like the one I got recently.

The letter, from a

“domain renewal service,” alerted me to take advantage of the service now, before it’s too late.

Renew what? My domain’s “Search Engine Indexing,” so I can “maintain viability of” my “URL listings.” By renewing these “URL listings,” I would receive “annual key search requirements” for my “website to be found on the web.”

Failure to renew “may result in search engine directories failing to list your website correctly.”

All for \$147 annually.

There are a couple of problems with this letter:

1. I’ve never done business with this company.
2. I don’t own the domain name it lists.
3. The name comes up just fine in the major search engines.

4. The domain name brings up a website which says “Our New Site Is Coming Soon ...”

This is one of many scams involving website domain names. Some offer domains for a very low price, then hit you with a high renewal price a year later.

Other scams send you an official-looking invoice, requiring you to renew your domain because it will “expire soon.” In some cases, they’re right. With plenty of payment options and a self-addressed envelope, everything looks correct — except for the fact that the invoice is not

from your domain’s registrar.

Business owners sometimes fall for these letters and unknowingly transfer ownership of their domains to unscrupulous companies — a practice known as “domain slamming.” To prevent being scammed:

- Know when your domain names expire. Here’s an easy way: Go to GoDaddy.com. Scroll to the bottom and click on “WHOIS Search.” Enter your domain name and hit the “Search” button. The results will list all information publicly available regarding the domain name and its

owner. Note the “Registrar Registration Expiration Date.”

- Plug the domain’s expiration date into your calendar. Have the calendar send you an alert a few days before the expiration date.

- When in doubt, show any letters or emails regarding your domain name to your webmaster for review.

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