

Cyber Squatters Should be Shot

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Whats the deal with cybersquatters? For those of you who don't know who I mean, these are people who buy domain names and hold them, just because they believe someone will eventually want to buy them at a large profit. So, what happens when someone goes to get a domain name to use for a specific purpose, but someone else has it and is just sitting on it hoping for a payday? Basically, you're screwed.

When the Internet first started getting popular, there was a mad rush on domain name registration. People were buying up any name they could think of, so when a legitimate user came along for it, they could severely overcharge them for it and make a serious profit.

This scam worked for awhile (and still does, to some extent), but people who registered trademarks of other companies (like Burdines.com, for example), soon found themselves in lawsuits, and forced to give up those names to the rightful owners for free. Of course, it took a really big company to pave the way for this, but it is the way things are now, regardless.

Now, this new precedent has stopped squatters from taking registered trademarks, but not anything else.

Case in point. I've had a number of silly nicknames through my career, but one of the most humorous ones was "CodeMonkey". A few years ago, I was fortunate enough to purchase codemonkeystudios.com. No, I havent actually DONE anything with it yet, but I bought it with the intention of doing so.

In any case, a couple of months ago I was hit by an inspiration and went and checked on codemonkey.com. Well, I found no website at that address, so I checked the whois and found out that the domain ownership expired on March 3 of this year (thats 2 days away from this writing). Well, I was excited! I decided that if I actually got this domain name, I would dress it up as a personal site of mine, containing hobbies, code samples, pictures, and who knows what else. I also planned on changing all of my IM names and even my account name on all the forums I frequent.

Well, yesterday, 4 days before the domain expired, the owner renewed it for another 3 years. My hopes were shot. Being I was truly interested in the domain, I decided to shoot an email to the owner of the domain. In the email, I expressed my desire for the domain name, and asked if he would be interested in selling it.

I got a response from the guy late last night. The beginning of it was actually pretty rude, and said something like "just because there is no website doesnt mean it isnt being used". Now, I didnt actually SAY that in my email, but I mentioned no site being one of the reasons I was watching for it to expire.

He then went on to say "Your interest in my domain indeed confirms what I hoped, that this domain name is a valuable commodity". Valuable? I'll admit I liked it, and yes, I wanted it. But valuable?

In the last part of his email, he said that he wasn't saying he wouldn't part with it, because he would much rather have a 1999 Porsche of some specific model. He then went on to make sure that I had a valid email address to contact him back at.

So basically, this jerk cybersquatter thinks his domain name is worth the price of a 1999 Porsche. I dont know how much that Porsche is, but I can assure you it is nowhere near the couple hundred dollars the domain name was worth to me. This guy has the domain name, sitting on a shelf, and has no plans for it except to sell it. Between me and you, is this fair?

Fair or not, how could we stop it, if we wanted to? One of my co-workers said that there should be a rule that a purchased domain needs to have an operational website within a certain amount of time, or it would be considered squatting and ownership revoked.

I know that wouldnt be fair. I personally own over 20 domains. I have an exact plan for each and every one of them. When I think of a new business idea, I go domain shopping immediately to not only find a good identity, but to secure it for when I have time to complete that project. For my part-finder website, Ive owned that domain since the 1990s, but didnt actually complete a fully functional site until May of 2005. I purchased THIS domain in May of 2006, and got a small shell up 3 months later, but the site didnt actually take shape and become active until late January of 2007.

Do I consider the domain names I'm sitting on 'squatting'? No, I don't. But someone who buys domains just to resell them

at a huge profit is nothing but a con artist in my book.

What do you think? Am I as bad as the people I'm ranting about? Do I have any justification for being pissed off at these people?