Expired domain names

BEST SERVICES, TIPS AND TOOLS

David CHELLY, March 2025
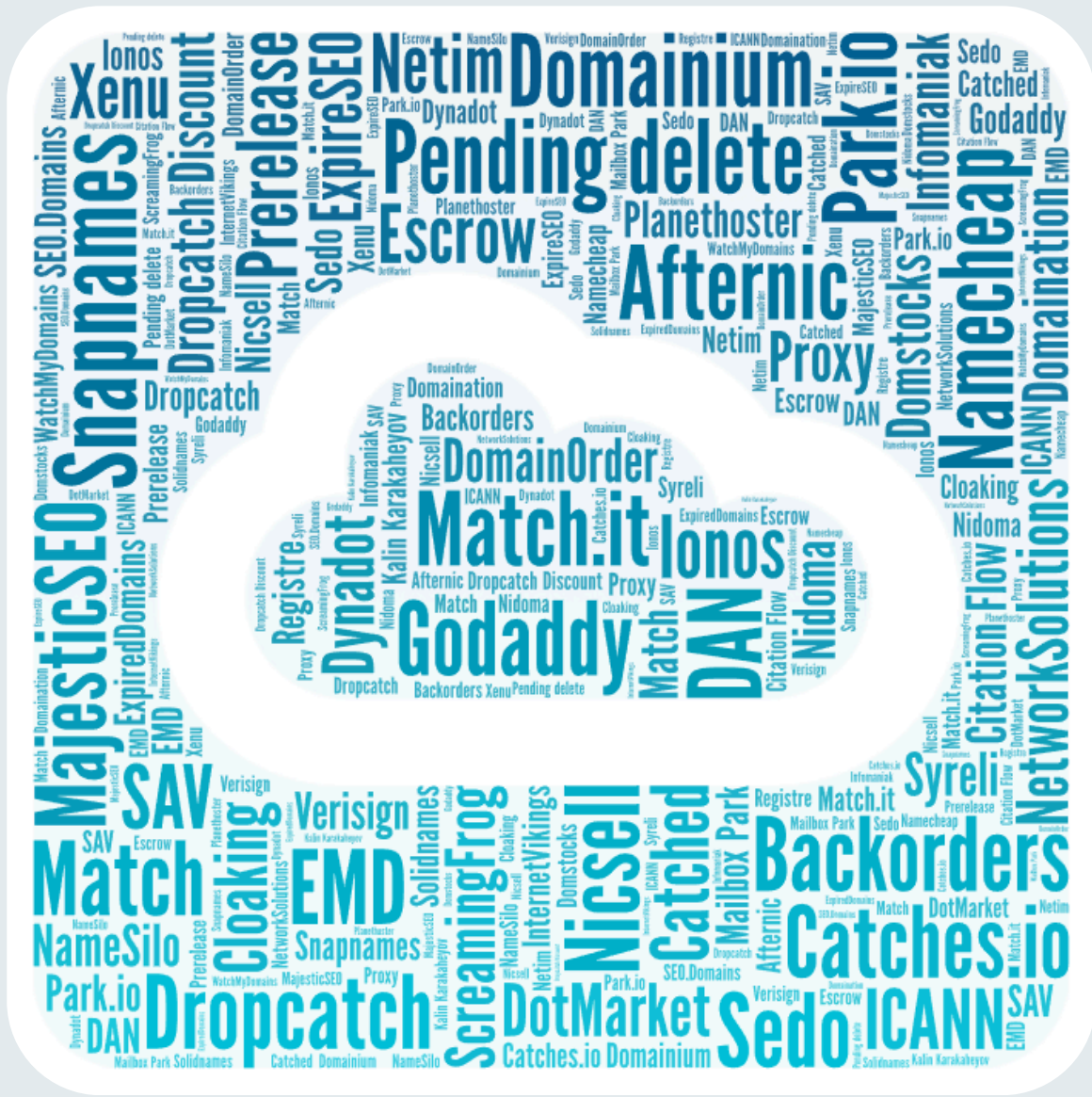
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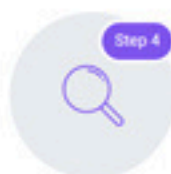Objectif = que votre stratégie vous apporte le meilleur ROI .

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Every day, more than one hundred thousand domain names are not renewed by their owners. These include valuable domain names which are fought over by service providers specialized in recovering them.

The recovery of expired domain names offers a competitive advantage for certain activities such as SEO and domaining, and is one of the techniques that Industrial Property Attorneys must also master.

This eBook provides an overview of how to recover and use expired domain names.

Contents

eBook partners

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What is an expired domain name?

The holder of a domain name never owns it. Each year, or at each expiry date if the holders pay for several years, they must renew it with their registrar. A domain name is said to be "expired" when it has reached its expiry date and has not been renewed by its holder.

Before falling back into public domain, i.e. becoming available for registration again, the non-renewed domain name goes through several phases, which differ depending on the type of TLD.

Role of registers and registrars

ICANN, the centralising body designated as the root of the Internet, contracts out the management of domain name extensions to entities known as registries. There are more than 2000 extensions or Top Level Domains, with .COM, .CN (for China), .DE (for Germany) and .NET being the most popular. The registry sets the rules for the TLD or TLDs it manages, and in particular, the rules for registering and expiring domain names. These are different for generic TLDs and geographical TLDs.

As registries do not market domain names directly to the public, registrations are carried out by approved bodies known as registrars.

The registrar is the central player for expired domains. On the one hand, you need to be a registrar to be a namecatcher. On the other, many registrars sell their customers' expired domain names, i.e. those that have not been renewed.

Domain name life cycle (generic extensions)

gTLD domains go through three phases from the day they expire.

- ## Grace period

The period known as the "grace period" begins on the day of expiry and lasts for approximately forty days. During this period, the domain name holder can no longer use it, but can renew it, with or without additional charges depending on the registrar's policy and the number of days elapsed.

The grace period is one of the best times to obtain expired domain names, since most of the major registrars auction the ones that have not been renewed by their customers in exclusive sales channels called prerelease. These are much less competitive than the ones in pending delete.

- ## Redemption period

The period following the grace period is known as the "redemption period". It lasts for thirty days and does not allow any transactions, except in rare cases.

- ## Pending delete period

The final period, known as the "pending delete period", lasts five days, after which the domain name is deleted. Only then does it become available to the public again. This is when namecatchers such as Dropcatch and Snapnames intervene.

Domain name life cycle (geographical extensions)

For national TLDs, the domain name life cycle is defined by the registry in each country. The domain name recovery process known as pre-release does not exist for geographical domains, with a few rare exceptions.

Advantages of expired domains for SEO and domaining

Domain names that still receive a significant number of visitors with many incoming links are valuable assets for SEOs, given their advantages in terms of incoming links compared to 'new' domain names, i.e. those that have never been registered before.

Increasing pagerank with expired domains

Acquiring expired domain names with a high pagerank is beneficial for SEO, as they can be used to create sites with high potential for Google, or to create links to your own sites.

There are actually more SEOs than domain name investors on the market for expired domains.

Monetization

The sale of sponsored articles with backlinks is a historically lucrative business, and performs best with expired domain names.

Selling products and services online, whether via an ecommerce site or as an affiliate, is a potentially lucrative activity that works well with expired domain names too.

Raw material for domaining

Generic domain names, i.e. those that designate a thing or a word in the dictionary, and catchy "brandable" names are the two most sought-after types of domain name on the secondary market.

For a large-scale project, a domain name should preferably be in .COM or in the national extension. Some ccTLDs such as .DE, .NL, .CH, .PL and .CZ are locally preferred than .COM, while others such as .FR, .BE and .CA are just as popular locally as .COM.

Opportunities to acquire
premium domains via expired domains

Expired domain names are the best way of acquiring premium domain names. Buyers benefit from a situation with a small number of competitors, who tend to reach agreements during auctions, mostly on Snapnames/Namejet and other platforms where usernames are visible.

Monetization of expired domain names

Although far from the golden ages of the 2000-2010 decade, parking pages, i.e. pages filled with advertising links, still generate revenues.

As an alternative to parking, holders of expired domain names with residual traffic can set up pages redirecting visitors to affiliation sites.

Services such as Mailbox Park pay domain name holders for adding a simple MX field to the DNS records.

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Disputes related to expired domains

The registration of a domain name, and a fortiori its use, implies legal liability. Contrary to some SEOs' belief, using an expired domain name is not without legal risk and can lead to a conviction, in addition to the loss of the domain name.

Domain names, particularly expired domain names, can pose an issue with other distinctive signs such as trademarks with which they share many similarities. These disputes are generally brought before specific entities, called domain name arbitration courts, which are not courts of law. In many countries, however, there is no dispute resolution procedure. In such cases, or when the parties are not satisfied with the out-of-court solutions proposed, disputes must be brought before the courts.

Brand strategies against cybersquatting

The cybersquatted domain names of 2025 bear little resemblance to those of fifteen years ago, when they generated direct browsing and search engine traffic, with substantial damage. Today, the majority of cybersquatted domain names include a parking or sales page with negligible traffic and no need for intervention.

Before taking legal action, companies should assess the extent of the damage suffered, which is almost null in the majority of cybersquatting cases.

The creation of more than 1,200 new extensions from 2014 onwards has made defensive registrations against cybersquatting impossible. The best strategy now is to monitor registrations and the uses to which they are put, and to intervene only when the situation requires it.

When the aim is to stop the damage without expecting any monetary compensation, the quickest course of action is to threatenly request the deletion of the domain name from its holder and/or the registrar, and the deletion of the content from the host. The procedure is more likely to be successful if the registrar is from a European Union country, and even more so if the disputed domain is a European ccTLD.

Given the difficulty of identifying and prosecuting certain holders, particularly with generic extensions, some brands choose to stop the damage by buying the problematic domain names from their holders, either directly or via platforms. This solution should be avoided, however, as it encourages cybersquatters to repeat cybersquatting acts against the same target, using other domain names.

If alternative strategies fail, extrajudicial or legal proceedings may be initiated.

Out-of-court procedures

Alternative dispute resolution procedures have been introduced to combat domain name reservations that infringe the rights of third parties. They are simpler and less costly than legal proceedings, do not require the intervention of a judge, and are carried out online.

The UDRP is a dispute resolution procedure provided by ICANN in the event of a dispute over the ownership of domain names bearing a generic extension. An expert is appointed to decide on the case, or three if the defendant wishes so. Rendered within two months of the complaint being filed, the response concludes with the transfer of the domain name, its cancellation, or the rejection of the request. No financial compensation may be awarded.

The cost of a UDRP procedure varies between $1500 and $5000, depending on the number of domain names and the number of experts asked for. The cost is borne entirely by the complainant, except when the respondent chooses to have the procedure conducted by three experts instead of one.

Dispute resolution procedures for national domains are decided by each registry. They differ from country to country and have specific names (e.g. PARL for .FR), but are generally similar to the UDRP procedure, as are the procedures for .FR, .CH, .BE, .EU and .CA domains.

Some domains, such as .DE or .RU, do not offer an out-of-court settlement procedure. In these cases, disputes must be brought before the courts.

Detection of expired domain names

Scrape and site directories

The most common method used by SEOs to detect expired domain names is to scrape directories of quality sites or other private or public directories to identify domain names that no longer respond, using ScreamingFrog or Xenu.

The extracted lists are then submitted to tools for mass checking the availability of domain names, such as those from Namecheap or Eurodns, which reveal which domain names are available for registration. The chances of finding valuable domain names that are available are slim, as this has been carried out on a massive scale for over twenty years. In any case, these will only be very old domains or in exotic extensions, as namecatchers have been registering all the valuable domain names in .COM, .NET and other popular extensions for many years, as soon as they become available.

Monitoring ad hoc lists

As all domain names could expire, i.e. not being renewed by their holder, one of the solutions for recovering expired domain names is to compile lists of desirable domain names and periodically test their status, either manually or automatically.

A number of high-end registrars and companies such as Solidnames offer a service to monitor the status and use of domain names, based on lists provided by the customer or generated automatically according to given criteria. Solutions are also available for recovering expired domain names.

Relatively inexpensive, these services are useful, whether to avoid issues with a trademark, or to take advantage of business opportunities by recovering a domain name with potential or traffic in your sector.

As with the creation of lists, it is also possible to monitor domain names yourself, using free or paid tools.

Domainrecover.net offers a free monitoring service for a wide range of extensions. Godaddy also offers this service, but only for legacy TLDs. For larger volumes, monitoring can be carried out using softwares such as WatchMyDomains from the Indian company DomainPunch.

WatchMyDomains, professional domain name monitoring

Available as a SAAS service and for download, WatchMyDomains enables you to monitor lists of thousands of domain names to find out their status, the name of the registrar, expiry dates, etc., so that you can take appropriate action at the right time in the domain name's life cycle.

Online services

In addition to your own lists, you can also use namecatchers' lists, which are free and can be filtered.

All namecatchers offer more or less complete lists of domain names they can recover. These lists can generally be ordered and filtered according to different criteria: keywords, language, date, extension, price, SEO metrics, etc.

The same information can be found with specialized tools, with the advantage that the lists are homogeneous and centralised in a single address. The indispensable free service ExpiredDomains [1] allows you to search exhaustive databases of domain names that have expired or are for sale, using around a hundred criteria.

Not all expired domain names filtered using these tools are worthy of registration, far from it. The domain names selected should be analysed to ensure they meet the conditions for registration, which vary according to the objectives of each buyer.

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[1] Maintained by a German developer, Expireddomains.net offers a free, high-quality service in the spirit of the early days of the Internet.

Qualification of expired domains

Qualifying expired domain names enables us to find out their potential. The analysis differs depending on whether the domain names are needed for SEO or for domaining.

SEO metrics

To choose expired domain names, SEOs use a variety of indicators, commonly referred to as "SEO metrics". These are generally used to carry out an initial filter, after which a more in-depth analysis is required, focusing mostly on the quality of incoming links and the domain name's history.

One of the criteria most commonly used by SEOs is Trust Flow, developed by the UK company MajesticSEO. This indicator measures the authority of a page, ranging from 0 to just over 100. The Domain Authory (DA) of the North American service MOZ is a similar indicator.

The secrets of the Trust Flow algorithm

Although its relevance is limited and it can be manipulated, Trust Flow has been one of the market benchmarks in Europe for many years.

Citation Flow (CF) measures the frequency with which a page is cited, i.e. its popularity.

Also offered by MajesticSEO, the number of Referring Domains (RD) is another widely used indicator, but needs to be analyzed as not all links are worth the same, far from it. The higher the number of quality RDs, the more potential a domain name has for SEO. In practice, the vast majority of expired domain names with thousands of RDs come from spam links, and therefore have no value. One solution to avoid wasting time analysing a large number of spammy domain names is to set a maximum limit for RDs (see Figure below).

Filtering the number of Referring Domains in Expireddomains

In our search filters of .COM and .NET domains for SEO , we indicate a maximum of 99 RD. Most people choose a minimum of 100 RD, resulting in more competition for these domain names, and therefore high prices. By limiting our search to domain names under 100 RD, we reduce the likelihood of finding ourselves in competition with other buyers. In many cases, this allows us to obtain the domain name without bidding, via Dropcatch Discount or a Snapnames reseller such as Gname.

Kalin Karakeahov – world expert in the recovery of expired domains

Founder of Bulgarian start-up Edoms, Kalin Karakaheyov is known to be one of the best specialists in expired domains for SEO purposes. In his opinion, metrics such as TF from Majestic SEO or DA from Moz are irrelevant, and recommends instead targeting domain names with a low score, such as TF 1 or TF 2, as these are neglected by competitors and are sometimes of very high quality.

Quality and relevance of incoming links

Ideally, domain names should have a large number of natural links from leading sites in their fields. On the other hand, forum comments, directory links, or worse, spam links, have zero or negative value.

Detecting these features cannot be fully automated with SEO metrics and requires the meticulous use of tools such as WebArchive for content or MajesticSEO for link analysis.

How much does an expired domain name cost for SEO?

Since quality expired domain names are rare and demand is strong, market prices are much higher than registering a new domain name.

The number of inbound links, obtained using the "Referring Domains" indicator from MajesticSEO, has the advantage of simplicity. Many buyers use it to set their maximum price during an auction, and there is a certain correlation between the number of quality Referring Domains (RD, indicator from MajesticSEO) and the final purchase price, with a valuation of around €3 to €10 per RD.

For a more accurate estimate, other factors need to be taken into account:

- The more RDs a domain name has, the higher the value per RD [1].
- The higher the Trust Flow, the higher the domain name value.
- Domain names in English or French are highly sought-after, as opposed to those in secondary European or non-European languages.
- Competitive themes (housing, automotive, health, etc.) are highly sought-after too.
- Generic domain names have generally more value and those protected by a trademark in force or subject to legal risks are devalued.

EMD domains and brandable

Filtering EMD and brandable domain names is different from filtering expired domain names for SEO purposes, as there is no numerical indicator directly correlated with the value of a domain name.

The TLD is the first important filter. Only .COM and a few geographical extensions have real market value.

The saturation of extensions (REG column in ExpiredDomains) can be used to filter long lists. A domain name in .COM or a ccTLD that has already been registered in many other extensions is more likely to be resold.

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[2] Expired quality domain names with more than 1,000 referring domains are rare and systematically subject to auctions. As a buyer, it is preferable to stay away from competitive domain names, as the quality/price ratio is much better with lower-quality domain names.

Registering and buying expired domains in the secondary market

There are three main ways of acquiring expired domain names: registering available domain names, buying them on the secondary market, and using namecatchers.

Many SEOs say they "purchase" expired domain names for SEO purposes, sometimes in large quantities, using detection tools such as ScreamingFrog or lists of available domain names like those from ExpiredDomains.

The term "purchase" is inappropriate here: we are talking about registration, not buying from an owner. As for this practice, it is generally ineffective.

Available domain names: the ones nobody wanted
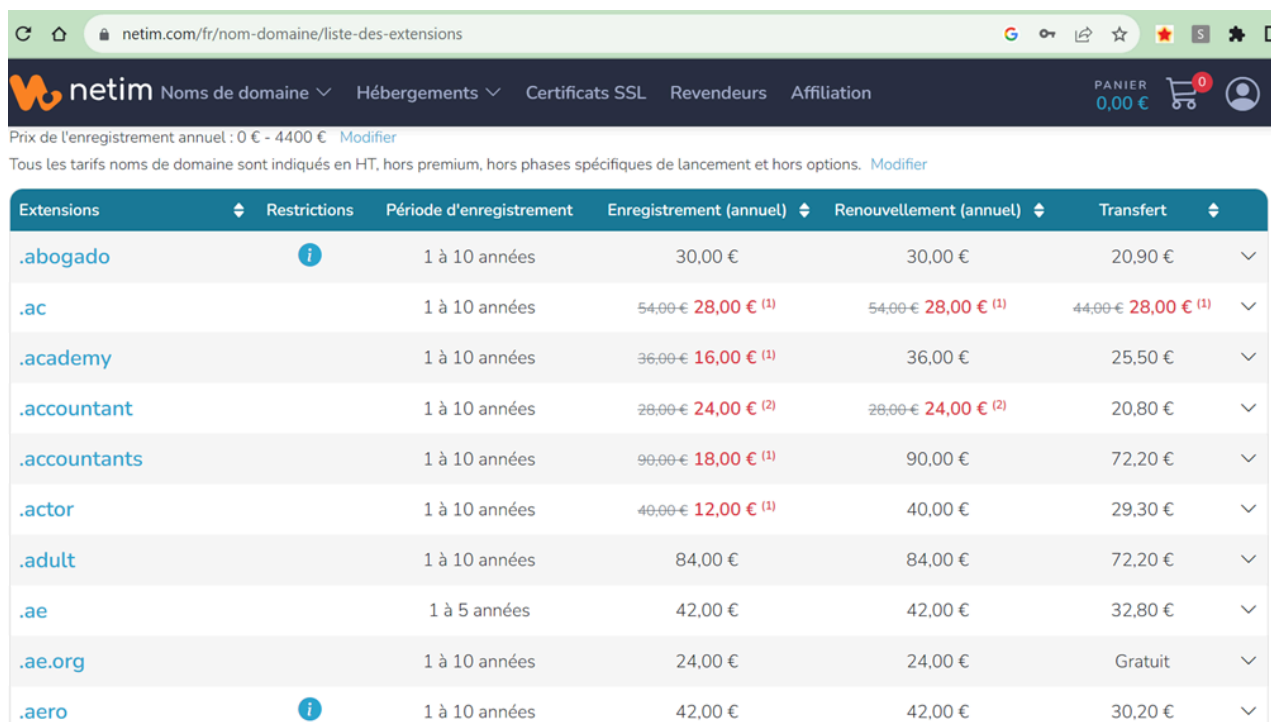
While it was possible in the past to register valuable domain names, it is no longer the case, as the old stock of high quality domains has been used up and is not being renewed.

Given the millions of scrapes launched every day by SEOs over the last decade or two, free quality domain names have long since been registered.

Since more recently, expired domain names are almost systematically snapped as soon as they become available. The lists of domain names to be deleted are in fact scrutinised by a very large number of users who can check them free of charge, keeping all the domain names likely to have market value.

However, this only happens with major TLDs, as snapping and domain tasting are not well developed in secondary TLDs. To register a domain name in a TLD not offered by one's usual registrar, one must choose a registrar that offers it, and ensure they meet the registration requirements for that TLD.

Specific requirements for each extension

Extensions	Restrictions	Période d'enregistrement	Enregistrement (annuel)	Renouvellement (annuel)	Transfert	
.abogado	ⓘ	1 à 10 années	30,00 €	30,00 €	20,90 €	⌄
.ac		1 à 10 années	~~54,00 €~~ 28,00 € [1]	~~54,00 €~~ 28,00 € [1]	~~44,00 €~~ 28,00 € [1]	⌄
.academy		1 à 10 années	~~36,00 €~~ 16,00 € [1]	36,00 €	25,50 €	⌄
.accountant		1 à 10 années	~~28,00 €~~ 24,00 € [2]	~~28,00 €~~ 24,00 € [2]	20,80 €	⌄
.accountants		1 à 10 années	~~90,00 €~~ 18,00 € [1]	90,00 €	72,20 €	⌄
.actor		1 à 10 années	~~40,00 €~~ 12,00 € [1]	40,00 €	29,30 €	⌄
.adult		1 à 10 années	84,00 €	84,00 €	72,20 €	⌄
.ae		1 à 5 années	42,00 €	42,00 €	32,80 €	⌄
.ae.org		1 à 10 années	24,00 €	24,00 €	Gratuit	⌄
.aero	ⓘ	1 à 10 années	42,00 €	42,00 €	30,20 €	⌄

Netim, a global ccTLD specialist registrar, describes on its website the registration conditions for all ccTLDs marketed worldwide, and offers proxy services covering all countries and territories with a geographical extension.

Prerelease

Most of the major North American domain name registrars offer a prerelease service, which involves auctioning off domain names that have not been renewed by their holders. For website publishers and SEOs, this is an opportunity to obtain quality expired domain names at resale price. The supply is abundant, with the world's top four registrars and most of those in the top 20 offering prereleases, which account for more than half of the expired domain names.

During the last few days of the so-called "grace period", registrars using the prerelease system auction domain names that have not been renewed by their customers.

If a domain name receives at least one bid at auction, it is renewed before entering the redemption period, on behalf of the person who wins the auction. This means that the domain name does not expire and the whois does not get reset, which SEOs and domainers appreciate. Winning an auction does not, however, guarantee that you will get the domain name, as the previous holder can generally renew it up to a few days after the auction ends.

Domain names that have not received any prerelease bids follow the normal expiry cycle and enter the redemption period, followed by the pending delete period, before becoming available for registration again.

Main prerelease services

The world's leading registrar, the American company Godaddy, is by far the largest seller of expired prerelease domain names. The company earns millions of dollars every year selling domain names it does not own.

The prerelease offer from Godaddy allows users to get valuable domain names, sometimes for a small fee, but the pitfalls and bugs on the platform are numerous.

Domain names not renewed by customers from the Godaddy Group and its partners like Tucows, Enom or Hostinger, are auctioned in the Godaddy Expired Auctions section just before the end of the grace period, for five days. Domain names that have not received any bids by the end of this period are then sold at a fixed price (Godaddy Closeouts), which decreases over a period of five days.

Snapnames and Namejet, which have a common offering, have a large number of registrar partners, leading to many prerelease domain names. Snapnames centralises auctions from the group's registrars and partners: Crazy Domains, DomainPeople, DirectNic, Dotology, Ionos (for domain names that have not been sold at Sedo after 7 days), Network Solutions, OnlineNic, Register, SRSPlus, etc.

All domain names not renewed by their holders are put up for auction during 15 days, with a starting price of $69 or $79 in the vast majority of cases. These auctions include some very old domain names [3], as NetworkSolutions was the only registrar until 1999.

Other prerelease offers include those from Namecheap, Namebright, Dynadot, NameSilo and SAV.

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[3] Purchasing a prerelease domain name does not reset its whois, meaning you can obtain some domains registered in the 1990s for as little as $69 on Snapnames.

Buying expired domains on the secondary market

Offers from namecatchers

Many namecatchers, particularly those specialized in ccTLDs, sell domains they caught without prior backorder and/or allow customers to sell their domain names.

Europe's leading ccTLD namecatcher, Nicsell, has a marketplace that includes the most popular European ccTLD.

Other ccTLD marketplaces include Match.it and Nidoma, which are mainly active in the Italian, Spanish and French markets.

Some specialized services like SEO.domains, DomainCoasters and Odys sell expired domain names that have already been snapped. This is suitable for buyers who do not wish to spend too much time and energy looking for expired domain names and accept to pay more.

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Platforms for buying and selling domain names

The German company Sedo and the American Afternic have catalogues of several million domain names for sale. Anyone can buy and sell domain names, expired or not, in any language.

SEO domain names are mixed up with other types of domain names, but they can be identified using the ExpiredDomains filters. The prices charged on these platforms are often unrealistic and the average quality is very low, but one can still find some great deals among the millions of domains for sale, provided they use the right filters.

Domains for sale on Sedo and Godaddy
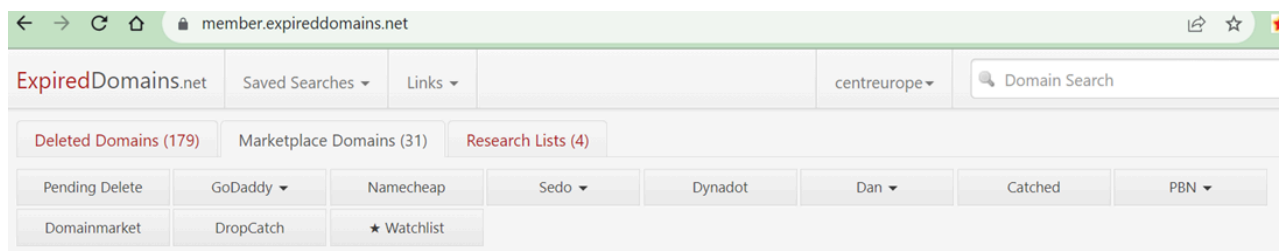
The domain names for sale can be found in the "MarketPlace" tab. You need to create and save different filters for each one, in this case, Sedo and Godaddy. Afternic is not offered by ExpiredDomains, but since they are part of the same group, they can be found among the ones from Godaddy [4] .

Over-the-counter purchases

Some expired domain names are not used by their owners, or just have a "parking" page or a small site, until they are resold. In most cases, it is possible to contact the owners via a contact form or using the information from the whois. If the holder's details are hidden, several solutions can be tried:

- Use a form provided by the registrar, who will transfer the message to the domain holder.
- Use services such as riskIQ to try to bypass private whois.
- Search for a contact page on an older version of WebArchive.
- Search for the domain name on the most popular sales platforms, such as Afternic and Sedo.

When agreed on the price, it is recommend to use a trusted third-party service for the transaction, such as Escrow, Sedo or DotMarket.

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[4] Godaddy TDNAM tab in ExpiredDomains

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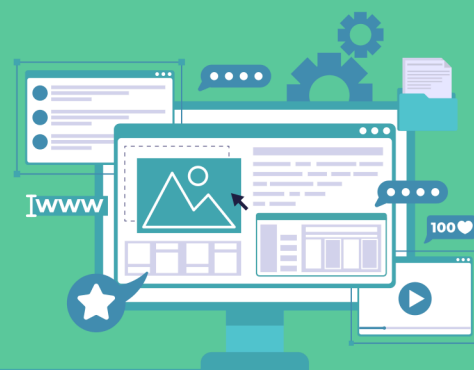
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Recovery of expired domain names

The most sought-after domain names in generic extensions are registered as soon as they become available, by robots that multiply the number of registration requests. In practice, it is impossible for an individual to obtain a domain name with good SEO metrics without using a specialized company's services, i.e. without setting up a backorder with a namecatcher.

Recovery scripts

A domain name snap consists of making a registration request at the very moment the domain name becomes available.

Some registrars, such as InternetBS, OVH and Dynadot, offer an API that automates the process by means of a registration script. All you need to do is write a simple registration script knowing the date and time when the domain name will be released so that the script is triggered as soon as the domain name falls back into public domain. The expiry date and time can be obtained via ExpiredDomains.net.

The stakes surrounding expired domain names are so high that only companies specialized in the recovery of expired domain names obtain valuable ones. To acquire quality domain names, it is therefore necessary to place reservations, known as backorders, with these companies.

Placing backorders

As competition between namecatchers is fierce, placing a backorder with one provider does not guarantee obtaining the desired domain name. It is advisable to place it through all the namecatchers likely to obtain the domain name, which requires a good knowledge of their respective hierarchies and specializations. In practice, recovering expired domain names requires regular use of at least half a dozen services, having to create an account in each one of them.

If several people had placed a backorder for the same domain name with the namecatcher which obtained it, an auction is made over a period of a few days, which varies depending on the company. In some cases, the auction is only open to people who had placed a backorder on that domain name, while in others, it is open to everyone. The customer does generally not have to pay anything until the backordered domain name is obtained.

Proxy auctions

All expired domain recovery sites offer a proxy bidding system, which has some advantages for the bidder. Bidders can enter their maximum price and no longer have to worry about changing it, as the system automatically places bids for them.

It is advisable to place your proxy bid as late as possible, so as not to give information to competitors, and not increase the domain name's visibility. On the other hand, there is no point in waiting until the last second, as auctions are automatically extended by a certain amount of time, often 5 minutes, as soon as a bid takes place, even going past the scheduled end of the auction.

It is advisable to always bid 1 level above your maximum price, i.e. 510 euros and not 500, for example.

Risk of irregularities in high-value auctions

Bad practices are not scarce in the domain name sector, particularly with high-value auctions. Domain name recovery companies are private companies with no approval or control over their auctions, so no blind trust should be placed in them.

Namecatchers specializing in gTLDs

Dropcatch

Since the mid-2010s, Dropcatch has been the leader in the recovery of expired .COM, .NET and .ORG domain names, rivalled only by Snapnames/Namejet, which it outranks for low-cost snaps, and is at least equal to with competitive domain names.
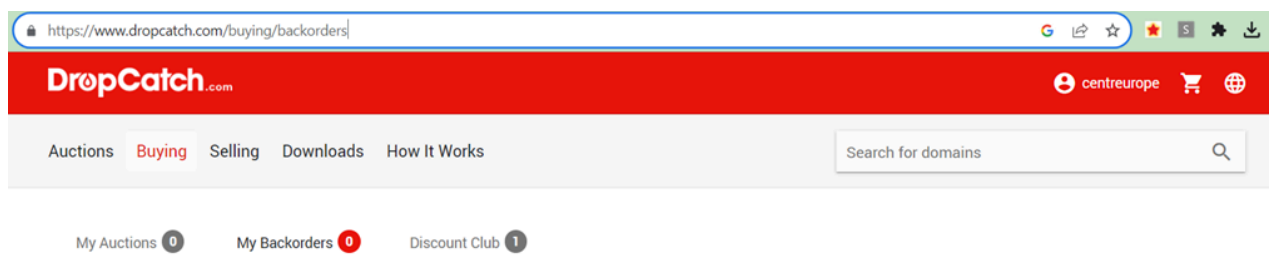
The price of a backorder is $59 for .COM and .NET domain names, and $15 for .ORG. No amount is debited until the domain name is obtained.

Unlike its competitor Snapnames, Dropcatch auctions are open, meaning that anyone can take part, even if they have not placed a backorder on the domain name. This feature is advantageous for buyers who do not wish to analyse domain names in advance, many of whom choose to turn up a few minutes before the end of the auction (8pm Paris/Madrid for .COM or .NET, and 3pm for .ORG [5]). This logically leads to higher prices on average than on Snapnames/Namejet.

For expired domain names that are not very competitive, Dropcatch offers another service that is more advantageous for buyers: Dropcatch Discount.

Dropcatch Discount (https://www.dropcatch.com/buying/discount-club) allows you to backorder a domain name at a price of your choice, ranging from $13 to $58. This service is only available for domain names with the .COM and .NET extensions.

If several people have backordered the same domain name via Dropcatch Discount Club and Dropcatch succeeds in obtaining it, it is automatically given, without bidding, to the buyer who chose the highest amount. Obviously, the $59 backorders have priority over the Discount Club service.

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[5] Different schedule three times per year.

Namejet / Snapnames

Once competitors, Snapnames and Namejet are two different names for the same expired domain name recovery service.

Backordering a domain name can be done from its homepage and costs $79, paid only if the domain name is successfully recovered. Snapnames covers all gTLD extensions, but the service is only actually competitive for .COM, .NET, .ORG and .INFO domain names.

Unlike Dropcatch, which only accepts backorders during the period of pending delete, backorders can be carried out at any time, including when the domain name is active.

If only one buyer placed a backorder on a domain name that Snapnames gets, it is sent directly to that person.

If several people backordered the same domain name and Snapnames or Namejet manages to obtain it, it is automatically sent to auction, for three days. Unlike Dropcatch, only buyers who had placed the backorder on Namejet or Snapnames can take part in the auction [6], which is an advantage for bidders.

Snapnames resellers

Unlike Dropcatch, Snapnames does not directly offer a discount service. However, it has a handful of partners who can recover domain names at the NetworkSolutions registration price.

For example, Catches.io allows you to obtain .COM, .NET and .ORG domain names for $20 or $40.

In the same way that Snapnames often beats Dropcatch, Snapnames resellers can beat Dropcatch Discount and even Dropcatch standard. Furthermore, any backorder on Snapnames has priority over its resellers.

Other namecatchers offering generic extensions

Other services offer recovery of expired .COM and .NET domain names. Of these, only Gname can sometimes beat Dropcatch and Snapnames. The superiority of these companies is less clear for .ORG than for .COM and .NET.

Some namecatchers, such as Dynadot, SAV, Catched, Park.io and Docky.ly specialize in less competitive generic extensions such as .INFO, .BIZ, .WS, .IO and .ME.

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[6] Snapnames has used fake bidders for years in the bast, but it is believed that this practice, for which Snapnames was condemned in court, has ceased.

Namecatchers specializing in ccTLDs

There are many namecatchers specialized in recovering domain names in national extensions, all being much smaller than Dropcatch, Snapnames/Namejet and Godaddy.

.DE and .NL, two of Europe's leading geographical domains, are often offered by the same companies such as Nicsell, Domainorder, Catched, Realtime, Match, etc.

DE is the most competitive extension. Demand is strong, given the size of the German market and the fact that the supply is structurally weak [7]. .NL and .EU are two other popular geographical domains. The namecatchers specialized in these three domains are the Dutch DomainOrder, the German Nicsell [8], the Italian Match, Mexico's Catched.com, Austria's Realtime.at and Taiwan's docky.ly.

The .UK has a number of multi-extension namecatchers, such as DomainRecover and many which are specific to its market, such as dropped.uk, Domainlore, ukbackorder.com and catchdrop.uk.

Two French namecatchers are specialized in the French market: WebExpire and Kifdom. Many namecatchers offer .ES and .IT, including Nidoma, Match.it and Catched.

Other market specialists include DomainQuadrant for .AT, Dotroll for .HU, Daukce.cz for the Czech Republic, Aftermarket.pl for Poland and Rymdweb for Sweden.

There are no namecatchers for most other geographical extensions. These domain names must be registered via a traditional registrar, on a first-come, first-served basis. Nor is there a dropcatching service for geoTLDs such as .BERLIN or .PARIS, which are considered by ICANN and Google to be generic and not geographical domains.

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[7] One of the reasons for this is the high renewal rate for .DE domain names, which registrars pay monthly rather than annually, amounting to just a few tens of euro cents.

[8] Auctions at Domainorder and Nicsell are organised in the German style, i.e. they start before the domain name is obtained. This makes it possible to know the price that will be paid if the domain name is obtained, focusing recovery efforts on the most lucrative ones. Of course, the winner of the auction does not have to pay anything if the domain name is not obtained.

Using expired domains

Choice of registrar

North American leaders such as Godaddy, Namecheap, Tucows and Newfold Digital offer a generally poor service quality, which they compensate for with aggressive marketing.

The major European players such as Ionos, OVH and Gandi offer better value for money than their American counterparts, but with other shortcomings, so domain name holders are advised to opt for lesser-known but better-performing registrars.

Netim, a French registrar that is not well known to the general public but is an international benchmark among specialists, offers a high-performance service and support, as well as good value for money with its reseller offer (https://www.netim.com/fr/programme-revendeur). Other registrars such as Canada's Planethoster and Switzerland's Infomaniak are are both competitive in terms of price and offer a good quality of service too.

Transferring domain names

Transferring a domain name involves changing registrar. It occurs after purchasing an expired domain name on a platform or from third parties, and in a multitude of other cases: wanting to change registrar, selling a domain name, change of hosting solution, etc.

Almost always, the transfer from one registrar to another requires an authorisation code called the EPP code or auth code [9] , which the seller provides to the buyer. The new holder initiates the operation from his registrar, and is validated as soon as the seller accepts the request received by email.

For generic TLDs, it is impossible to transfer a domain name if the registration date is under sixty days. Similarly, it is impossible to transfer a domain name if the incoming and outgoing registrars are identical. In both cases, the way for the new holder to take possession of the domain name is through a "push", or account-to-account transfer.

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[9] Some ccTLDs do not have any.

How do I recover a domain name?

	.COM AND OTHER GTLD		CCTLD	
	TRANSFER	**PUSH**	**TRANSFER**	**PUSH**
Who carries out the operation?	The new holder	The seller [10]	The new holder	The seller
Required information	Auth code	Username and/or email of the new holder	Auth code	Username and/or email of the new holder
Restrictions	- Impossible within 60 days of registration, and/or if the domain is locked - Impossible if the incoming and outgoing registrars are identical	The domain name must be unlocked	Impossible if the incoming and outgoing registrars are identical	The domain name must be unlocked
Change of holder	Generally done by default or suggested	Generally suggested, and the new holder can make the change manually in their interface at any time.	For many ccTLD, this requires an additional operation called update	For many ccTLD, this requires an additional operation called update
Duración	- A few minutes to a few hours if the outgoing registrar validates it - 5 days if the outgoing registrar does not validate (OVH, NetworkSolutions, InternetBS…)	Immediate	- From a few minutes if validated by the outgoing registrar - Several days if the outgoing registrar does not validate (OVH, InternetBS…)	Immediate
Cost	Cost of one registration, but adds 1 year to the expiry date	Free	Cost of one registration, but adds 1 year to the expiry date [11]	Free

[10] The registrar associated with Snapnames, NetworkSolutions, works in reverse: the operation must be requested by the new holder.
[11] The transfer is free with certain registrars and extensions such as .CH, in which case 1 year is not added to the expiry date.

Contact management

A domain name comprises three contacts: the holder, the administrative contact, and the technical contact. The information must be up to date so that its operations can be carried out (renewals, DNS changes, etc.) without issues. In theory, incorrect data could lead to the domain name's deletion, but the risk only actually exists with certain ccTLDs such as .FR, .CH, .CA or .BE.

Uses for SEO

Expired domain names are often used to create a microsite as part of a PBN or via a redirection, which is quick and easy to carry out. Despite Google's announcements, and in particular the spam update of March 2024 which is supposed to affect expired domain names, the SEO benefits are generally significant.

Certain services and tools can be used to automatically create websites with hundreds or thousands of pages aimed at specific queries related to the target theme. Produced by AI, aggregators, DeepL-type translators or any other automated system, the content is intended for Google's robots only, using the famous "cloaking" technique. Internet users are redirected to a page containing a form or an ad intended to generate revenue.

Sites that use such methods are generally quickly detected and sanctioned, either due to Google's anti-spam algorithms, which detect footprints inevitably left by automated processes, or due to the reports made by competitors using the "Spam report" procedure.

Website publishing

The most sought-after expired domains, i.e. those with inbound links, residual traffic and a competitive topic [12], are generally used for ambitious projects monetised through link sales, affiliation, or the sale of products and services. Such sites also have an original design, an https domain name [13], a relevant theme [14], up-to-date legal notices, a favicon, optimised meshing with an obfuscation plugin, etc., at the very least.

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[12] The most common and effective practice is to develop an expired domain name website in its original topic and language.
[13] Whether or not to use "www" in a web address is a question that remains unanswered. Although it serves no purpose, its presence reassures Internet users.
[14] Part of the community prefers publishing so-called 'generalist' sites, which are in fact random sponsored articles on topics such as finance, casinos, housing and health.

Reselling expired domain names

Selling expired domains and sites is quite common in the web publishing community. There are many reasons for this, including discontinued projects, need for cash, disagreements between partners, etc.

The best platforms for selling domain names are Sedo and Afternic, mostly thanks to their partnerships with the major registrars. It is strongly recommended to choose a fixed price, as this gives the domain name visibility when its availability is checked with major registrars such as Godaddy or OVH.

Conclusion

This ebook has sketched the broad outlines of a sector that is opaque but profitable for those who know how to pull its strings. However, the future of expired domain names is uncertain with the threat of generative AI, and in particular its integration into Google with SGE. Similarly, Verisign and the registries of geographical extensions have the means to reshuffle the cards in this currently lucrative market.

About the author

Active in the domain name sector since the early 2000's, David Chelly is co-founder of NddCamp and member of the AFNIC and FePSeM associations.

With a multidisciplinary background (PhD in Management, Law Degree and a postgraduate Degree in Finance), he takes an active interest in all aspects of domain names, which he deals with on a daily basis.

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