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## TRANSCRIPT

### **Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman Bruce Billson interview with Luke Grant.**

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**Subject: Internet domain name changes**

#### **Luke Grant**

Identity has become an integral part of building a successful business these days. But there are some changes coming that could impact the way you operate here in Australia. A new system is being introduced by the non-government regulator au Domain Administration that will allow anyone with a connection to Australia to register the .au category of domain name. That means websites ending in, for example, .com.au or .net.au could now be shorter.

For example, a website for say Money News, our show, could be moneynews.au

With less than a week until the changes are put in place, that's next Tuesday, businesses do need to register now to avoid any complications with these regulations. This is a very timely warning and to take us through the changes coming and what you might need to do, I'm joined by Bruce Billson, former cabinet minister, but now Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman. Bruce, great to talk to you. Welcome to Money News.

#### **Bruce Billson**

Luke, awesome to be with you and the Money News listeners.

#### **Luke Grant**

Tell me, it's just under a week now before these changes come into effect. You are concerned about the response I could tell from businesses so far, and there's a good reason for that. Can you walk me through it?

#### **Bruce Billson**

Yeah, I am. And I have been, and I've sought to have what's called the priority allocation period extended by the non-government regulator auDA to give Australian small and family businesses a chance to know this is happening, Luke, and then an opportunity to do something to protect their interests. Now that priority allocation period runs out in less than a week, so by the 20th of September, if you've got a current domain name, like, you know, livelyluke.com.au and you want livelyluke.au for whatever reason, but in many cases to protect your interests from having someone else snaffle that and potentially cut across your value proposition, perhaps emulate your website, or frankly not do what's in your interests, including grab it and then offering to flog it to

you at a substantially up-marked price, you need to register your interest by the 20th of this month to make sure you can take advantage of that priority allocation process.

### **Luke Grant**

That is so important for business to know. And it might be that .au is not a thing. I think it's likely to be a thing. Anything to abbreviate we kind of hang on to don't we. So, if you if you have that .com.au name and you don't put your hand up for the .au name, as Bruce rightly says, that could be picked up by someone, for example, who might think, I might turn this around in a month and sell it back to the original owner.

If they don't register within the time, what happens mate?

### **Bruce Billson**

Well, then it becomes available for the general public. And we already know Luke, and your listeners would know, that there are people opportunistically grabbing domain names, knowing that business interests will want them now or probably want them soon. Or it might be an enterprise that's trading overseas that might be coming our way. Or they're simply trying it on.

And I know when I first got elected to Parliament I went to register brucebillson.com.au and got a great big 'no'. Someone had already registered it and bless their cotton socks a few weeks after the election they were kind enough to offer it to me to purchase from them at a very substantial price.

Now that's not cool, but that happens now and that's opportunistic entrepreneurship that doesn't always play out well for small and family businesses. So, if you've invested in your website, that's a key channel to your customers. It's part of your corporate identity in the relationship you have with the people you want to delight. And then someone comes along and wants to take a piece of your customer action, maybe emulate your website, maybe even look like a website that you're familiar with, maybe an equipment finance company. And they start asking you for a whole lot of, you know, rather personal and important information. That's going to create a vulnerability. And as the Cyber Security Centre has warned, opportunistic cyber criminals could register your .au domain name in an attempt to impersonate your business. Maybe, you know, intervene in your customer relationship, harvest information of harm to you and your customers.

My big call is there's less than a week to go Luke. Ask yourself, would I be upset if someone else got a domain name that was basically mine minus the .com or minus the .net. It was my domain name, mybusinessname.au

Would I be upset if somebody snaffled that and it wasn't me? Now, if you're feeling that way, take action. It's going to take a few minutes, a few dollars, but protect your interests even as a defensive play, to make sure someone doesn't want to mess with your business. And for others, they might see the .au as being slightly more funky. An abridged version. Well, that's okay. Whatever your reasons, just don't get caught short by these shortened domain names with less than a week to go for you to access the priority allocation mechanism before those domain names become available to the general public.

### **Luke Grant**

You're so good at explaining this stuff. And for people that just went through the exercise, Bruce told you about, like imagining your name ending in .au and you not owning it, can anyone think for a moment that a big organisation like McDonald's or Bunnings would let this through to the

keeper thinking, Oh, well, no harm here? Is it difficult to protect? I know you mentioned it might take a few clicks and maybe be a few dollars, but I reckon there'd be plenty of small business operators who might have once got themselves a website and might do some work on it themselves. Who can fix this for them? Where do they go Bruce?

### **Bruce Billson**

Well, if they've relied on an I.T. provider to help set up their systems, that same I.T. provider can probably navigate the business through that process. So, it's not that complicated, but it's important to know what you've currently got registered and frankly through what channel you've registered it. If that doesn't work for you, you can always go to the auDA website, or go to some of the commercial providers like GoDaddy that offer you that facility, cost you a few dollars more than you doing it directly, but, I did mine on the weekend, mate, and it cost me about \$9, \$10 to reserve for a year my old business names. Twenty odd bucks if it was for three years or more. I reckon that's a good investment to make just to protect against the risk of someone else without your interests at heart, grabs hold of a domain name that's a shortened version of the one you've got.

### **Luke Grant**

We all want to do the right thing. I'm just now wondering whether this is the best way to operate this system. I mean, it would be clear to everyone that, for example, Bunnings is a hardware franchise, the hardware business. Shouldn't they be approaching businesses direct in a perfect world and saying, look, we're going to give you a month to sort this out, but on this date, it comes to an end. Has anything like that happened and should it happen?

### **Bruce Billson**

Yeah. I was actually urging the non-government regulator to extend this priority period for a year because they point to things they've been doing to raise awareness, often, awareness raised through firms like GoDaddy that administer, that are the retailers and intermediaries for these domain names. But problem is they're not the ones that actually hold the asset, which is the domain name itself.

You need to get that messaging out to small and family businesses. I didn't win that argument, Luke. They didn't follow my strong urging to extend that priority period and to really lift the public awareness and information game. They've stuck to this timeline. And I thought, well, what's the most constructive thing I can do? That's to get on my bike and sort of get that message out there so small businesses and family enterprises can protect their interests.

### **Luke Grant**

Outstanding. Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman Bruce Billson, nice to talk to you again.