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TRANSCRIPT

Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman Bruce Billson interview with Jenny Marchant and Dan Cox.

ABC Newcastle

Subject: Internet domain name changes

Jenny Marchant

The Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman wants you to know about some changes happening from next week so you don't get caught out. It's to do with your digital identity. There's a new shortened domain name system being introduced. So along with the .com.au and the .net.au there's also going to just be a .au

Dan Cox

Just looks so wrong. You know when the '40' numbers came in in the Hunter. Isn't it supposed to be '49', what's the '40'? It's going to take a bit of getting used to. Bruce Billson is the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman. Hello Bruce.

Bruce Billson

Dan, it's great to be with you and Jen and your listeners on this great morning.

Dan Cox

Thank you for joining us. So why change this?

Bruce Billson

Well, that's something beyond my ability to fully explain. It is a non-government regulator that oversees domain names in Australia, and it's followed what's happened in some overseas countries and thought a shortened or au direct, I think is the way they're describing it, would be kind of funky, kind of fun and hip to be with it. So, they've decided to make that option available.

A few arguments they've put forward is, you know, what could be wrong with a few more domain names? And the other one is when you're on a mobile phone, it's fewer keystrokes. But it makes me wonder. I don't know anybody that when they're searching for something on their mobile phone puts the URL, the full domain name, address in there.

So, not the most compelling story I've ever heard, but it's happening. I was trying to urge the non-government regulator to hold off for a year, so that they could actually run a public education information campaign to let people know that this is change is happening. And for people to take what action they think is necessary. They said, thanks Bruce, no, we won't do that.

So I'm on my bike trying to raise awareness.

Jenny Marchant

Why do we need to be educated about it? Won't it just be that, you know, my local take away goes from being .com.au to .au that's not going to be a big change, is it?

Bruce Billson

Well, that's a really good question. And I like the way you phrased it. You don't need to be educated, but you also don't need the hassle of someone perhaps mimicking your website. You know, danandjen.com.au would be you guys. If it became danandjen.au someone thought, hey, I might cut across your online presence. I might try and harvest your customers. I might even use that capacity to mimic a legitimate website to really create a cyber security risk. As the Cyber Security Centre said, this is a time of concern and that people should at least defend their position by getting the shortened domain name that is the direct equivalent of the one they've got.

And by the 20th of this month is the last chance for people with existing domain names to claim that shortened version before domain names become available to the general public.

Dan Cox

Right. So there is a bit of a worry here that if I had my own smallbusiness.com.au and someone saw the potential to get in early or if I don't get it, to take the .au version and without even noticing I could be losing business.

Bruce Billson

Correct. And Dan and Jen this happens now anyway, where people try and ambush-market people through their online presence by mimicking, emulating a popular website, a website that customers would go to, and then slipping in something that looks pretty much similar to it to try and harvest those customers from where they're supposed to be going by emulating the legitimate websites.

There's also some concerns around, like if you and I were financial planners or something like that and we interacted with our customers through our website and we're looking for personal information and the like, there's a chance that we might be duped into providing information, thinking it's our trusted and known business operating through their digital channel when it's a scammer or someone not intending on doing us any favours or the business they're trying to try to mimic.

Jenny Marchant

So small businesses should really look into that before those .au domain names are released to the general public. Bruce, you must deal with small businesses, family enterprises every day. How tricky is this field for them, that idea of managing cyber security, an online presence, making sure it's safe, aboveboard and looking after their customers?

Bruce Billson

It is a big issue Jen and quite the challenge because, you know, who in the small business community wakes up in the morning saying, Gee, I really want to look after my cyber security? Not many. Like they don't wake up in the morning thinking, Gee, I can't wait to fill out my next BAS.

You know, the spark that got them going into the business is what they do well. It's what brings them joy. These sorts of things though are around the good governance of their business. And a lot of people aren't well versed in it, it might have some technical aspects to it, or people might feel frankly overwhelmed. But in this area of cyber security, small businesses are a target. And worryingly, a large number, if they're attacked, don't recover. They're not able to get back into business.

So, it can be really catastrophic. They can lose confidence of their customers, that their website is secure, or someone might take over their website and say, look, pay me a large lump of cash and I'll release the dirty code that I've dropped into your computer systems and you can get back to business.

And so they're quite vulnerable at that level. There are some simple steps that can be taken around identification verification, backups, the way in which passwords are made available and who has access to different parts of the system. So many turn to IT professionals to provide that support like they might turn to a specialist accountant. But it is an increasingly important area.

And you touched on it in your intro. More people are online doing business, looking for goods and services and businesses, looking to find customers they can delight. And there's more of that to come. We're still not at the same level of, say, e-commerce penetration that the UK is. So, you know, Australian customers will probably keep going to websites and businesses need a digital presence as part of their strategy.

Jenny Marchant

So, the .com.au remains, you're just saying you might want to think about grabbing .au for your domain name. We've had somebody here saying, well, it just feels like maybe a bit of a cash grab that, you know, you'd have to pay for another domain.

Bruce Billson

I'm kind of with them.

Jenny Marchant

Alright. I don't even know how much this kind of thing costs to be honest.

Bruce Billson

Oh, look, it's about seven or eight bucks if you go through, you know, a wholesaler. It can get up to into the twenties if you go through other companies. Firms like GoDaddy and others make domain names available. Linking back to your earlier question Jen, if you use an IT provider that helps you, they can help you navigate that.

Look, worryingly, I've never had a small business busting to get a shortened domain name, so that's one side of it. But here, I suppose, frankly, my warning is you might want to take a defensive position to make sure you're not leaving yourself vulnerable. And I suppose that leads into the observation your caller shared with you about it being a little bit of annoying extra expense you could have done without.

But here we are. I'm just trying to get the message out there, given that priority allocation for a like domain name for the shortened version, that runs out on the 20th of this month and then they're available to the public.

Dan Cox

And we appreciate you letting people know and talking to us this morning. Thank you, Bruce.

Bruce Billson

Fab to be with you. Have a great day.

Dan Cox

Thank you. Bruce Billson there, the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman. You have until the 20th of this month.