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## TRANSCRIPT

### **Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman Bruce Billson interview with Paul West.**

*ABC Radio South East NSW*

**Subject: Internet domain name changes**

#### **Paul West**

...compared to the Wild West, the wild World Wide Web when it comes to rules and regulations or a lack of them with spammers, phishers and fraudsters all trying to trick you into some sort of scheme. Now, there is a new warning for online businesses to protect their identity with changes to .com.au web addresses.

Bruce Billson is the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman and joins me on the phone this morning. G'day Bruce.

#### **Bruce Billson**

Awesome to be with you, Paul, and your listeners. And a bit of dusting on the high country while warm on the coast. Spring is here. What an interesting time of year and an interesting time for domain names.

#### **Paul West**

Yes, So, Bruce talk us through the changes that are happening to the .com.au web addresses.

#### **Bruce Billson**

Well, in terms of your intro Paul, the way this is managed is regulated by a non-government agency called auDA, au being the Australian shortened domain recognition address, and DA being domain administrators and auDA is introducing this, let's call it shortened version of domain names so you might have paul.com.au, you can now get paul.au

That's a change that sees a shortened version of a domain name. It takes out the .com, the .net, but it says hey I'm Paul and the au says I'm connected to Australia. The thinking behind that is that will open up a few more domain name opportunities. Some think it's mildly funkier Paul, and I'm sure that would appeal to you and me, for a bit of wokka wokka on your domain name.

But for many it represents a risk. So, there's some opportunities for people wanting domain names and maybe it's a shortened version. But the real thing I'm trying to draw attention to is it's also a time of risk and concern for small and family businesses that have an existing domain name. Now they've got until Tuesday to use what's called a priority allocation process to claim the shortened

version of their domain name because they've already got the longer one. And if they don't then it becomes available to the general public.

Now, a lot of great things on the South East have an attachment to a location, they've got a story about the business. The owners have got their own story. That authenticity and connectedness is often brought to life through their website. That can be the main channel they have with their customers. Imagine if someone came along and thought, Well, I'm going to nick that domain name, but the shortened version. Cut of that customer traffic, possibly mimic the legitimate website. This is why we're concerned that small businesses should protect their interests, and this is why even our top cyber security experts are saying this is a time where there's opportunity for cyber criminals to register your shortened .au domain name and attempt to impersonate your business.

So, we're just encouraging people to think about this time, take some steps, protect your interests. And if you would be unhappy if someone had a shortened version of your domain name, now's the time to snag it for yourself.

### **Paul West**

So Bruce, what can both business owners, website operators and consumers or the general public do to protect themselves against this kind of fraud?

### **Bruce Billson**

There's a range of measures around cyber protection and how you can make your sites secure. That's a broader part of a business leader's agenda where cyber threats need to be really taken seriously into account and you take measures to protect your interests.

I'm urging people to see this as a risk that they also need to protect against. And if they don't want to open up a chance for someone to mimic or emulate your website domain name, grab that domain name now. Grab it while there's that priority allocation. Because you've got the current name, the longer version, you've got until the 20th or Tuesday to grab the shorter version to a priority allocation. If you're worried about someone pinching that shortened version, grab it for yourself.

### **Paul West**

Why are the changes happening to the au web addresses? I mean is the system broke? Do we need to fix that? Or is it just adding, as you say, a bit of wokka wokka?

### **Bruce Billson**

I think it's more in the wokka wokka sense, because I've been working with the small and family business community for 30, 35 years. No one's ever stopped me in the street saying, can I have a shortened domain name. Some of the technical argument would be, well, it's fewer keystrokes.

But, if you're looking for Bombala, do you put the www.bombala, you know, motel.com.au or do you just put accommodation in Bombala? No one puts the whole URL in, the whole web address in when they're searching, so I'm not sure that shortened URL, shortened domain name, is a particularly compelling argument.

I know other countries have done it and that's probably why the non-government regulator in Australia is opening that opportunity. So, I think the arguments for doing it are a little bit in the eye of the beholder.

What I'm concerned about is the risks are real and the potential there is already from cyber threats to small and family businesses who know if they're struck, if they're hit, by a cybercriminal, the prospects of them recovering in their business are pretty grim.

This is the time to protect yourself. Don't leave that door open or a cybercriminal might find it easier to get in and mess with your web presence, your website and the relationship you have with your customers.

**Paul West**

I guess that's that notion of cyber security, something that we think about affecting governments and big organisations. But really, for cyber criminals, small businesses and family enterprises, they kind of like the low hanging fruit.

**Bruce Billson**

They're viewed by cyber criminals is as a rich target. Rich, not in terms of cash, but, you know, a target that might not have the full suite of protections that a big corporate might have. A target that might not know of options and might not have put in place contingency plans if they are hacked. A small business, they might think is - if someone gets a virus into this into their system - might be more inclined to pay a ransom or something like that.

I mean, these are these are the risks that exist now. And my concern about the shortened domain name is that most people don't even know this change is happening. I think that a public awareness campaign that auDA has run has been particularly lacking impact. So that's part of it. But secondly, the risk that it represents for people who, unbeknown to them, get someone who's pinched the shortened version of their domain name and starts emulating their website and using that as yet another channel to represent a cyber threat to a small and family business.

**Paul West**

Do you think this is an opportunity for the whoever sells domain names to grow their pie rather than it being any benefit to anyone, really, except maybe fraudsters?

**Bruce Billson**

Look, frankly, I think there's a bit of that in it. You know, a new product to sell. And frankly, most of the people I talk to aren't talking about some delicious new opportunity. They're talking about a new threat they need to protect against. So, you know, it might be six, eight, \$20 we're talking about per domain name, but, you know, that's still an expense that's still revenue going in.

For what upside? That's not particularly obvious to many people, but, you know, that decision has been made by the non-government regulator. I urged them to take more time and more care in communicating what this is about and raising awareness and delaying the opening of the shortened domain names to the general public for another year so that southeastabc.com.au could actually get southeastabc.au

Don't worry I've got that one, happy to sell it at a reasonable price to you (laughs).

**Paul West**

We'll talk after this interview Bruce (laughs).

### **Bruce Billson**

But you know, actually give people a chance to learn about this change and to weigh up what steps they want to take. Now, that was declined. My overtures weren't particularly persuasive. So, I thought the best thing I can do is get on my bike and try and raise the awareness and make sure small and family businesses are alert to this and have taken the actions that they think are appropriate.

### **Paul West**

Bruce, if someone wanted to get in touch or to learn more about the issue, what would be the best place for them to do that?

### **Bruce Billson**

Well, they can jump on our website. We haven't got a shorten domain name, so it's all the w's dot asbfeo - that's the acronym for Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman - .gov.au ([www.asbfeo.gov.au](http://www.asbfeo.gov.au)). Jump on there, there's resources there. The other thing they can do is if they're using an I.T. provider or someone's help them set up their website, shoot them a call and in addition to that, there's quite a number of of resellers and sellers of domain names. Your GoDaddy's of the world that you can jump on and punch in your current web address and see if the shortened one's available and reserve that for yourself. So, there's a few avenues there that people can pursue.

### **Paul West**

Bruce Billson, thanks so much for your time on a Friday morning.

### **Bruce Billson**

Fab to be with you, Paul, have a great South East Coast weekend.

### **Paul West**

Thank you. Bruce Billson, the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman. You're listening to ABC South East Breakfast.