

## Fears website owners will be stripped of anonymity under ICANN proposal

by Tim Biggs via zed - SMH *Friday, Jun 26 2015, 12:44am*

international / prose / post

If agency's proposal to ban proxy services goes through, anyone who operates a "commercial" website would have their phone number and physical address available publicly online.

ICANN, the agency that looks after global internet domain names, is considering a plan that would make it difficult for website owners to prevent their personal details from becoming publicly accessible online.

People or companies registering a domain are required to publicly list their details - including phone number and physical address - although many make use of "proxy" services that mask that information from regular web users. It's these services ICANN proposes to ban.

While the agency's proposal (which can be [read PDF form](#)) would apply only to "commercial" websites, many fear that could be interpreted to include any site that profits from content or advertisements.

The Electronic Frontier Federation claims the proposal is being pushed by US entertainment companies, frustrated at the anonymity many site owners enjoy.

"These and other companies want new tools to discover the identities of website owners whom they want to accuse of copyright and trademark infringement, preferably without a court order", the EFF wrote in a [blog post](#).

Anybody can perform a search to find the individual or company behind a website by entering its domain at the [Whois lookup site](#). Proxy services are required to hand over their clients' actual details if asked but ICANN's proposal, if approved later this year, would mean the contact details of anybody running a "commercial" site would be accessible directly to anybody on the web.

As the EFF points out, the change could be particularly worrying for owners of sites that regularly attract online hate, such as those tackling gender and sexuality issues. Under the proposed changes these site-owners - assuming they make money from ads on their sites - could find their personal addresses and details published on the web for anyone to see.

"I run a number of sites that allow me to earn a full-time living online ... I have been stalked, harassed, and have had the content of my sites stolen," reads one of the thousands of <https://forum.icann.org/lists/comments-ppsai-initial-05may15/threads.html> letters of protest sent to ICANN. "I have turned to using private WHOIS data to prevent unscrupulous internet users from finding my sites, home address, and phone number. Removing this privacy will only serve to put my home, life, and loved ones' lives and safety in danger.

"I'm a single female and live alone. I don't want my personal address available to every pervert/troll/angered citizen that wants it after visiting my small website," reads another letter. "Seemingly innocent topics, like vegan cooking, can spark outrage in certain individuals".

© 2015 Fairfax Media

<http://tinyurl.com/o7f5vsg>

---

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1687.html>