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### **How To Avoid Losing Your Community's Internet Domain Name?**

Almost all Ohio political subdivisions now have a presence on the World Wide Web in some form or another. Generally, web development and hosting agreements are signed by community administrators assuming that all intellectual property automatically belongs to the community because the community paid for it. Some communities may be surprised to learn that their website domain name (e.g. [www.mycommunity.com](http://www.mycommunity.com)) is not owned by them.

Recently our office was approached by a community to review an agreement related to the renewal of its web development and hosting plan. While this was a typical agreement, one provision that caught our attention was that the web developer had registered the domain name with the registrar in the developer's name and was simply licensing the domain name for a fee to the community. What was troublesome was that the agreement prohibited the community from using the domain name upon termination. Some disadvantages of this arrangement are: (1) the community could potentially lose valuable intellectual property which it rightfully should own; (2) the community could incur substantial expenses in reprinting its letterheads, business cards and educating the public; (3) the developer could post advertising or inappropriate material upon termination of the agreement that could create an appearance of improper endorsement by the community of certain businesses or information.

A simple solution to avoid this situation is to register a domain name with .gov top-level domain name instead of .com or .org. The General Services Administration is the federal agency responsible for oversight of the dot-gov internet domain name. To preserve the integrity of .gov name space, .gov domain names are limited to the United States government organizations at the federal, state and local level. The domain name the community selects must include the community name and a clear reference to the state in which the community is located. An example is [www.citynameohio.gov](http://www.citynameohio.gov).

Some advantages of registering the .gov domain name are as follows: (1) .gov conclusively establishes the website as the official website of the community because no private entity can register .gov as its top level domain name – there can be confusion if two or more entities use the same 2nd level domain name e.g. [community.com](http://community.com) or [community.org](http://community.org) or [community.net](http://community.net); (2) .gov is usually easier to remember as the official government site; (3) local governments are beginning to develop their websites as places for residents and business to go for government information and services; (4) All .gov Internet domains are registered for a 2-year eligibility period.

A .gov domain name also has its downsides. Some of the disadvantages of registering the .gov domain names are as follows: (1) The current cost of a .gov domain name is \$125 per year, renewable each year with another \$125 fee. .com and .org are usually around \$30-35 per year; (2) your community will have to update all the business cards, stationery, and other materials bearing the old domain names.