Internet Domain Auction Threatens 285 U.S. TV Stations

Domain names using the call letters of 285 U.S. TV stations -- including major affiliates of ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX -- will be auctioned to the public by GoDaddy.com over the next few days, according to an investigative report released by AndyPurdy.com.

Denver (PRWeb) July 18, 2008 -- Highly-prized 4-letter domain names using the call letters of 285 U.S. TV stations -- including major affiliates of ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX -- will be auctioned to the public by GoDaddy.com between Saturday, July 19, and Wednesday, July 23, according to an investigative report released today by AndyPurdy.com.

The TV call-letter domain auction is the largest ever of its kind. Releasing the domains to anonymous bidders around the world may have a serious impact on how American broadcasters maintain their online identity, particularly in light of the upcoming switch to digital broadcast.

The call-letter domains represent some of the most successful broadcast stations in the country, including 2 NBC owned-and-operated stations -- WCAU-TV Philadelphia and WTVJ-TV Miami -- and 3 CBS owned-and-operated stations -- KPIX-TV San Francisco, KTVT-TV Dallas/Ft. Worth, and KCCO-TV Minneapolis/St. Paul.

All of the domains for public auction use the .TV top-level domain, so auction winners will lay claim to domains such as WTTW.TV (using the call letters of the famous PBS station in Chicago), WXIA.TV (the NBC station in Atlanta), and WDIV.TV (the NBC affiliate in Detroit).

Up for grabs are the call letters for 88 existing ABC stations, 78 CBS stations, 59 NBC stations (including a station that is no longer active), 56 FOX stations, 1 PBS station, 1 CW affiliate, 1 MyNet affiliate, and 1 low power station in Washington, DC.

The auction list of TV station domains includes nearly 100 broadcast stations in the top 100 TV markets. Featured throughout are stations owned by such media giants as Gannett Company, Sinclair Broadcast Group, Tribune Company, Media General, Allbritton Communications Company, The E.W. Scripps Company, and LIN TV Corporation.

For several of the broadcast companies, this would not be the first time they face losing control over online call-letter branding. Over the years, LIN Television, CBS, Capital Broadcasting, Viacom, Paramount, and others have filed complaints with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to claim domains registered by unrelated parties.

All 285 domains are currently registered under the name of a Florida resident who has no apparent ties to the broadcasting industry. The domains are now set to expire later this month, most likely because the registrant failed to pay the annual $39.99 renewal fee for each of the domains.

Ironically, it was the bulk expiration of the domains that led to the discovery of the call-letter trove by

AndyPurdy.com. The sheer number of simultaneous registrations dispells any notion that it is mere coincidence that the 4-letter combinations are identical to the call letters of 285 U.S. television stations.

According to GoDaddy's contract with the registrant, the well-known Internet registrar has the right to put the expiring domains up for public auction. There are 7 online auction sessions scheduled to automatically close at 7 different times between Saturday morning and Wednesday afternoon. Bidding for each domain starts at only $10, and bids can be placed by anyone on the Internet until the posted deadlines.

Bids are already being placed anonymously on many of the domains. To prevent last-second preemptive bidding by aggressive bidders, GoDaddy extends each auction 2 minutes past the last bid. This gives any other bidder at least 2 minutes to post another bid, which, in turn, may further extend the auction.

Winners of the TV call-letter domains must in addition pay the one-year $39.99 renewal fee for each domain acquired.

Also according to the GoDaddy.com contract, the current registrant retains certain rights even beyond the close of each auction. For a period of about 7 days after the auctions, the current registrant will still have the right to redeem and recapture any of the domains by paying a premium to GoDaddy.com. In those cases, auction winners would no longer be able to claim a domain, however, they would receive a refund from GoDaddy of monies advanced for the domain.

The report posted at AndyPurdy.com includes a complete list of all broadcast stations represented in the auction, along with links to 16 selected WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center Administrative Panel Decisions that shed light on abusive registration of media-related domains.

The report also features an in-depth auction research tool listing the 7 auction sessions with links to bidding information for each of the 285 domains, and links to backgrounder information on each of the 285 broadcast stations.

Andy Purdy, publisher of the AndyPurdy.com site, served as the U.S. cyber security "czar" for two years in his role heading the Department of Homeland Security's National Cyber Security Division/US-CERT. Before joining DHS in 2003, Mr. Purdy served as a member of the White House staff and helped to draft The National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace. AndyPurdy.com derives no income from the sale of any domains listed and has no financial interest in the domains or corresponding stations. Also, AndyPurdy.com cannot guarantee the accuracy of any of the information provided in the report, as all of the auction-related data may be subject to change without notice. Comments and suggestions from members of the broadcasting industry are most welcome.

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Contact Information
John Simmons
AndyPurdy.com
http://www.AndyPurdy.com
(303) 548-3816

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