.ie **We are Ireland online**

.IE Domain Profile Report 2022

January–June

An urgent call for post-Covid data on digital adoption

The .IE Domain Profile Report is an analysis of new .ie domain registrations and the .ie database. During the two years of the pandemic more than 120,000 new .ie domain names were registered. This is a very significant development.

This report clearly illustrates the nation's digital intent, county-by-county, in 2020 and 2021, reflecting a narrowing of the digital divide. However, there are major gaps in our understanding of the full extent of digital transformation across the country during the two years of on/off lockdowns.

"Any pre-2019 data we have on digital usage is chronically out of date. Post-Covid data is essential for policymakers and local leaders, to help them understand what has happened, and make better decisions around resource allocation, development of programmes and supports needed for SMEs and towns during the digital decade....."

David Curtin, CEO at the .IE Digital Town Awards ceremony June 2022, issuing an urgent call for post-Covid data.

We urgently need updated data in order to:

▶ Measure **SME productivity** - SMEs are now using websites, apps, digital banking, platforms in the Cloud. They are selling using click & collect, outsourcing fulfilment & deliveries. These eliminate wasteful commuting, paper workflows and queuing by their customers.

▶ Measure **consumers' preferences and behaviours** - they are alternating between digital and in-store buying and browsing.

▶ Measure the extent of the **transformation of professional service delivery** – estate agents, architects, designers, legal professionals, pharmacists, GPs - are all digitally transforming their businesses by using single-purpose apps, platforms, Zoom & mobile commerce.

▶ Measure **citizen's forced adoption of digital tools** and websites - they are accessing for religious services, virtual entertainment events, social gatherings and financial transactions online – and in particular to measure the remaining digital divides between old and young, urban and rural – so that digital skills training can be targeted and focused.

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Since our .IE Domain Profile Report H1 2021, Government has issued Strategy documents – on Town Centre First, Remote Working and Harnessing Digital – all aligned with the EU Digital Decade strategy. It is extremely helpful to have data from the April 2022 Census – where interim results shared by the CSO shows that the number of people living in rural areas has increased by more than a ¼ of a million since 1996. Some 1.75 million people lived in rural areas in 2016. According to eminent economist Dan O'Brien, "What happened to the world of work as a result of the pandemic will, in the fullness of time, come to be viewed as the biggest ever sudden change in the functioning of the labour market….".

"….the liberation from the nine to five, Monday to Friday, rat race will have geographical consequences.

For many workers, the wastefulness of commuting to and from work 10 times a week has been highlighted. A lot of people simply don't want to do it any more, while many employers have come to see that having all staff in one place is simply not necessary. With ever more expensive energy and the impact commuting has on the environment, more working from home is a no-brainer. It is here to stay………"

Dan O'Brien, Economist: "Census confirms that reports of death of rural Ireland are greatly exaggerated" Business Post June 26, 2022

The .IE Tipping Point Report 2022 also showed that just over half (54%) of SMEs surveyed are planning a significant digital investment in the next 5 years, with most focusing on launching a new website or improving their existing one.

The Connected Hubs network, launched last year as part of the Government's policy to support remote working, to encourage workers to relocate outside of the big cities and assist with reinvigorating rural towns is expected to benefit local SMEs. **In addition, over 18,000 Trading Online Vouchers were approved by LEOs since 2020, enabling SMEs to get online or improve their online presence.** New programmes and initiatives will be needed to reflect the post-Covid digital transformation. A whole-of-Government response will be essential.

As digital usage expands rapidly, keeping the .ie namespace safe from cyber criminals is a key focus for us, the national registry. Through our policies and protocols, we proactively tackle technical DNS abuse in the .ie namespace and we are dedicated to fighting malware and phishing. Together with our partners we are enabling a better Ireland online through our technical and policy-based guardianship of the national critical infrastructure.

"New domain registrations are a forward economic indicator of future digital activity. It's an important metric for policy makers. Entries to our .IE Digital Town Awards are a good measure of community spirit and enthusiasm for digital solutions to a town's issues and problems. These are both actionable metrics for town leaders and policy makers".

Oonagh McCutcheon, National Director .IE Digital Town Programme

Along with analysing the countries and counties of .ie domain registration, this report also examines the broader .ie ecosystem, including domain usage, the breakdown of Content Management System (CMS) usage by .ie website owners, .ie domain security features, keyword usage in new .ie domain registrations, .ie website categorisation and .ie market share and international growth.

Despite these insights, new post-Covid data is urgently needed. Policymakers understanding of what has happened in the digital sphere during the pandemic years has yet to emerge. We are looking forward to working with partners and government bodies to help figure this out.

David Curtin Chief Executive, .IE

54%
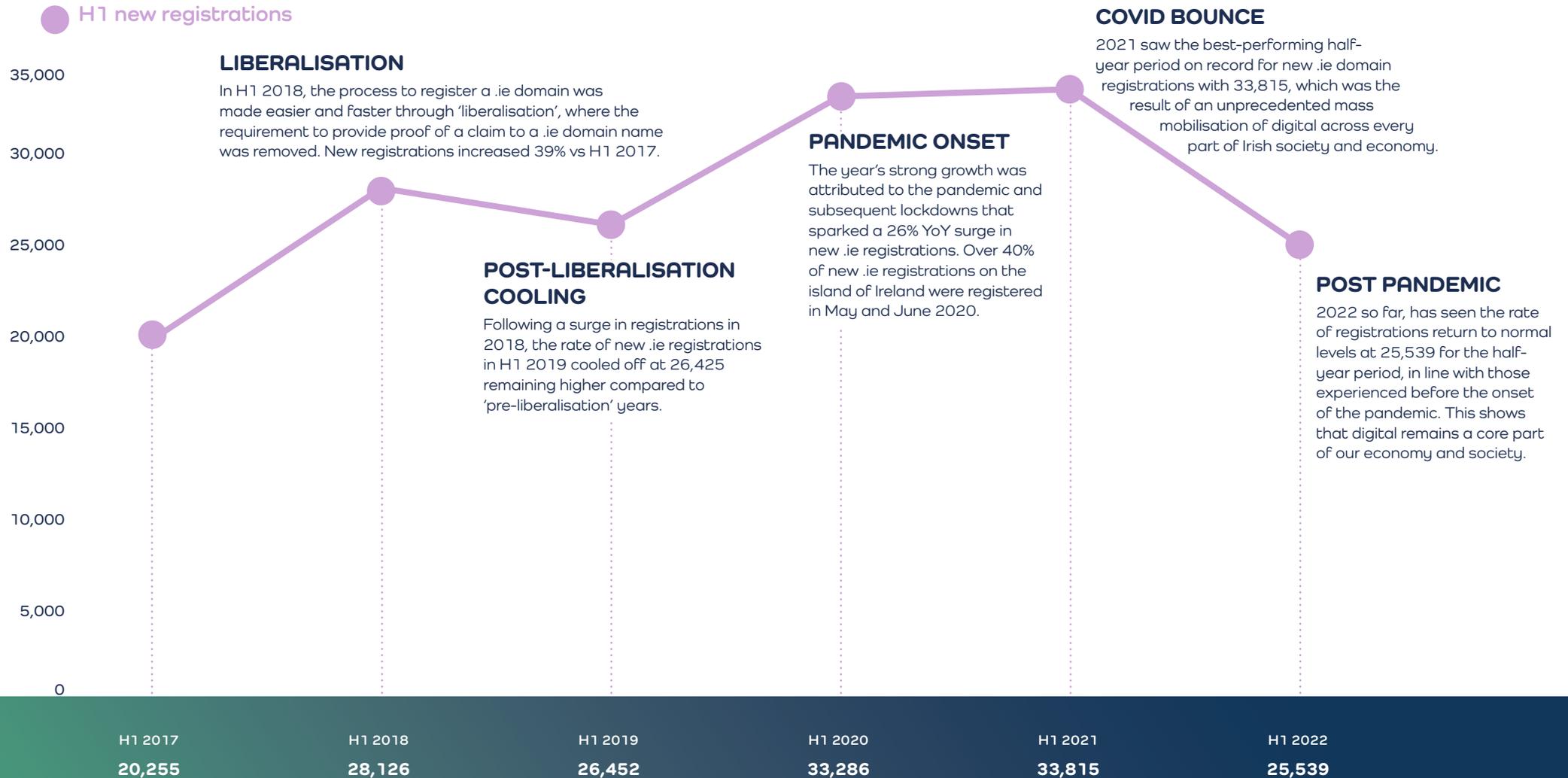of SMEs plan significant digital investment in the next 5 years

Source: .IE Tipping Point Report 2022

18,000
Trading Online Vouchers approved since 2020

Timeline of new .ie registrations 2017–2022

After two separate surges of growth in the past five years, cooling off periods followed and registrations remained steady. Since the record-breaking highs in .ie registrations through the pandemic, this cooling off period is evident.

● H1 new registrations

LIBERALISATION

In H1 2018, the process to register a .ie domain was made easier and faster through 'liberalisation', where the requirement to provide proof of a claim to a .ie domain name was removed. New registrations increased 39% vs H1 2017.

POST-LIBERALISATION COOLING

Following a surge in registrations in 2018, the rate of new .ie registrations in H1 2019 cooled off at 26,425 remaining higher compared to 'pre-liberalisation' years.

PANDEMIC ONSET

The year's strong growth was attributed to the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns that sparked a 26% YoY surge in new .ie registrations. Over 40% of new .ie registrations on the island of Ireland were registered in May and June 2020.

COVID BOUNCE

2021 saw the best-performing half-year period on record for new .ie domain registrations with 33,815, which was the result of an unprecedented mass mobilisation of digital across every part of Irish society and economy.

POST PANDEMIC

2022 so far, has seen the rate of registrations return to normal levels at 25,539 for the half-year period, in line with those experienced before the onset of the pandemic. This shows that digital remains a core part of our economy and society.

	H1 2017	H1 2018	H1 2019	H1 2020	H1 2021	H1 2022
	20,255	28,126	26,452	33,286	33,815	25,539

Y-axis values: 0, 5,000, 10,000, 15,000, 20,000, 25,000, 30,000, 35,000

Cybersecurity – a key focus for the .ie namespace

.IE is designated as an Operator of Essential Services (OES) under the Network and Information Systems (NIS) directive. As one of the guardians of Ireland's national critical internet infrastructure, the .ie namespace, we are acutely aware of helping to protect Irish consumers and SMEs from cyber criminals.

We take a number of steps to keep the .ie domain as safe as possible and this ensures that the level of security threat to .ie websites is a lot lower than other top level domains, such as .com.

▶ **Manually review .ie applications:** Only individuals and businesses with a provable connection to Ireland can register a .ie domain, and applications from new customers are manually reviewed to ensure that they meet this requirement. This process keeps the .ie domain largely free from registrations by bad actors for their quick-moving scams and other illegal activities that unmanaged domains cannot control as easily.

▶ **Consumer protection protocols:** We have established protocols with regulators to address online illegality and to permit 'take-down' of .ie websites under certain circumstances. There is a Regulatory Authority Protocol for dealing with illegal content on .ie websites. The regulatory authorities with whom we engage include the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, the Central Bank and the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau, amongst others.

▶ **Monthly scans:** We do a scan of the .ie zone file every month, which notifies us of suspicious activity, which is an important control.

▶ **Proactively respond to online abuse:** We employ **Netcraft**, who provide internet security services, including cybercrime disruption. These services allow us to proactively respond to online abuse issues, such as websites that are hosting malware, phishing or botnets. Netcraft notifies our Registrars (companies that sell and manage .ie domains on our behalf) and the .ie domain holder. The domain holder can then, with the help of their Registrar or Hosting provider, take the required corrective action. Netcraft will monitor the website post the fix to ensure the issue is resolved. This service is invaluable as it helps innocent victims, such as SMEs who might be unaware that they have experienced a cyberattack and can take the required remediation action.
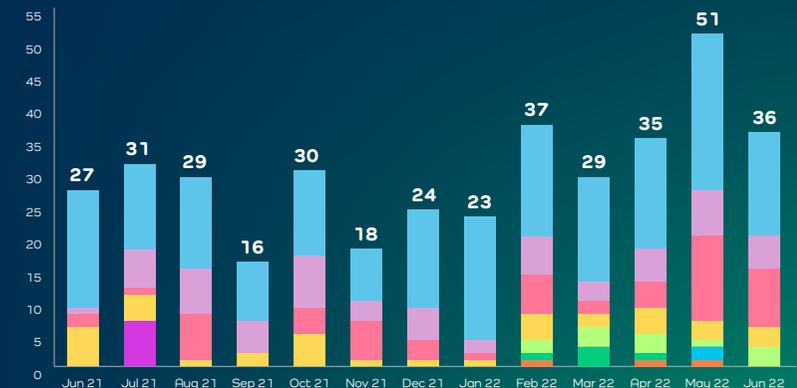
Number of cybersecurity attacks identified

211
January – June 2022

386
June 2021 – June 2022

Legend:
- Phishing URL
- Web Shell
- Web-Inject Malware URL
- Shopping Site Skimmer
- Defaced Website
- Cryptocurrency Miner
- Fake Game Scam
- Phishing Dropsite
- Other Attack Types

Source: Netcraft monitoring service of .ie domains

Use of domain security features

We regularly advise .ie domain holders, especially SMEs, to integrate additional third-party security features, such as website security certificates and DNS Security Extensions.

65%

of content-rich .ie websites are secured with a security certificate

Security certificates encrypt the communication between the website and its visitors. This means that cyber criminals cannot intercept a customer's data. Websites with a security certificate have URLs that begin with https://

567

.ie domains are secured with DNSSEC (+61% YoY)

DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC) uses cryptography to add an extra layer of security to a .ie domain.

50

.ie domains are secured with Registry Lock (+11% YoY)

Registry Lock is a service which requires a passphrase, thereby preventing unauthorised or unwanted changes to a .ie domain. The aim of the service is to minimise the risk of unauthorised changes, terminations or transfers, in cases where a user's information has been leaked or systems are hacked. With cybercrime on the increase, it is important that all businesses and in particular, brand managers use this service to improve their website's security.

Analysis of .ie domain database and growth

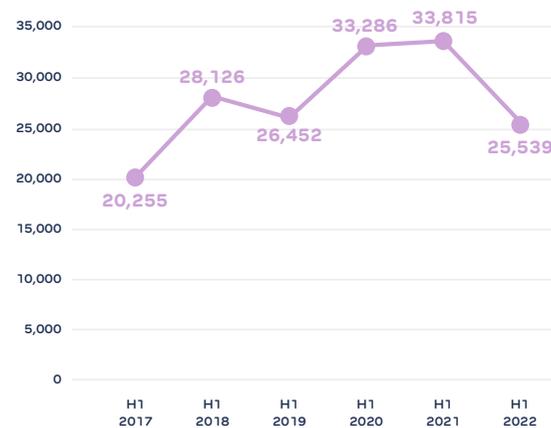**New .ie registrations return to pre-pandemic levels.**

There were **332,642** .ie domains in the database at the end of H1 2022 (30 June), a **2.6%** increase on the same period last year. The database has grown **21.8%** compared with the same period 3 years ago before the onset of the pandemic (H1 2019).

New .ie domain registrations decreased by **24.5%** in H1 2022 when compared with H1 2021. Following a surge in registrations during the pandemic and government-imposed restrictions, a slowing down in the rate of new .ie registrations signalled a return to normal growth levels seen pre-pandemic. A small decrease of **3.5%** was seen H1 2022 vs H1 2019.

+2.6%
growth in .ie database
(H1 2022 vs H1 2021)

-24.5%
new .ie registrations
(H1 2022 vs H1 2021)

TOTAL DATABASE

Period	Value
H1 2022	332,642
H1 2021	324,074
H1 2020	295,794
H1 2019	273,156
H1 2018	252,222
H1 2017	230,611

NEW REGISTRATIONS

Period	Value
H1 2017	20,255
H1 2018	28,126
H1 2019	26,452
H1 2020	33,286
H1 2021	33,815
H1 2022	25,539

Analysis of .ie domains by geography

Registered .ie domains on the island of Ireland

Republic of Ireland
298,026

Northern Ireland
4,807

Island of Ireland
302,833

The majority of internationally registered .ie domains come from **Great Britain**. New registrations declined year-on-year by 38% in H1 2022, from 792 to 491.

Bulgaria had the second-highest number of new internationally registered .ie domains in H1 2022, which also saw a decline of 3% down to 434. **United States** had the third highest with 126, a 53% decline, followed by **Germany** with 71.

Individuals or organisations that register a .ie domain from overseas either have business operations and customers in Ireland or can prove another type of professional or personal connection to Ireland. The registered owner is traceable, thanks to the pre-registration checks on corporate identity and connection to Ireland.

91%
of all .ie domains are registered on the island of Ireland.

23,809
new .ie domains registered on the island of Ireland in H1 2022
-24.3%
vs H1 2021

1,730
new .ie domains registered internationally in H1 2022
-27.1%
vs H1 2021

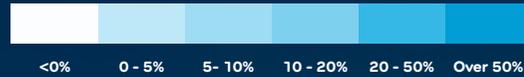## Total number of internationally registered .ie domains

International
29,809

Top 3 international registrants:

Great Britain
11,012

United States
5,153

Germany
2,512

Analysis of .ie domains by county

% difference in new .ie registrations H1 2022 vs H1 2019

<0%	0 - 5%	5 - 10%	10 - 20%	20 - 50%	Over 50%

Monaghan

Monaghan also performed well with a 16.8% increase in new .ie domains registrations H1 2022 vs H1 2019, coming in fifth overall.

Mayo

Mayo had the largest percentage growth (+20.7%) in new .ie domain registrations for any county in the West of Ireland, H1 2022 vs H1 2019.

Tipperary

With 34.9% growth in new .ie domain registrations, H1 2022 vs pre-pandemic H1 2019, Tipperary came in second.
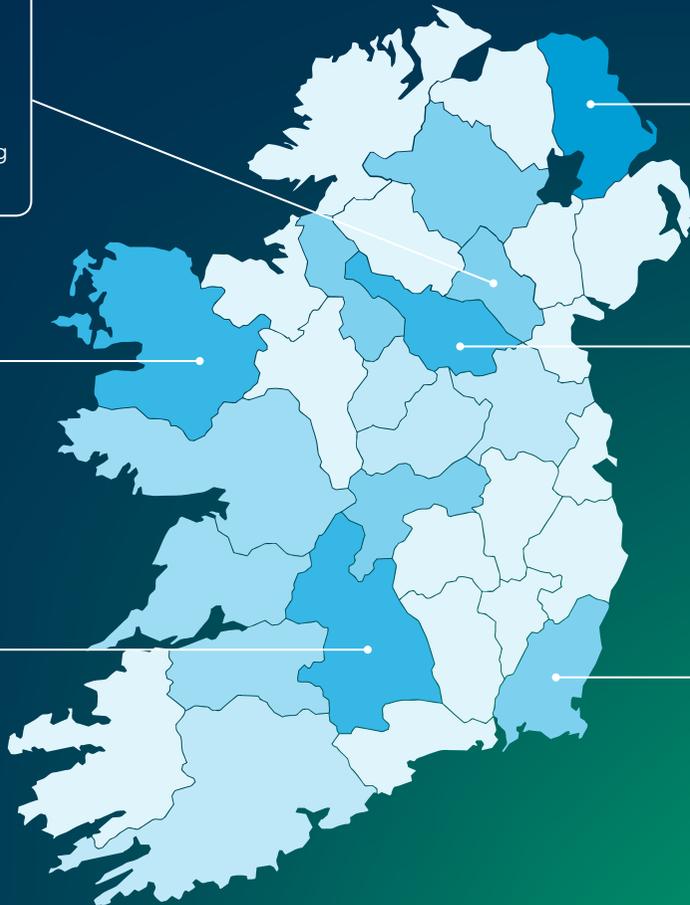
Antrim

Antrim recorded the largest percentage growth (+63%) in new .ie domain registrations in H1 2022 compared to H1 2019.

Cavan

Amongst the border counties, Cavan had the largest percentage growth (+22.5%) in new .ie domains registrations H1 2022 vs H1 2019.

Wexford

Wexford came out on top in the South-East with a 15.7% increase in new .ie domain registrations H1 2022 vs H1 2019.

County	Island of Ireland database % share	New registrations H1 2022	difference vs pre-pandemic H1 2019
Antrim	0.57%	163	63.0%
Armagh	0.17%	23	-42.5%
Carlow	1.61%	407	-4.7%
Cavan	0.92%	278	22.5%
Clare	1.75%	444	8.6%
Cork	8.74%	2,161	2.5%
Derry	0.18%	36	-16.3%
Donegal	1.66%	445	-9.6%
Down	0.41%	113	-1.7%
Dublin	43.30%	9,065	-9.9%
Fermanagh	0.06%	11	-15.4%
Galway	4.57%	1,236	6.6%
Kerry	2.16%	557	-9.1%
Kildare	4.42%	1,077	-19.9%
Kilkenny	1.48%	441	-0.9%
Laois	1.05%	275	-24.7%
Leitrim	0.46%	114	12.9%
Limerick	2.97%	774	8.6%
Longford	0.57%	120	2.6%
Louth	2.20%	567	-4.1%
Mayo	2.08%	554	20.7%
Meath	3.72%	1,024	2.9%
Monaghan	0.68%	153	16.8%
Offaly	0.91%	225	14.8%
Roscommon	0.82%	215	-3.2%
Sligo	1.07%	233	-2.9%
Tipperary	1.90%	557	34.9%
Tyrone	0.19%	44	10.0%
Waterford	1.85%	489	-5.6%
Westmeath	1.30%	365	1.1%
Wexford	2.62%	775	15.7%
Wicklow	3.61%	868	-7.8%
Total	**100%**	**23,809**	**-3.5%**

Analysis of .ie domain ecosystem

H1 2022 in keywords

Ireland overview

Identity with 'Place' proved very popular for new .ie registrations:

▶ **'Ireland'** was the top keyword with **'Dublin'** second and **'Irish'** third.

▶ 17 counties had their **county name** as one of their top 3 keywords.

▶ **'Kingdom'** featured in the top 3 for Kerry as did **'Mullingar'** for Westmeath, and **'Wild'** and **'Atlantic'** for Sligo.

Across the country

These keywords are in the top 3 for the listed county in new .ie registrations:

'Retrofits' Tipperary	**'Coaching'** Cork
'Boat' Donegal	**'Roofing'** Carlow

Limerick spotlight

The top three keywords in new .ie registrations with a content-rich website were all health-related:

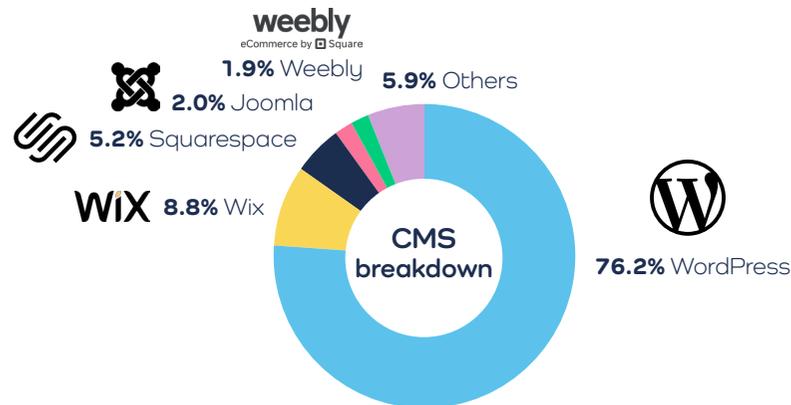**knee** **surgeon** **hip**

.ie domain usage

Website:
48%
of all .ie domains have a content-rich website

Website content management system (CMS):
59%
of .ie domains with a content-rich website use a CMS.

CMS breakdown

- 1.9% Weebly
- 2.0% Joomla
- 5.9% Others
- 5.2% Squarespace
- 8.8% Wix
- 76.2% WordPress

Wix grew its share of the total, while Wordpress remained the most popular CMS.

E-commerce functionality
23%
of content rich .ie websites are e-commerce enabled

These are websites that have a plugin which provides e-commerce functionality, including automated bookings and reservations.

Payment processors

Our analysis shows that most .ie websites have more than one payment processor. The top 3 processors on .ie websites are:

59%	43%	38%
Apple Pay	**Visa**	**American Express**

Number of new .ie registrations with a fada

H1 2022 → **62**

.ie websites by content categorisation

Top categories 2022

Category	%
Business & Industrial	17.0%
Home & Garden	7.5%
Arts & Entertainment	5.8%
Health	5.5%
Food & Drink	4.9%
Jobs & Education	4.2%
Shopping	3.7%
People & Society	3.5%
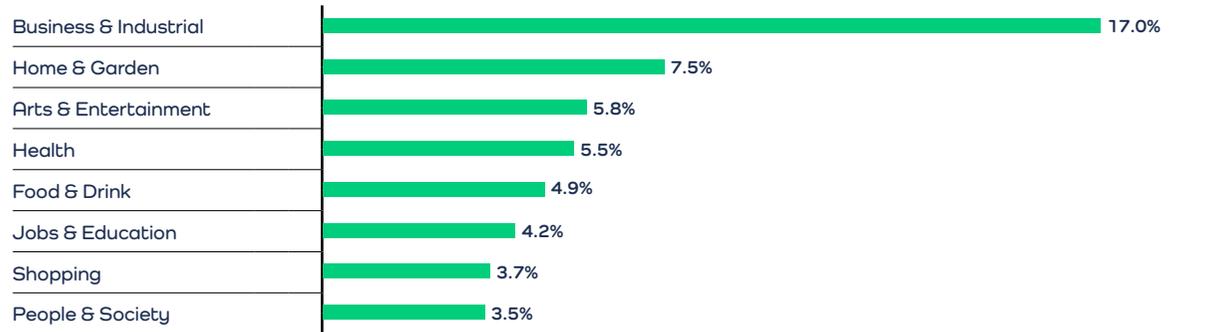
% share of .ie websites July 2022

Categories with biggest growth year-on-year

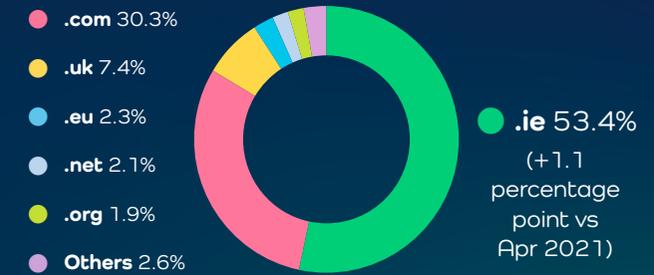| Category	%
Computers & Electronics	52.7%
Online Communities	51.7%
Games	49.0%
Travel	48.8%
News	48.0%
Finance	44.7%
Science	40.7%

% growth July 2022 vs July 2021

.ie domains with a content-rich website were analysed using Google Natural Language Processing classification. The analysis counts one domain per category, the most probable category.

Market share

(of Ireland's hosted domains, by top-level domain)

- **.com** 30.3%
- **.uk** 7.4%
- **.eu** 2.3%
- **.net** 2.1%
- **.org** 1.9%
- **Others** 2.6%

.ie 53.4% (+1.1 percentage point vs Apr 2021)

Source: HosterStats, April 2022 & April 2021

Top 10 country code top-level domain growth across Europe

.pt +9.7% YoY	.dk +7.4% YoY	.fr +3.7% YoY	.at +3.2% YoY	.hu +3.1% YoY
.fi +3.0% YoY	.ch +2.9% YoY	.cz +2.7% YoY	.ie* +2.6% YoY	.sk +2.4% YoY

Source: CENTR, June 2022 / *.IE data

About .IE

.IE is the national registry for .ie domain names and the trusted and progressive guardian of Ireland's unique online .ie address. Our purpose is to enable and empower people, communities and businesses across Ireland to thrive online.

We operate the domain name system (**DNS**) for the .ie namespace, facilitate an **independent dispute resolution service**, and operate a public **WHOIS** lookup service for .ie domains.

In cooperation with our Registrars, technical partners and stakeholders, we help advance Ireland's internet ecosystem. Good governance is evidenced in our **policy development process** for the .ie namespace, which follows a bottom-up, consensus-driven approach through a multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Committee.

At .IE we are committed to digital advocacy for local towns, communities and SMEs. Through stakeholder engagement initiatives such as **.IE Digital Town** programme, we work with and support SMEs' organisations to improve their members' online presence and e-commerce capabilities so they can unlock the power of the internet to boost sales and productivity.

We also produce fact-based research for the business community and policymakers, such as the **.IE Domain Profile Report** and the **.IE Tipping Point**, which charts the attitudes to digital of Irish SMEs and consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are over 330,000 .ie domain names registered. Since March 2018, it is easier and faster to register a .ie domain. As part of the domain registration process, every applicant must provide tangible evidence of its identity and its connection to Ireland.

www.weare.ie

.ie
We are Ireland online

.IE is the trading name of IE Domain Registry CLG, company number 315315.

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