

PRESS RELEASE

.ie Domain Profile Report 2023 highlights strength of .ie domain cybersecurity

Considerably lower levels of cyber threats detected on .ie domains compared with international top-level domains .com, .eu and .uk

- 552 cyber-attacks detected on .ie domains in 2023 from a total database of close to 330,000 domains
- .ie is concerned that Ireland's digital services sector is not yet ready for the imminent changes from EU Cyber Directives
- Exponential Covid growth tapers off with modest growth of new .ie domain registrations in 2023, up 0.34% to 48,689 on 2022
- Market leader .ie holds 54.3% of Ireland's hosted domains, 25 percentage points ahead of .com (29.3%) while .uk holds a 7.3% share
- Almost nine in ten (88.57%) .ie websites do not have e-commerce functionality
- Donegal (34.55%) and Monaghan (22.6%) had the highest regional growth in .ie domains

Thursday 25th January 2024; The latest .ie Domain Profile Report 2023, launched today, reveals that 48,689 new domains were registered up to 31st December 2023, a modest increase of 0.34% on the previous year. These new domains take the total .ie database to 328,245, representing a marginally small net reduction on 2022. Now in its ninth year, the Report is an annual exploration of the .ie database and is published by .ie, the national registry for .ie domain names. It analyses the entire database, sectors domains are operating in and counties and countries they are registered in. It also highlights several regulatory changes that will come into effect in 2024 and which will impact the wider digital landscape.

Strength of .ie cybersecurity services

The .ie Domain Profile Report shows a slight increase in the number of cyberattacks (552 in 2023) on the .ie namespace vs 2022. These attacks ranged from phishing, web shell and website defamation to shopping site skimmers and survey scams. Phishing scams were by far the most prevalent of all cyber security attacks, representing 49% of the overall total. However, .ie websites boast significantly lower levels of spam and cyber threats, such as phishing, malware and botnets, when compared to other top-level domains like .com on an international scale. The SpamHaus Project, an international non-profit organisation that tracks spam and related cyber threats such as phishing, malware and botnets, collates a Badness Index for top level domains, with .ie domains ranking at 0.1% / 0.00.

Speaking on keeping the domain as safe as possible for users, **David Curtin, Chief Executive .ie** said *'We remain concerned that cyber-crime and online fraud continue to be a drag on digital adoption and risks undermining consumer confidence in e-commerce and digital business. As part of a range of responses, our data analytics team is developing scorecards, dashboards and tools to provide insights for policymakers and practitioners into the profile and progression of website/email/domain security. We take great pride in the level of rigour in our domain registration and management process. This, paired with our monitoring of active domains using the Netcraft service, has contributed to our excellent scoring in the SpamHaus ratings. This service gives reassurance to our .ie domain holders who may otherwise not be aware that they are an innocent victim of malicious hackers.'*

Impending cyber regulations impacting Ireland's digital services

2024 will see a number of different EU cyber regulations come into effect with significant implications for Ireland's digital services sector. The NIS2 Directive, which has a mandatory implementation date of October 2024, has the

potential to overwhelm regulators in Ireland. NIS2 aims to protect critical organisations and infrastructure within the EU from cyber threats with the goal of achieving a high level of common security across the EU. To fulfil its objective, the NIS2 Directive focusses on organisations that operate in critical sectors, as they are essential for the proper functioning of society and, for this very reason, are often the primary target of cyber-attacks. It has been estimated that the expanded scope of NIS2 could encompass up to 2,500- 3,000 entities in Ireland across fifteen sectors including manufacturing, public administration, food, water, and waste management and providers of public electronic communications networks or services.

David Curtin expressed his concern that Ireland’s digital services sector is not yet ready for the changes which NIS2 will introduce, while also highlighting .ie’s proactive steps to support with implementation , *“The impact of NIS2 risks bringing severe unintended consequences, particularly for small companies in Ireland and across Europe. Our registrars and resellers will need to keep a dedicated database of complete and accurate information on any and all registrants which is going to add an extra level of compliance and responsibility on under-resourced organisations. In order for us to support the successful implementation of NIS2 across Ireland, our multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Committee will help to navigate the rough regulatory waters ahead. A dedicated working group focus on advocacy, alignment and awareness building’.*

Low Levels of eCommerce Functionality across .ie domain database

Over one in three (31.8%) of new .ie domain registrants declared themselves as ‘commercial’ in 2023 while just over one in ten (11.43%) .ie domains have e-commerce functionality on their websites. Digitalisation is essential to business and it is clear that Ireland needs to do more to help SMEs survive and thrive online.

Minister of State at the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Neale Richmond said, *“This report from .ie highlights just how important digitalisation and e-commerce is for Irish businesses. While many companies may have an online presence, be that a ‘shop window’ or click and collect, the option to shop online is hugely important for customers both in Ireland and abroad. This will open businesses up to new markets and more customers. There are a number of supports available for businesses of all sizes who want to improve their digital footprint, from the Local Enterprise Office to Enterprise Ireland, and I would encourage all businesses to avail of these as the opportunities that come with an enhanced online presence are endless.”*

That being said, there has been a considerable increase in the use of third party security features with 70% of content-rich .ie websites now being secured with a security certificate (+18.1% YoY).

‘Business and Industrial’ websites are the most popular category of .ie domains with 16.6% of the overall total. That is followed by ‘home & garden’ with 7.9%, arts and entertainment (5.8%) while travel (2.8%), finance (3%) and autos & vehicles are amongst the least popular categories.

Post-Covid Status

The extent of digital transformation during the Covid period has been well documented with many organisations seeking to establish an online presence when the pandemic hit. The starting point for many was to use websites and email for communicating with customers. According to the .ie Domain Profile Report 2023, of the 115,812 domains registered between 31st March 2020 and 31st December 2021, less than half (49.65%) remain active, 57,033 domains (49.25%) have been deleted, 1,130 have been suspended and 153 are pending deletion.

Additional Domain Database Findings

Donegal recorded the largest percentage growth (+34.55%) in new .ie domain registrations compared to 2022. Amongst the border counties, Sligo has shown strong growth of 16.91% in 2023 vs 2022. In Leinster, Westmeath leads the way with 18.72 % YoY growth compared to 2022 while Waterford also features in the top performers with a 16.65% increase in new .ie domain registrations 2023 vs 2022.

Keywords used in domain registrations continue to provide interesting insights as 24 counties had their county name and/or Ireland as one of their top keywords in 2023. Green, Solar, Fest, Kebab and Pizza are among the other top keywords used.

The .ie Domain Profile Report 2023 can be viewed here.

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For more information please contact:

Fiona Askin	fiona@thereputationsagency.ie	086 1615002
Eleanor Guinan	eleanor@thereputationsagency.ie	087 3695597

About .ie

As the trusted national registry for 330,000 domain names, .ie protects Ireland's unique online identity and empowers people, communities and businesses connected with Ireland to thrive and prosper online.

A positive driving force in Ireland's digital economy, .ie serves as a profit for good organisation with a mission to elevate Ireland's digital identity by providing the Irish online community with a trusted, resilient and accessible .ie internet domain.

Working with strategic partners, .ie promotes and invests in digital adoption and advocacy initiatives - including the .ie Digital Town Blueprint and Awards for local towns, communities and SMEs.

A designated Operator of Essential Services (OES) under the EU Cyber Directive, .ie fulfils a pivotal role in maintaining the security and reliability of part of Ireland's digital infrastructure. For more information visit weare.ie