Pandemic prompts "mass mobilisation of digital" across economy and society as businesses, services, and community groups register highest ever number of .ie domains — new report

New .ie domain registrations peaked in May, 6 weeks after the closure of non-essential retail, according to new 2020 .IE Domain Profile Report

- **65,113 new .ie domains registered in 2020, the highest ever figure**
- **New .ie domain registrations increased YOY in every county in Ireland for the first time ever**
- **Pandemic and health-related keywords common in new .ie web addresses: uses of "mental health" and "counselling" increased 105% year-on-year**
- **General health-related keywords, such as "doctor", "pharmacy", and "fitness", increased 92% year-on-year**
- **.IE CEO: "A local .ie web address has been a lifeline. It has also advantageously positioned many businesses for a more digitally integrated post-Covid-19 economy."**

65,113 new .ie domains were registered in 2020, the highest ever figure and an almost 30% increase on 2019, according to the latest edition of the .IE Domain Profile Report, which explores and analyses the .ie database.

Peaks and troughs in new .ie registrations generally followed the Government's restrictions on travel and business. The highest peak occurred **in May, when 7,003 new .ie domains were registered**, the highest number ever registered in a single month.

This occurred **approximately 6 weeks after the closure of non-essential retail**. This peak began to drop off from June, as restrictions eased, but moved up sharply in October, peaking again in November corresponding to the announcement of the second national lockdown.

David Curtin, Chief Executive of .IE, Ireland's national registry for .ie domains, says that the increase demonstrates a **"mass mobilisation of digital in every part of the economy and society"** in response to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Businesses migrated online, many for the first time, in direct response to the lockdowns," he said. "They realised that having an online presence, and in many cases e-commerce capabilities, would at the very least minimise the damage of reduced or non-existent footfall.

"Some businesses have fully embraced digital, using multiple platforms to communicate with and sell to their customers. For example, some restaurants are using their own websites to advertise special offers but redirect customers to third-party apps and platforms for food ordering. Delivery is then outsourced. Many who have pivoted their business model in this way have reaped the rewards and stayed afloat, even thrived, in an intensely challenging period."

Mr Curtin said that the Central Bank recognises new .ie registrations as a forward indicator of economic health. On this metric it was clear: Irish businesses and services have proved to be resilient and adaptable in 2020.

"While new company *start-ups* fell in 2020 overall because of the pandemic, the .IE Domain Profile Report indicates that entrepreneurs and new businesses are taking a 'digital-first' approach and ensuring that they secure their preferred online identity with a .ie domain name, before they register their company as a legal entity.

"A local .ie web address has therefore been a lifeline; a way to mitigate the worst effects of the physical lockdown, including permanent closure. It has also advantageously positioned many businesses and services for a more digitally integrated post-Covid-19 economy."

For the first time ever, **every county in Ireland recorded an increase in .ie domain registrations**. Counties Clare, Monaghan, Limerick, and Tipperary recorded increases in .ie domain registrations in every month of 2020, compared to 2019.

"The nationwide increase in new .ie domain registrations is very encouraging," said Mr Curtin. "It suggests that businesses and public services, regardless of county or whether they are in a city or a small town, were able to quickly and easily set up an online presence and meet local demand."

As of end 2020, the total number of .ie domains in the database was **309,853. The .ie domain now accounts for 51% of all domains hosted in Ireland**, followed by .com (32%) and .uk (8%).*

The pandemic's impact on new .ie web addresses

The pandemic affected the online identities chosen in 2020, which is evident in the words used in new .ie domain web addresses. "Health" and "Covid" were the second and fourth most common keywords respectively.

315 .ie domains containing the word "mask" or "facemask" were registered in 2020 compared to just 6 in 2019; 61 containing the word **"remote" (e.g. remote work)** were registered in 2020 compared to 5 in 2019.

General health-related keywords, including "wellness", "supplement", "pharmacy", and "fitness", increased 92% year-on-year.

178 .ie web addresses containing the words "mental health" or "counselling" were registered in 2020, up from 87 in 2019 (+105%). 89 .ie domains containing the words "doctor" or "nurse" were registered vs 62 in 2019 (+44%).

"Many health services are now delivering their services online, for example through virtual consultations with patients and e-prescriptions sent securely to their local pharmacy," said Mr Curtin. "Digital has given them the tools they need to adapt to a socially distanced Covid-19 economy and provide continuity of care to local patients, in the comfort and safety of their own familiar environment."

ENDS

Notes to editors

Read the 2020 .IE Domain Profile Report in full.

Source: HosterStats, November 2020 figures

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About .IE

.IE is the national registry for .ie domain names and is 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 SMEs and for local communities. Through stakeholder engagement initiatives such as .IE Digital Town 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 to local consumers

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

We are focused on providing excellence in customer service through our ongoing customer experience (CX) innovation and improvement programmes. Since March 2018, it is easier and faster to register a .ie domain.

Based in Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin, .IE employs 22 people.