



BUSINESS GUIDE



Best Practices Guide

Domain Name Renewals in *.com* and *.net*



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Introduction

This guide is intended to help registrars build a comprehensive and effective domain name renewal program. A variety of marketing practices can (and should) be conducted to supplement what is outlined here. This guide provides suggestions that can help increase the effectiveness of renewal programs. Because it is significantly cheaper to retain customers than it is to acquire new ones, we encourage registrars to focus on their existing customers.

The guide is organized into three sections:

- Tips for building a consistent and effective renewal program
- Recommended schedule for addressing renewals
- Explanation of VeriSign marketing tools

Tips for Building a Renewal Program

The specifics of building a renewal program will vary with each individual case. However, some general principles and tactics have been implemented successfully in addressing domain name renewals.

+ General Tips for Renewals

The following tips apply to all renewal strategies.

Start Early

Begin solicitation of renewals as early as 90 days from the expiration date. Doing so provides a larger window of time in which to retain customers. It also allows you to identify the core base of customers that see the greatest value in their domain name, namely those who renew at first notice. These customers should be the focal point for offering value-added services around the domain name registration.

Scale Renewal Offers

By carefully scheduling your renewal program, you will begin to recognize the different offers and messages that resonate with different groups of customers (i.e., those that renew right away, those that need more prodding, and those that wait until the last minute). For example, you may find that offering a greater discount on names as the expiration date approaches results in a higher renewal rate for those that do not immediately renew. Or you may discover that the best approach is to offer a short-term discount for renewing early, thereby spurring the middle group to renew earlier. Later in this guide, we provide a suggested schedule for renewal notices.

Associate an Application or Functionality with Registrations

Surveys of customers who did not keep their domain names show that the majority do not renew because they are not actively using the name. In recent research conducted by VeriSign, there is a direct correlation between live Web sites associated with registrar domain names and registrar renewal rates. Encourage domain name holders to use their domain names by offering product bundles of parked pages. Product-bundling promotions to first-time “renewers” in particular will increase the effectiveness of renewal campaigns.

By offering even inexpensive value-added services to domain name holders, you can increase the value of their names. Some examples of low cost and easily supported value-adds include Web forwarding, email forwarding, and domain name “cloaking” or “gripping.”

Maintain Up-to-Date Contact Information

Keeping contact information for domain name customers is crucial to successful delivery of renewal notices. Be sure to confirm contact information any time a customer contacts you with questions or in need of support. Another excellent way to keep contact information up to date is through periodic delivery of some opt-in content, such as a newsletter.

Create a Turnkey Renewal Program for Resellers

If you rely on a network of resellers, create an easy-to-implement, packaged renewal program so they can conduct their own timely renewal campaigns. We suggest that you include items such as lists of domain names due to expire, email content, and special offers. Marketing materials provided to you by VeriSign may be re-distributed to resellers, unless otherwise noted.

Deactivate Names in Auto-Renewal

Registrants often do not realize their name is expiring until it no longer works for their Web site or email. Place names that are in auto-renew for more than 10–15 days on “Registrar Hold” with the registry. The names will be removed from the zone file while still in the auto-renew grace period, thereby allowing you to retain the customer if they are prompted to renew when the name stops working. Be sure that any renewal emails generated after the name is deactivated are not sent to an email address using the deactivated domain.

Capitalize on Wholesale Promotions to Enhance Special Offers

Use promotions from domain name wholesalers to enhance the special offers or discounts currently offered to renewing customers. For example, if you will receive a financial incentive for an increased term length on renewals, pass a portion of that incentive on to the customer. If two percent of customers will renew for longer terms for a certain discount, it is reasonable to expect the percentage to rise as the discount increases.

+ Tips for Email Renewal Campaigns

The following tips apply specifically to email renewal campaigns.

Send Email Renewal Notices Mid-day

Send email renewal notices to customers in the middle hours of their day. Email boxes often fill with unsolicited junk mail overnight; you do not want your renewal notices to get lost among these unwanted messages.



Clearly Label the “From” Line

Your email renewal notices should come from an email address in which the “From” line is labeled simply with your company name. The email address itself can be something different (e.g., renewals@companyname.com), but the message should appear in your customer’s email box as a communication from you, not from “Renewals Center” or some other inter-company title. In addition, the email address used to send renewal notices should be different from any address used to send promotional content, such as a newsletter.

Use a Short, Concise Subject Line

To further differentiate your renewal notices from unwanted solicitations, create a subject line that is short and to the point. Limit subject lines to 50 characters or less (including spaces) so they can be read in the inbox. The text should be simple and customized whenever possible, e.g., “Renewal Notice for Your Web Address, www.domain.com.”

Convey Official Tone and State Your Message Explicitly

The body of your email should state very clearly that the domain name is due to expire. It should state the number of days until the name is past due and/or deactivated. Generally, the email should look like an invoice due for payment rather than an advertisement or marketing solicitation. Include clear, concise instructions on how to renew and also include any discounts or special offers for renewals.

Put the Main Message First

The body of the renewal email should state in the first two sentences the subject of the email (e.g., “This is your renewal notice for your domain name www.domain.com”). Putting this information upfront ensures that it appears in the “auto-preview” feature found within many popular email clients.

Embed Customer-Specific Information in Email Links

Whenever possible, embed non-private customer account information into the links within your renewal emails, so that the Web page to which a customer links can be pre-populated with the customer’s account number. That way, customers need to input only their password to access the renewal page. On the renewal page, present any of the customer’s domain names that are due to expire within the next 60–90 days. Doing so induces customers to renew early and reduces your future renewal efforts.

Triple-Check Links before Sending

Be sure all links within renewal emails are working before sending the email to customers.

Leverage Your Company Name

Make your company name and logo prominent within renewal notices. It will alert customers that a current service provider is contacting them.

Try to Get Multiple Renewals with Each Notice

Whenever possible, populate renewal emails or the account management Web page with details on expiration dates of all domain names the customer has registered with you. Also enable customers to renew multiple names from this page.

+ Tips for Postal Mail Renewal Campaigns

The following tips apply to postal mail renewal campaigns.

Try Email First, Then Try Postal Mail

Always send customers the first renewal notice by email. If they respond to the initial notice, you will save money by removing them from the higher-cost postal mail effort.

Cross-Check Postal Addresses

Before conducting a large-scale postal mail effort, cross-check addresses with the national change-of-address database. Licensees of the data will perform a comparison of your data for fees typically ranging from \$2-\$5 per thousand names. A list of licensees is available on the U.S. Postal Service Web site (www.usps.com/ncsc/services).

Track Response Rate

On postal mail notices/invoices, provide a URL from which you can track response rates, not just sell-through rates. The knowledge that the customer logged on to the renewal process but did not follow through with the renewal is valuable for sending follow-up notices and making special offers.

Recommended Schedule for Addressing Renewals

Below is a recommended schedule for contacting customers that have domain names up for renewal. A set of email templates to address each recommended point of contact is available on the VeriSign® Naming and Directory Services Web site (www.verisign.com/nds/naming/promotion).

- **Sixty (60) days prior to expiration date**—send initial email renewal notice to registrant.
 - + If registrant responds and renews, send confirmation and end renewal effort.
 - + If registrant does not respond, continue to next step.
- **Thirty (30) days prior to expiration date**—send second email renewal notice to registrant.
 - + If registrant responds and renews, send confirmation and end renewal effort.
 - + If registrant does not respond, continue to next step.
- **Twenty (20) days prior to expiration date**—send postal mail renewal notice/invoice.
 - + If registrant responds and renews, send confirmation and end renewal effort.
 - + If registrant responds but does not renew, send follow up mail and consider offering a discount or special offer. Continue to next step.
 - + If registrant does not respond, continue to next step.
- **Expiration date**—auto-renew domain.

- **Five (5) days after expiration date**—send registrant past-due notice with deactivation warning.
 - + If registrant responds and renews, send confirmation and end renewal effort.
 - + If registrant does not respond, continue to next step.
- **15 days after expiration date**—deactivate domain (put on Registrar Hold status) and send past-due notice with deactivation status (be sure to send to an email address in a domain other than the one deactivated).
- **Thirty (30) days after expiration date**—send final renewal notice with domain deletion warning.
 - + If registrant responds and renews, send confirmation and end renewal effort.
 - + If registrant does not respond, delete domain 35–45 days after expiration date.

VeriSign Marketing Tools

To assist registrars in handling renewals, VeriSign provides the following marketing tools.

+ Expiring Names Lists

As part of the renewal program, VeriSign provides a set of reports for registrars. These reports list domain names that are due to expire within 30, 60, and 90 days. They help save time and effort and ease the outreach effort as expiration dates approach. The lists, combined with other VeriSign marketing tools, can establish a good starting point for a renewal campaign. They are available from the FTP site where other standard reports reside.

+ Sample Marketing Emails

VeriSign has prepared a set of email templates (HTML) for your use in renewal campaigns. Each template has placeholders for information that should be customized for your customers and different headlines to address the various stages of the renewal process (as discussed in the Recommended Schedule for Addressing Renewals section).

The templates also include placeholders for special offers or discounts you want to include, as well as a space for renewal instructions and administrative content. Feel free to modify the template as needed for your own purposes. The templates are available on the VeriSign Naming and Directory Services Web site (www.verisign.com/nds/naming/promotion).

+ Additional Support

We will add to this document from time to time as new ideas emerge and as new tools become available. The more recent version of the guide is always available for download from the VeriSign Naming and Directory Services Web site or by contacting your account executive.

If you have specific requests for additional marketing tools that will help you address renewals, contact your account executive so that the request can be forwarded to the VeriSign marketing group. We will do our best to accommodate your needs.



Finally, if you need help with the 30/60/90-day expiring names lists or with other specific information about registrations under your management, our customer service representatives are always available to assist you with any questions on discrepancies between your registration data and expiration dates with the registry.

Visit us at www.Verisign.com for more information.