

Cyber-squatting: The new gateway to identity crime

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THAT old scrounge, cyber-squatting, is back with a vengeance especially for a host of global brands in India. With domain name prices falling and more top-level domains (such as .biz, .cn, .mob and lately .in) getting accredited, cyber squatters are back in business full time.

Global brands across categories — Monster Jobs, PepsiCo, SonyEricsson, Siemens, McAfee or search giant Google — have of late been at the receiving end of squatters. Take for instance, world's largest job site Monster.com which was squatted in the name of one Usha Rani, a Hyderabad-based squatter which registered Monster.in and Monsterjobs.in. The global jobsite filed a case with the .in registry saying that "the respondent had registered the domain in bad faith which impugned its brand." After

DOMAIN ISSUE

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a resolution process, the domains were taken away and allotted to Monster India. "We have a fast track dispute resolution process where by decisions are transferred within 30 days of filing a complaint," says a National Internet Exchange of India (NIXI) official, which handles the .in registry.

With little disincentive for squatting under Indian cyber laws, even Pepsico.in, Siemens.in and Sonyericsson.in were

squatted recently. "There is no provision in the current or proposed IT act in India to punish cyber-squatters. At best, the domain name can be take back," says cyber lawyer Pavan Duggal, who has dealt with several squatting cases.

With domain name prices falling to as low as Rs 200, squatters seem to be on a domain binging spree. Apart from global brands, celebrities domains are also targeted by squatters. For instance, AmitabhBachchan.in is currently undergoing an auction on the internet, with a minimum price bid of \$1,000. Similarly, Soniagandhi.com is registered by Indianmagazine.com a news and views website. Indian film actor Gul Panag is also facing tough time to get her domain back. "I'm not going to pay the squatters \$20,000 which they are demanding for GulPanag.com," she was quoted as saying recently.

Other global brands have also been

targeted. Netgear.co.in, Ushaworld.in, Baccarat.in were all squatted and won back recently by respective companies.

Indian internet companies whose identities were squatted are Agencyfaqs.com and Rediff.in While Google suffered the squatting of Gmail.in. McAfee.co.in was also squatted.

One of the world's largest Flash memory maker Kingston also suffered with its Kingston.in and Kingston.co.in being squatted in India. Though there is no legal compensation under IT Act, .in registry has taken proactive steps to grant compensation to victim companies to deter squatters from further stealing domains. Most squatters however operate under guise of obscure names.

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