

# INTERNET DIRECTORY



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## **Abstract**

*Internet Directory* is a single loose-leaf book listing all 115 million .com domains in alphabetical order. They are presented phone-book style: each second level domain (meaning domains in the xxxx.com format), matched with each of its IP addresses. The book has 37,732 pages, each 36" x 48" in size and holding about 3,000 domains. While the individual pages explore the specificity of internet language word by word, the project is usually presented as a performance, where the artist read the domains one by one, to draw attention to each individually. In this format, the succession of names feels like a running down of the (mostly commercial) uses of a particular word. To read the whole book would take two years, so it is usually presented in segments. In a pinch, *Internet Directory* can be used as a paper-based DNS, a manual lookup—keep it in mind the next time the DNS root servers get DDOSed!

## **Keywords**

Systems  
Internet  
DNS  
Exhaustive  
Performance

Performed at Creative Tech Week, 2016. Photo by Jeff Donaldson.



## 1. OVERVIEW

*Internet Directory* is not just an inventory of domain names but also a catalog of lexical permutations. In 2011, I published the first version: a much smaller book including only domains preceded by the word “serious.” At that time, I collected .com, .org, and .net. After considering domains such as “seriouslyresponsible-catering.com,” “seriouslysassyhats.com,” “seriouslyseniorhomes.com,” or “seriouslyricherthanyou.com,” a semantic saturation of the term sets in. Even if any one of these self-proclaimed serious sites were actually serious (they’re not), this running down of potential word combinations would undercut any potential to take any one of them seriously. They are all but rendered meaningless.

In 2014, I collected all of the .com domains and expanded from an 8” x 10” book of 450 pages to a loose-leaf A0 (poster-size) book of 37,732 pages, listing all 115 million .com domains as of February of that year (.com now has about another 10 million domains, but the book has remained static). Many other words function in a similar way to serious; on the online version of the directory (commissioned by the Webby Awards in 2014), we can find every domain starting with “flower” (19,629 domains), “colonial” (4,179 domains), and “pomp” (5,200 domains), each seeming to run down every possible use of the word.

As exhaustive as it may seem, the names here reflect two opposing impulses of the Web. Democratized participation means that no domain is too ridiculous to make up and claim ownership of. For online projects—many yet to be realized—I keep around thirty domains, which seems about an average count for net artists. The other impulse is the raw commercialism of the Web. I recently attended NamesCon, a conference based in Las Vegas for domain resellers. There I met hopeful domain resellers who kept portfolios of thousands of domains. Some are essentially squatters, embodying the appeal-to-the-masses approach of traditional media, capturing combinations of words pandering to obvious commercial prospects. Some others are essentially digital hoarders, perhaps responsible for the odder combinations of words, and the lengthy domains that sound like they have little use to anyone; “magicalmonkeys.com,” “dontle-tyourbabiesgrowuptobejpgs.com”, etc. Reading through the domains in *Internet Directory*, references to old fads and memes appear, memorialized by squatters who bought up every variation of “don’t tase me bro” and failed to sell them.

Buying a domain can be an impulsive activity, especially in the dot com space where its cost is low. Domains unlikely to be typed into the browser, such as 000

