

# Dotcom celebrates 25th birthday

March 16 2010, by Chris Lefkow

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A man uses a laptop computer at a wireless cafe. Recognize Symbolics.com? Probably not. But 25 years ago this week the Massachusetts computer maker played a bit role in history -- it was the first company to register a .com address on what would eventually become known as the World Wide Web.

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Only five companies would join Symbolics.com in 1985 in registering their dotcom names with DARPA, the Pentagon technology research agency which was behind the precursor to the Internet.

Ten years later there were 120,000 dotcoms and "today we have close to 85 million dotcom names registered," said Mark McLaughlin president

and chief executive of [VeriSign](#), the company which runs the dotcom infrastructure.

"In some ways (dotcom's) become somewhat of a [proxy](#) for the Internet," McLaughlin told a gathering of Internet policymakers and leaders here to celebrate the 25th birthday of dotcom.

"Dotcom's becomes part of our lexicon, our way of life, how we communicate, how we interact with each other, how we do business online," McLaughlin said. "It's a platform for business, entertainment, sports, finance, culture and how we connect with people."

Robert Atkinson, president of the Washington-based Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, said none of this was envisioned when Symbolics.com and the others were registered as the first dotcoms.

"[DARPA](#) let these companies come on what was essentially a government research network," Atkinson said. "When they made that decision they didn't really know what they were doing.

"What they actually ended up doing was probably creating one of the greatest technological revolutions of all time," he said.

Reed Hundt, a former chairman of the US Federal Communications Commission, said the dotcom domain has become a "common medium for humanity."

"In earlier generations the printing press provided the common medium, print on paper," he said. "To a very large degree the telephone network was a common medium.

"We haven't yet wrapped the whole world in the common language of dotcom-ism," he said. "It's an important thing to do."

Participants in the 25 Years of .Com Policy Impact Forum also highlighted the economic contributions of dotcoms.

"Commerce and communications led (the Internet) to explode and dotcom has been the home for most of that," said Rod Beckstrom, chief executive of ICANN, the private corporation which administers the Domain Name System that forms the technical backbone of the Web.

"The value that all those domains add to business and commerce is absolutely massive," Beckstrom said.

According to a new ITIF study, the dotcom domain has become the platform for 400 billion dollars in annual economic activity, a number that is expected to rise to 950 billion dollars by 2020.

Of the world's nearly 85 million dotcoms, 11.9 million are e-commerce and online business websites, 4.3 million are entertainment-related sites and 1.8 million are sports-related sites, according to VeriSign.

"The value of these dotcom names is incredible," Beckstrom said. "The economic value to businesses that often pay just 10 bucks a year for their domain name may be millions of dollars.

"Google probably paid 10 bucks for Google.com when they first got it," he said. "What would they pay to replace it today?"

According to a survey conducted for VeriSign, 81 percent of Americans visit five or more dotcom websites a day while two-thirds visit between five and 25 dotcom websites a day.

One in five reported finding a job on a dotcom site while six percent said they met their spouse or significant through a dotcom website.

Dotcom may be the best known but it is just one of 270 other so-called Top Level Domain Names including .net, .org, .edu, .mil, .gov and the domains for individual countries such as .cn for China, .de for Germany or .ru for Russia.

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