

College.xxx? Schools snap up porn domains to keep them clean

November 14 2011, By Tim Barker

The world is getting closer to the launching of a new Internet address system for pornography providers, and there are some eye-opening names being registered. Among them: washu.xxx and mizzou.xxx.

Don't, however, expect to find naked co-eds at either of these sites.

In what amounts to a defensive maneuver, schools across the nation are snapping up the .xxx [domain names](#) that match their federally registered trademarks. It's simply a matter of trying to keep them out of the wrong hands.

"We don't want someone coming across our trademark on a porn site. God only knows what they'd come up with," said Terry Robb, director of information technology at the University of Missouri-Columbia, which also has registered missouri.xxx and missouritigers.xxx.

Colleges and universities are no different than other organizations in this regard. With the impending launching of the new .xxx [top level domains](#) later this year, everyone with a trademark had a chance to reserve names in what's called a 'sunrise phase.' Essentially, it provides some protection for organizations against domain prospectors who grab sites to use or sell at a profit.

In theory, the .xxx top level domain will give adult content providers a natural place to be on the Internet. But it has been criticized by the porn industry, which worries that this is the first step in forcing all adult

providers to move to the more easily blocked domain addresses.

Against this backdrop, universities and other organizations have been forced to decide whether it's worth the time, trouble and money (about \$200 per domain) to take control of their .xxx sites.

Some experts don't think there's a lot to be worried about for the vast majority of institutions.

"Then again, it's just a couple of hundred bucks. So I don't see any reason not to do it," said Greg Jackson, vice president for policy and analysis at Educause, a nonprofit that promotes the use of technology in higher education.

That has been the motivating factor for the St. Louis College of Pharmacy, which recently picked up stlcop.xxx. That's not exactly a name that screams porn.

"Not really," agreed Chad Shepherd, the school's vice president of information technology. "But, you know, it's better to be safe than sorry."

The school has made a practice of grabbing all the stlcop versions it can get its hands on, including .org, .tv, .info and .biz. Unfortunately, it has not been able to get .com, which still belongs to a domain prospector.

The decision to buy a domain also can be about protecting a school from unintended harm. Consider the case of Washington University. It may be that no one would ever think to combine pornography with the St. Louis institution.

But the school does share a name with a female character, Washu Hakubi, from the world of Japanese animated cartoons. The anime genre

has inspired a subset of cartoons heavy on sex and violence, leaving open the possibility that Washington University could find itself an accidental victim.

"It wouldn't necessarily be anyone who even knew much about us," said Karen Daubert, the university's trademark and brand manager.

That's just one of the reasons for the school's decision to register washu.xxx, along with washingtonuniversity.xxx and wustl.xxx.

And don't expect to find much if you visit any of those addresses. It's one of the differences between the .xxx sites and mainstream sites with .com, .edu and .net extensions. Often, organizations will set up their various [domain](#) addresses to all point to the same Web page. Not so with the .xxx addresses.

"In this case, they won't point to anything," Daubert said.

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Citation: College.xxx? Schools snap up porn domains to keep them clean (2011, November 14)
retrieved 3 May 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2011-11-collegexxx-schools-snap-porn-domains.html>

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