

To thwart porn, colleges are buying up .xxx sites

December 9 2011, By PATRICK CONDON , Associated Press



Paul Vander Tuig, trademark licensing director at Kansas University, pose for a photograph by the gift store at Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence, Kan. With the launch of the first public sale of .xxx domains, Kansas University has purchased .xxx domains to protect its school and brand from being linked to pornographic sites. (AP Photo/Ed Zurga)

(AP) -- The University of Kansas is buying up website names such as <http://www.KUgirls.xxx> and <http://www.KUnurses.xxx> . But not because it's planning a Hot Babes of Kansas site or an X-rated gallery of the Nude Girls of the Land of Aaahs.

Instead, the university and countless other schools and businesses are rushing to prevent their good names from falling into the hands of the pornography industry. Over the past two months, they have snapped up tens of thousands of ".xxx" website names that could be exploited by the adult entertainment business.

"Down the road there's no way we can predict what some unscrupulous entrepreneur might come up with," said Paul Vander Tuig, trademark licensing director at the Lawrence, Kan., school.

The university spent nearly \$3,000 in all. It plans to sit on the .xxx names and do nothing with them.

The brand-new .xxx suffix is an adults-only variation on .com. The .xxx name went on sale to the public for the first time this week, promoted as a way to enable porn sites to distinguish themselves and a means of making it easier for Internet filters to screen out things parents don't want their children to see.

ICM Registry of [Palm Beach](#), Fla., is the exclusive manager of the .xxx names and sells them through a dozen middleman companies such as GoDaddy.com for an average of \$100 a year.

Indiana University spokesman Mark Land said the school spent \$2,200 to buy <http://www.hoosiers.xxx> and 10 other such names. Other Indiana schools took the same step, including Purdue University and Ball State University.

"This is just a modest cost of doing business in the world we live in," Land said.

ICM sold .xxx names for the past two months exclusively to companies and others that wanted to protect their brands from the porn industry.

During the so-called sunrise sale, ICM registered nearly 80,000 names, said chairman and CEO Stuart Lawley.

A search of ICM's database finds prominent brand names - including Nike.xxx, Pepsi.xxx and Target.xxx - among those purchased.

"Target has applied to block a number of the .xxx domains that correspond with our registered trademarks," said Lee Henderson, a spokesman for the Minneapolis-based store chain. He added, dryly: "We do not plan to use the domains."

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or ICANN, which the U.S. government established in 1998 to run the Internet's address system, authorized creation of .xxx earlier this year.

The strongest opposition to the suffix has come from the adult entertainment industry. The Free Speech Coalition, the industry's trade group, lobbied against its creation, complaining among other things about the registration fees.

Allison Vivas, president and CEO of Pink Visual Productions, an adult website operator in Van Nuys, Calif., said her company and others like it were also given the chance to buy up .xxx sites matching their existing .com addresses, but Vivas and many others opted not to.

Vivas said she doesn't think her company - or any organization, adult-oriented or not - should have to pay to protect its trademarks. Otherwise, "it kind of becomes extortion."

Lawley said ICM will take steps to protect existing trademarks even if companies or schools fail to lock down certain website names.

Patrick Condon can be followed at: <http://www.twitter.com/pcondonap>

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Citation: To thwart porn, colleges are buying up .xxx sites (2011, December 9) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-12-thwart-porn-colleges-xxx-sites.html>

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