Māori domains

Karaitiana Taiuru

Introduction

Domain names are important for Māori as they are the Internet equivalent of whakapapa and pepeha. The suffixes prior to the Internet address .nz further identify the groups that the web site or email address identify to; such as .govt.nz for government: .school for schools and .co.nz for commercial entities. The third suffix is where people self-identify themselves and their organisations. An example being taiuru.maori.nz. The suffix .nz represents that I am in New Zealand, the suffix .maori states that I identify as Māori, and finally, the suffix taiuru is personal self-identification and ownership.

The Internet was introduced to New Zealand in 1989 as an academic research tool. At that time there was no consideration for Māori rights, nor for the Treaty of Waitangi. In early 2000, despite over a decade of growing Internet use, Māori remained in the lower end of the user scale with the least access and use of the Internet (Parker & Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001). Another 17 years later in 2017, tikanga and digital integration has yet to be recognised. For example, New Zealand's cyber safety organisation NetSafe do not incorporate tikanga resources or Māori specific resources.[1]

It would appear that there was no thought or consideration for Māori representation by InternetNZ (guardians of the Internet Domain Name System in New Zealand) when policies were created for the daily management of its structure. In a similar manner to the Māori street protests of the 1970s and 80s, Māori online took the protest from the street to the Internet, actively lobbying for equal and equitable representation on the Internet. This was largely achieved by Māori efforts to be the first Indigenous Peoples in the world to make changes to the Domain Name System with majority support. Of 1,600 New Zealand Internet community members, 91.7% of the voters in the public consultation over '.maori.nz' supported its creation. InternetNZ, stated that the result of the Straw Poll was unprecedented.[2]

.maori.nz

.maori.nz was the world's first un-moderated Indigenous domain name first applied for in 1997 and subsequently made available on September 4, 2002. It took Māori three attempts and five years for the Internet governing body, InternetNZ, to recognise the distinct needs of Māori and to approve its implementation.

In 1997, Ross Himona led the first application. This application was a direct result of Kōhanga Reo being declined the right to use .ac.nz and .school.nz as domain names by InternetNZ, irrespective of the educational group status of Kōhanga Reo. The justification of the first .maori.nz application was to ensure that Māori could use a specific domain name that they identified with on the Internet.

The application did not meet the policy criteria developed by InternetNZ, and

the application was declined. Many individuals of the Internet community believed the Kōhanga Reo application was racist and created separatism in New Zealand. The backlash and the need for Māori to be represented online led to the creation of the New Zealand Māori Internet Society (NZMIS), which became an influential online Māori lobby group. In 2001, NZMIS and a proactive cohort of non-Māori members, under a new partnership, formed the Internet Society of Aotearoa to advocate effectively for the inclusion of .maori.nz. Again the second application attempt was thwarted and unsuccessful as it did not meet the existing criteria.

.maori.nz successful

The third, attempt was successful, and was achieved as well as implemented, on September 4, 2002, by the New Zealand Māori Society.[3] Using an online group membership that reflected a traditional group of rangatira, the leadership group, called the executive Komiti, had the author as the Chairperson. The group never met in person and used a mixture of IRC chats and MSN. Due to slow dial up Internet speeds, actual speech was rarely used. Everyone on the Komiti had an equal say and there were no rules, aside from the constitution, which was required to apply for a new domain name. The application was based on representation principles that any group could use the domain name. Although, some disagreed and wanted the domain name to be exclusively for Māori. The intention of the application was to be specifically culturally unspecific, in order to avoid being labelled as racist.

.maori.nz was the world's first indigenous domain name applied for by Indigenous Peoples, and was able to be utilised by anyone in the world. The open nature of the registration process saw one company take advantage of the process on the first day of registrations. The company registered numerous Iwi names in .maori.nz and then offered them for sale at inflated prices. A community of individuals used their technical knowledge and media networks to name the company and their immoral actions, resulting in a public apology and all names returned to their rightful Iwi.

There were several alternatives planned, in the event that the application for .maori.nz was not successful. A community of Māori individuals had created what is now known as the "Dark Net". The intention was not to create anything illegal, but to piggy back on the current internet infrastructure. his was a unique indigenous web, which had its own Indigenous domain names. The initial purpose was to enable and empower Māori and then invite other Indigenous Peoples to use it. Other options included seeking co-operation from other world governments that had similar te reo Māori domain names such as .ao in Angola to bypass the .nz system that ignored Māori and treaty rights.

.māori.nz and macrons in domain names

Non-English speaking countries, being the majority of Internet users, were seeking and developing ways the Internet could use their own languages. This demand created International Domain Names (IDN), which allowed a domain name to be created with

non-English characters. Māori preference of macrons required a minimal usage of the new technology and therefore minimal risk compared to other languages that did not use any Latin characters.

By 2005, this author had been involved for a number of years with the international internet governance body the Internet Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and was aware of the advancements and issues from non-English speaking countries who required domain names in their own language. In 2005, I wrote to the New Zealand governing body of the Internet, InternetNZ, proposing that it recognise the Māori Language Act, the Treaty of Waitangi and the orthographic conventions of the Māori Language Commission, by introducing macrons into the .nz domain name system. It was agreed to introduce non-Latin characters only for the five vowels that Māori used a macron. In consideration of anyone typing an address in capital letters, the five capital vowels would also be introduced, therefore, .nz included 10 new IDN characters ā Ā ē Ē ī Ī ō Ō ū Ū.

During this time, it was identified that the ability to have .maori.nz available with both a macron and without a macron was a simple entry into the domain name database. It was accepted that this should be the new default standard for all .maori.nz addresses. The change would reflect correct orthographic conventions for written Māori and would better cater to the majority of users, who at the time, could not type macrons on a computer.

In 2017, computers and the Internet Domain Name System are still behind and do not recognise non-Latin addresses by default. Disappointingly, a majority of New Zealand government organisations continue to ignore the use of the IDN's.[4] For people to utilise the macron in domain names, it only requires a small configuration in the web server and email client. Despite the inertia by some organisations, the IDN's are available to those who wish to use them.

Bilingual domain names

A request was lodged to the Domain Name Commissioner, a subsidiary of InternetNZ, in 2007 seeking approval to consider making the .nz hierarchy bilingual.[5] The request outlined the benefits of the change, demonstrating a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi and the Māori Language Act. The response declined the opportunity to show leadership in this area stating it was not a policy, and the Domain Name Commissioner was not answerable to the Treaty of Waitangi as they were not a government department. Although the New Zealand government delegated authority to InternetNZ for the management of .nz, it was agreed not to pursue the matter. Around this time, a new domain, .KIWI, was launched and seized the opportunity to create a bilingual equivalent of the .nz domain name system and to prevent registration of a number of sensitive Māori names such as god names. Dot Kiwi was the first company in the world to protect Indigenous Peoples rights and to offer to represent Indigenous Peoples.

iwi.nz

In 1993, two non-Māori caretakers of the .nz domain Name System decided to create .iwi.

nz to reflect the recent Treaty settlements of Waikato and Ngāi Tahu. .iwi.nz became a moderated domain name along with .mil.nz, .govt.nz, .ac.nz, and .cri.nz, which formed the other moderated domains at that time. The lack of consultation and the lack of indigenous knowledge of the individuals, made .iwi.nz so exclusive that only iwi with a legal Trust Board could use the domain name. The registrations during the next 10 years reflected the exclusive nature of the criteria.
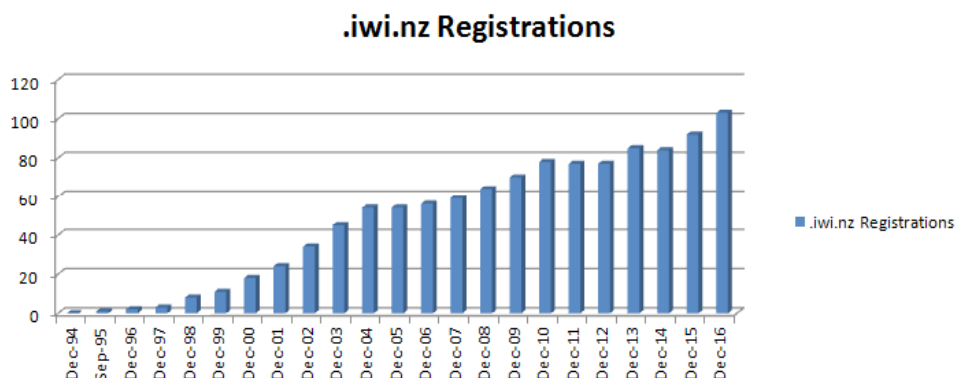

.iwi.nz Registrations

Figure 1: .iwi.nz registrations 1994-2016

In 2000, InternetNZ proposed to cancel or stop registrations of .iwi.nz until a suitable moderator was found. At this time the author become the iwi.nz moderator, a responsibility he still has in 2017. The first tasks the author committed to were to make amendments to the criteria to ensure any iwi could register in the .iwi.nz domain. Moriori were also included and are able to use .iwi.nz.

In the following years, three major revisions were completed on the criteria to be more inclusive of Iwi. Today with the changing nature of Iwi organisations, there is a need to review the moderation policy again.

UseNet .maori.soc.nz

UseNet was a bulletin board, discussion group part of Internet that is no longer used. UseNet was categorised by country and then communities and interests. There was no category to represent Māori and Māori culture. To create a new category an application had to be made to the community of users. A democratic and fair process that did not discriminate any groups. In 2002, after community consultation, the author proposed the creation of a UseNet group nz.soc.maori. The community voted in favour and the category was created within the .nz hierarchy. The whole process was completed in only a few months.

Conclusion

The domain names .iwi.nz, .maori.nz, .māori.nz and the ability for any .nz domain to use a macron on any of the Latin alphabet have created Māori representation on the

Internet. These achievements have been a catalyst for other Indigenous Peoples to ensure representation in their countries on the Internet. Passionate Māori individuals from the Internet community were responsible for the significant changes that allowed Māori to be represented on the Internet Domain Name System in New Zealand. There were no local or international central internet governing body or other organisation to advocate for and develop the Internet for Māori. In addition, there was no funding to assist Māori to achieve international leadership in creating a space on the DNS for Indigenous Peoples. Kaupapa Māori, tikanga, resilience as well as using a range of technical skills, created a new form of Māori street protest that eventually saw three Indigenous domain names established and Māori orthography appropriately recognised in domain names.

Endnotes

[1.] http://www.netsafe.org.nz

[2.] http://old.internetnz.net.nz/about/policies/nz/2ld/media-release020312maorinz.html

[3.] http://old.internetnz.net.nz/about/policies/nz/2ld/2ld01proposal-maori.html

[4.] http://www.taiuru.maori.nz/wp-content/uploads/New-Zealand-Government-responce-to-Te-Reo-Maori-email-addresses.pdf

[5.] http://www.taiuru.maori.nz/publicationslib/letter-for-a-bilingual-nz.pdf

References

Parker, B., & Te Puni Kōkiri. (2001). *Māori access to information technology.* Wellington, New
        Zealand: Te Puni Kōkiri.