

3.30.2009

Proposed eco-friendly Web domain untrustworthy

While it might be difficult to figure out what companies and Web sites truly have the environment's best interest in mind, trying to categorize eco-friendly Web sites using a different Web domain will not solve the problem.

According to *Grist*, Al Gore and the Alliance for Climate Protection have partnered with the group Dot Eco LLC to get a new Web domain for environmental organizations and initiatives. The Web domain would be ".eco" instead of the common ".com," or ".org." The purpose of the proposal seems to be to allow Web sites to show support for environmental causes, but that premise is problematic.

Showing support is a positive step, as more attention is given to environmental issues and causes. This coincides with more businesses making strides toward being "green" — from offering all-natural products to items made with recycled material or less packaging. Clorox's Green Works line of cleaning products is the first thing that comes to mind.

But marking Web sites with a ".eco" domain for showing environmental support would allow some Web sites to easily manipulate or abuse this function. It would be much like the "Astroturf" organizations — pseudo-green groups that paint an eco-friendly façade while being funded by industries at odds with environmental initiatives. People, orga-

nizations and companies could use this domain to advertise themselves as eco-friendly even if their intentions are not green at heart.

When Web sites are marked with only a ".com" or ".org," people are forced to research and learn to discern the true green from the turf. Web sites have to be accountable for their claims — for instance, a Web site that proclaims environmental activism but has no contact information is cause for suspicion. Relying on the ".eco" could leave too much room for people to show "support" to get the label without really making strides to live up to it.

To many, the environmental movement isn't in the same boat as the social issues that have opponents and proponents. That is a valid argument, as few are going to protest clean water, air and food. But the general public still groups the environmental organizations with other social issues, which would then open the door for more Web domains categorized by the issues they support.

As one commenter on the *Grist* post wrote, "what if an organization sup-

ports the NRA and wants its domain to be '.nra?'" Another good point — while showing environmental support is admirable, Web sites are easiest to navigate when categorized by their objective definition or purpose and not their subjective stances on issues.

It's not unheard of for Web sites to have seals of approval from different companies or organizations, so that would probably be a better bet to show environmental support. Who's to decide the qualifications for such a thing is tricky, but it's less confusing and more practical than introducing a new Web domain that has the potential to cause more confusion than it would fix.

No, I'm not going to make a joke about Al Gore and the Internet. I will say that it is

advantageous for Web surfers to be able to identify whether the company or organization they are reading about has made efforts to become more sustainable or eco-friendly. But ".eco" is not the best way to do so.

GREEN WITH ENVY



Cathy Wilson

Cathy Wilson is a senior studying journalism and a copy editor for *The Post*. Send her an e-mail at cw224805@ohio.edu.