



## Sorry, thebest.md is gone, but canuck.md still available

Steven Wharry

One of today's most common English-language phrases is "Check out my Web site." It is used every day by everyone from elementary school students to corporate executives. Now John Harris, an expatriate Canadian living in Bonita Springs, Florida, thinks he has the perfect way for physicians to set themselves apart from the rapidly expanding Internet crowd. For US\$299, physicians can trade in the ubiquitous

exploit," said Harris. He thought the deal was good for Moldova because "MD" carries no special meaning in the two primary languages of that country, Romanian and Russian.

Just how "natural" a resource an Internet domain name is remains debatable, but the demand for Harris' resource is not. He registered 1000 names in March alone, and expected that number to triple by April. He estimates that he has registered well over 4000 names since he launched the idea last November.

"I think we've got a major thing under way here and I expect to register a million names," said Harris, who has a 25-year contract with Moldova. He remains vigilant about the types of individuals or enterprises he will allow to

of Harris' unique business. However, he also recognized that some physicians will seek the designation as a way of reaching out to new patients. "I'm sure this will appeal to commercially oriented physicians," he said.

That's just the type of doctor Harris is looking for, and judging by some of the names being snapped up — love.md, footdoc.md and thebest.md are examples — some doctors, particularly in the US, are willing to jump on the bandwagon. Harris said he has registered some Canadian names, but when asked he could not provide specific examples. "From the point of view of our registry, there's no great incentive for doctors who practise in a socialized system of medicine to do this," he said.

Harris has reserved several names and hopes to use them to set up directories that group sites offering information on specific medical topics. Cancer.md falls into this category, and Harris hopes to offer it to the American Cancer Society to establish an authoritative directory of sites offering cancer information. However, Canadian docs can still pony up \$299 for canada.md, canuck.md and canadian.md. — Steven Wharry is editor of CMA News

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.ca, .com and .org Web site suffixes for .md, a move that Harris says will identify them immediately as doctors.

Harris, who has been a Web-based entrepreneur since 1993, was searching for ways to expand his Web site design business when he came across the idea of acquiring the .md domain name from Moldova, a small, backward country sandwiched between the Ukraine and Romania. It had received the designation from the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA). After more than 2 years of negotiations with government officials, Harris agreed to pay the Moldovan government \$20 for each name he registered with the .md suffix. The IANA charges a flat rate of \$35 for each name registered on the Internet.

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register under the .md domain name. He said he monitors sites closely to ensure that all registrants use their sites for medical purposes.

The \$299 cost of Harris' name designation breaks down this way: \$20 a month for hosting the site, \$2 a month for 4 extra email addresses, and \$35 for the IANA. This breakdown alone means considerable profit for Harris, but he also offers Web-design services — for another fee, of course — to those who wish to have their own Web site.

Although Harris touted the advantages accruing to physicians who use the .md designation, some wonder if it's anything more than a status symbol. Dr. Barry McCombs, author of a column on the Internet published in the *Alberta Doctors' Digest* and director of Medical Information Services at the University of Calgary, quipped "Vanity, thy name is physician" when he heard

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