

## RESTORING INTERNET DATA TRANSPARENCY TO PROTECT CONSUMERS ONLINE

**The Issue:** The international WHOIS database is the internet’s “phone book:” a public directory with ownership records and contact information for every domain name registered on the web. A vital tool in the battle to keep the internet safe and e-commerce reliable, WHOIS data has been drastically restricted as an overly broad reading of the European Union’s data privacy laws prompted registrars and registry operators to block access to it. Criminals leverage this anonymity, buying domain names in bulk and weaponizing them to launch ongoing cyberattacks and online scams, making billions at the expense of consumer health and safety.

**The Solution:** [The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies](#) (ASOP Global) supports restoring WHOIS data transparency. We urge Congress to adopt legislation that restores access to accurate WHOIS data to protect consumers from widespread criminal exploitation of an anonymous internet.

### A Critical Law Enforcement Tool

- Since the dawn of the internet, WHOIS has typically been the [first line of defense](#) for remediating cyberattacks, identifying “fake” news sites, and keeping consumers safe from dangerous predators and scams such as illicit online pharmacies.
- A broad spectrum of entities uses WHOIS to help determine who operates criminal websites: not only law enforcement and consumer protection agencies but also child advocacy groups, anti-human-trafficking organizations, cybersecurity investigators, copyright and trademark holders, journalists, and academics.
- The Department of Justice, Federal Trade Commission, Food & Drug Administration, Department of Commerce, Europol, nongovernmental cybersecurity experts, public health leaders, and others agree that [access to this information is essential](#).
- As a National Telecommunications and Information Administration official put it in [December](#): “Having access to contacts for websites and domain names is essential for law enforcement, cybersecurity, and [Intellectual Property] interests.”

### Alarmingly Restricted

- Registries, registrars, and their governing body, the Internet Corporation for Assigning Names and Numbers, or ICANN, arrived at an overly broad interpretation of the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), resulting in a drastic restriction of access to the information.
- Ending traditional WHOIS transparency sends a dangerous signal to criminals and internet scammers that they can act anonymously and with impunity.
- Internet criminals seeking to capitalize on fear and misinformation regarding COVID-19 have taken full advantage: 100,000+ new domain names containing pandemic-related terms were created in March 2020 alone, [90% of which were registered anonymously](#).

Please visit ASOP Global’s website for additional information on [Internet Accountability](#).