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When you move to another house or apartment, you make the decision to change your address. But in the world of ecommerce, your email address may change without your consent. Even if you decide to choose your email address, your old address may be assigned to someone else without providing a system to forward your mail or even find you. Perhaps someday the email forwarding problem may be solved, but for now the repercussions can be enormous. You may miss key messages, offers, e-payments, or even “disappear” unless you take action. This month’s column provides the logic for you to obtain a personal domain and keep it for life.

## Recommendations for Surviving Shifting ISPs: Be the Master of Your Domain

by Kenneth E. Kendall, Feature Editor



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Last month my email mailbox was filled with friends, neighbors, and colleagues who sent messages to me. They didn’t write to send their greetings, or ask about construction in the neighborhood, or to request my collaboration on some research project. No, all they wanted to do was tell me that their email address changed.

They were victims of the ISP changeover from @home to Comcast.

Next, I prepared the fall schedule and emailed the other professors in my department to double check that the schedule was to their liking. When I did this, I received a reply message from a stranger saying I must have sent the schedule to the wrong person. I had used an old mailbox. (In my defense, I was never informed of the change.) Fortunately, the new owner of the mailbox wrote back to me, so I received feedback that my intended recipient didn’t get his email. But what if I did not get this feedback? It is possible my colleague missed out on an important message or two.

He was a victim of the reassigned mailbox.

In both of the above cases, the ISP, or Internet service provider, had changed, either forcefully or voluntarily. When it did, the addresses I had stored in the mailbox were no longer valid.

### They Say Most Accidents Happen @Home

The Excite @Home change was not an easy one. Thousands of customers were left hanging out in the cold with no service at all and the remaining ones were forced to change their email addresses.

Excite@Home declared bankruptcy on September 28, 2001. It was not the first ISP to go under, but it was the first highly visible provider to do so. Excite@Home served about 3.2 million broadband customers (as reported on [www.PCWorld.com](http://www.PCWorld.com) by Stephen Lawson, “Excite@Home Resumes Serving New Customers,” IDG News Service, October 17, 2000). Being a cable provider, it served affluent subscribers who had nowhere to turn for alternate cable service. The possibility of having broadband service taken away was initially very stressful, but little did unsuspecting subscribers realize the address snafus that were yet to come.

When users signed up for @Home service, they chose an account name that would be something meaningful, perhaps their name or family name. I chose “kendalls,” so my family could be kendalls@home. This made a lot of sense and everyone who knew me could easily remember it. When I called for service (many times, I might add, since I was an early adopter) I used our name.

Then came the switch from @Home to Comcast. Our email was kendalls@home.com so it would make sense that we would get kendalls@comcast.net. This would not be ideal, because we would have to email all our friends, neighbors, and colleagues with our new email address, but we could live with it.

However, when the Internet connectivity changeover kit came in the mail, my user ID was changed. Although the letter said, "Your email address will change from username@home.com to username@comcast.net, a footnote in fine print pointed out that "Comcast may not be able to provide the same username/login that you have used in the past through @Home."

So Comcast changed my name from "kendalls" to "marthas." Why "marthas"? How should I know? No one in my family is named Martha.

When I told my students they immediately shouted "Martha Stewart" and wrinkled up their faces in distaste. I told them I was just glad it wasn't a name of an old girlfriend, because that may have had truly undesirable repercussions. They laughed, but told me to make sure I made Comcast change it anyway. They didn't approve of "marthas" and wanted me to change it immediately.

So I called up Comcast tech service. I talked to someone in Canada. They said that there was no way to change it and that maybe there was a chance I could change it in the future. But now I was stuck with "marthas."

What was I to do? Would I have to email all my friend, neighbors, and col-

leagues to tell them I was marthas@comcast.net? Would I have to sign up for a registry service like [www.returnpath.net](http://www.returnpath.net) so people could find me? Not exactly.

### Be the Master of Your Domain

About four years ago, my wife and coauthor, Julie Kendall (see her column also in this publication), and I decided to obtain our own domain.

We have had our Web pages up since early 1995, but they resided on some university server nested in several sub-directories. We decided to get our own domain for many reasons:

1. the address would be easier to remember
2. the address was shorter to type
3. we could have a prestige address
4. if our ISP changed, we wouldn't be inconvenienced, and
5. if *we* moved, we wouldn't have to change our address.

So we signed up and obtained the name "thekendalls.org," with individual email addresses (ken@thekendalls.org and julie@thekendalls.org).

Our domain was hosted at first by Netcom which was bought by Mindspring, then bought by Earthlink. After that we transferred to Verio. But our address remained the same.

Of course, most of you don't need your own domain because you have an email account at your university. I don't even remember my first address. It was at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Then,

when I moved, it changed and changed again. At Rutgers I was on the clam server and then was moved to the crab server. When I moved, my Listservs had to be moved, I had to notify all my colleagues, and I had to have new business cards printed.

But owning my own domain means I can keep it forever, set up multiple addresses within the domain for different activities, and even set up a junk mailbox in which to deposit offers I don't care about. I don't have to worry about changing ISPs. My domain will be the same, no matter which ISP I choose.

Having your own domain helps preserve privacy. If you use a university account, the university can read your email, parse it, and store it forever if they wish. If you rent space on a server to host your domain, you again have control over the intellectual property you place on the server. Put your PowerPoint presentations on your own server space and don't let anyone take these away from you. If you have your own domain you are in control. You are master of your domain.

So I recommend that you acquire your own permanent address as soon as possible. I have been suggesting to colleagues that they obtain addresses for some time now, and my former doctoral students seem to be getting their own addresses as well. Just don't try to get [www.MISProfessor.com](http://www.MISProfessor.com)—Merrill Warkentin already got that one. ■

## Future DSI Meetings

### NATIONAL ANNUAL MEETINGS

November 23-26, 2002

The San Diego Marriott Hotel and Marina,  
San Diego, California

November 22-25, 2003

The Marriott Wardman Park Hotel in  
Washington, D.C.

November 20-23, 2004

The Boston Marriott Copley Place Hotel,  
Boston, Massachusetts

### INTERNATIONAL MEETING

July 4-8, 2003

Shanghai, People's Republic  
of China

### REGIONAL ANNUAL MEETINGS

#### Asia Pacific

July 24-27, 2002

Le Royal Meridien Hotel  
Bangkok, Thailand

#### Asia Pacific (cont)

July 4-8, 2003

Shanghai (*in conjunction with 2003  
International DSI Meeting*)

#### Midwest

April 25-27, 2002

The Hilton Milwaukee City Center  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

#### Southwest

March 5-8, 2003

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Houston, Texas