

WHY EMOJI DOMAIN NAMES 🚀 MAY TAKE OVER THE WORLD 🌐 - WITH MATAN ISRAELI AND JON ROIG



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Episode 383

Michael Cyger: On today's DomainSherpa show, I'm joined by two investors who were early adopters in the emoji domain name market. What? You have no idea what I'm talking about with emoji domains? Three months ago I had no idea either. Stay tuned for an interesting show!

I have three sponsor messages before we get into today's show.

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Michael: Hey, Sherpa Network. Thank you so much for joining me today. My name is Michael Cyger and I'm the publisher of DomainSherpa.com, the website where you can learn how to become a successful domain name investor or entrepreneur directly from the experts. Today I'm pleased to welcome two people who likely know the most about the topic of emoji domain names, Matan Israeli and Jon Roig. Welcome, gentlemen.

Matan: Hi.

Jon: Hi.

Michael: Matan and I met at NamesCon in January 2017. It was the Sunday before the conference officially started, and I had tables in the networking lane for DN Academy and Efty.com, both of which were packed all day. So I didn't have a chance to walk around the room and meet a lot of what I think are the innovators in the room, the smaller companies that are starting up that are talking about what they're doing and how they're doing it, but when I was packing up my table I looked across the aisle way and I saw Matan and struck up a conversation with him. So we're going to learn why I was so fascinated with emoji domain names during the show, but after meeting Matan I bought a couple of domain names from him. I moved them over to GoDaddy and I tried to get one of them to forward to my LinkedIn account, but it wasn't working. It was just not resolving at all. So I think I posted a question on Twitter, and Jon Roig came to the rescue, explaining that GoDaddy's platform didn't handle IDN forwarding for some reason. So let's start there. That's how I met these two gentlemen. Matan, before we get into the show, where are you located and what are you doing for a living right now?

Matan: I'm living in Tel Aviv in Israel. I'm now setting emojis in EmojiURLs.com. I began with it starting in the beginning of 2015, actually, and I was thinking about it even before the famous Coca-Cola campaign with their smiley face .ws. Since then I'm with it. And then few months ago Jon came and exploded the bubble, I call it.

Michael: Yeah, you got in early before a lot of people realized that these emojis were taking off, before Coca-Cola did their famous billboard. Here's a quick picture of it. That's the entire billboard, what it was. It was smiley face .ws and the Coca-Cola symbol. And Jon, where are you located today and what are you doing for a living?

Jon: I'm in Tempe, Arizona and I'm actually coming to you from the GoDaddy offices, although today I'm coming to you not as a GoDaddy employee, but

kind of on my own, doing my own thing. Basically I work for a really cool company that, you know, they all thought this was a really great idea. It's not quite big enough to reach the GoDaddy level yet. So they're really super supportive of me building this out on my own and seeing where it can go.

Michael: That's awesome. So your website when you were introduced was heart heart heart .ws. It's the emoji domain name. Is that the way you describe it to people when you say, "Go to this domain name"?

Jon: That is what I say, yeah.

Michael: So Jon's opinions are his alone. He does not represent his employer, GoDaddy for this interview. So let's start from the beginning, gentlemen, so we can educate the audience on emojis. Maybe somebody's been under a rock for the past 20 years and they don't even know what an emoji is. So Jon, what is an emoji, to start with?

Jon: Simply put, I mean they're just digital images that are used in electronic communication to express an idea, concept, or a thing.

Michael: Yeah, and it's not any single language. Like if Matan was only speaking Hebrew and I was only speaking English, we could actually communicate via emojis in some ways, right?

Jon: Correct, I mean that's the appeal of this. It transcends language, it transcends culture, and it transcends age groups as well. I mean I think people pretty much get smile when they see it. It works anywhere you are in the world.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. And Matan, emojis aren't where they started from. In Japan years ago they started as sort of pictographs or simply line drawings of things, and prior to that they were like emoticons. So how do you describe the transition from emoticon to pictograph to emoji?

Matan: The way I look at is like the beginning was black and white, like the old phones in Microsoft Office. That has become characters, in Unicode of course. The evolution I think was in Japan, as I know, and it turned out to be some grid icons which represent emotions, mainly smiling and sad and those kinds of things.

Michael: Yeah. So before we get into some of the details, what's your favorite emoji, I wonder, guys? Jon, what's your favorite emoji, and do you own it?

Jon: I don't own it, but I love the poop emoji.

Matan: Like all of us.

Jon: [inaudible 00:05:18] and recognizable of the bunch.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. What about yours, Matan?

Matan: Actually, it was the poop emoji.

Michael: The poop emoji too.

Matan: My second one is the cowboy.

Michael: I do like the cowboy, and you have the cowboy for sale on EmojiURLs.com, right?

Matan: Yeah.

Michael: I thought about that. So we struck up a conversation at NamesCon. I'm like, I really could care less about emojis and emoji domain names. And then, you know, it's one of those things where a friend of yours buys a new car that you've never heard of before, like a Chevy Bolt or whatever. I don't even know what that car looks like, and then you see it, and suddenly you see it everywhere on the road, right? So emojis were that way to me. Yeah, I've used emojis on my phone to text with people, but I'm not a big emoji

user. But then as soon as we chatted, Matan, I started seeing emojis everywhere. It's all over my Twitter feed, people are posting a bunch of emojis to tell a story in Facebook posts, and then I started looking at the domain names, like I would love to have the rocket ship .ws. Then I reached out to the guy that owned it and he's like, "I'm using it for consulting," and, "Can I buy it from you?" and, "You can make an offer." Anyway, long story short, the guy wanted tens of thousands of dollars for it. I'm like, what is going on here? So I went back to you, Matan, and I bought the unicorn face .ws because unicorns are business related, growing successful companies, a billion dollar pre-IPO, and so I got in early. Who knows if they're ever going to be a commercial entity, but let me ask you guys this. Who controls whether the poop emoji becomes an emoji that you can use on your phones?

Jon: Sure, well there are a few steps to that. The first is that it has to be approved by the Unicode Consortium. So you can think of Unicode as the set of code that governs pretty much every character in every language. So it includes Latin characters, it includes Arabic, Chinese, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and emoji. So first it has to make it into there, and then each of the handset makers or OS makers has to include it in their set as well.

Michael: Got you. So it's a process that takes a while, because it needs to be accepted by Unicode Consortium, then it actually needs to be published, and then it needs to be accepted and used by the operating systems like iOS for Apple, or Android. Can you take any emoji character and make a domain name out of it?

Matan: So there is a committee in the Unicode Consortium which gather. I actually tried to be in that committee in the student role, you know, in that spot. But the flights, it was too much for me.

Michael: Oh, you had to actually go to meet. Got it.

Matan: Yeah, so after they approved the black and white picture, this committee, the Unicode Consortium, then each carrier, let's call it a supplier, LG, Apple, Microsoft, Google, they draw to themselves the black and white

picture colorized. Then the first who puts it, and it's usually Apple, available in the phones, and then it's available to be a domain.

Michael: Got it, and what top-level domains can you use when you're registering an emoji domain name?

Matan: In the past, entrepreneurs in the '90s or in the beginning of 2000, they did some experiments and registered the Unicode one emojis only. So there are around 40 or 50 domains, .com, .net with the emojis, but that's it. So all the rest of the emojis are not available in those top-level domains. Then .ws came with the IDN.

Michael: Right. Would you guys say that .ws is the most well-known top-level domain if you're going to go register an emoji domain?

Matan: Yeah, I consider it the .com of emojis.

Jon: There are others that we kind of talked about. They're a little weird. The Freenom ones, and they have their own interesting business model that none of us really fully understand, but .ws is the main one.

Michael: So you can go to Freenom.com and type in like a cowboy face and you can register a domain name there. Of course you need to convert it using Punycode into the IDN version before you look it up, but you can actually register it either for free, for a limited number which they can take back, or for a paid amount. As long as I brought up Punycode and IDN's, can one of you explain the difference between, you know, unicorn .ws and Punycode and what that is, and then the IDN and what that is, especially as it relates to the Unicode Consortium?

Jon: Sure. So all domains by design are always ASCII or dashes. So basically Punycode is the process of taking that emoji and converting it into the ASCII dash style, so it looks like XN--something.

Michael: Okay, so they're all going to be XN--something.ws when you convert it from smiley face .ws into that. And you can go to GoDaddy and register, I'm not sure at GoDaddy, can you register a smiley face .ws, type that in, and register it directly? Do they do the conversion?

Jon: You can't, no. You'd have to do the conversion yourself.

Michael: Okay, so at most registrars you will actually need to convert it into the XN-- using Punycode to convert it into the IDN in order to register it and see if it's available.

Jon: If it's supported at all, yeah.

Matan: [inaudible 00:11:52]

Michael: I'm sorry, Matan, one second. So your website, Jon, actually does that for you, if you go in there and select a character and paste it in there, you will look to see if it's available at GoDaddy. On the backend you will actually convert it to the IDN, look to see if it's available, and then tell the user.

Jon: That's exactly what it does, yeah.

Michael: I'm sorry, Matan. You were going to say something?

Matan: Yeah, regarding the XN--something, so the two last letters are, from what I know, the position in the keyboard, 6H, 7H, and the rest of it. It's the position.

Michael: Interesting. Yeah, you can go to Unicode.org and read a whole bunch of technical information about how all these emoji characters are being created and launched, and the different skin tones that they're now coming out with on some of the characters. So an emoji domain name doesn't necessarily have to be a single character like cowboy smiling face .ws.

It can be like an airplane Canadian flag .ws, and that can signify flying to Canada for example.

Jon: You got it, correct.

Michael: Okay, are emoji domain names rising in popularity, would you guys say?

Jon: Oh, absolutely. Post-launch of heart heart heart, we've seen an explosion of them. In fact, if you run into one in the wild, chances are it was registered through heart heart heart.

Michael: Oh yeah? So how do you guys know that there is a rise in popularity? I know you guys are so into it you have data, like it's your own website. But for those of us that are hesitant to believe that emoji domain names are actually taking off, what kind of data do you have that's publicly available?

Jon: Of course, we're a public company, so I can't share any of those exact sales numbers, and I'm just not sure of the rules there and whatnot, but we've sold enough that, from what I've heard of the GTLD launches, I think any of those guys would be envious of the number that we've sold so far.

Michael: That's awesome.

Jon: But yeah, we're starting to see them everywhere. I mean, support is being picked up on various social networks, I see them out in the wild being used, there are billboards running them.

Michael: Emojis or emoji domain names?

Jon: Emoji domain names.

Michael: So the one billboard I know about is the smiley face .ws that Coke did in Puerto Rico. Are there other examples that you guys can think of that mass media using emoji domain names?

Jon: Sertoma Chili Cook Off in Ohio, I believe. They've been running one. It's chili chili chili .ws.

Michael: That's awesome.

Jon: It's been successful for them.

Matan: There's another one in the U.K. This one, three times. It's for rating plumbers and technicians who come to your house. So this is their rank, like three times.

Michael: So when I see one of these billboards I physically have to start my phone, go to a web browser, and then click in the address bar, and then bring up my emoji characters like that, and then find the triple thumbs up, which is one of my frequently used. I'm not sure if you can see that. I'm just going to click it three times and then switch back to the English keyboard and type ".ws." Then it will actually load it directly. That's how it's done, right?

Jon: Correct, although they're also indexed by Google. When you search in Google results you see them as emoji domains.

Michael: Yeah, okay. So just so people can see, if you type it in on your computer browser, your browser will use Punycode and convert it into the IDN. So you'll see XN letters. But on your cellphone it actually shows it as the emoji domain name, which is kind of cool. I'm not sure if it does the same thing on Android as it does on the Apple iOS. Do you guys know?

Jon: It does not currently.

Michael: So that's basically what people need to do. They need to toggle back and forth between the emoji character set and the ASCII character set in order to get to the domain name.

Matan: Yeah.

Jon: Which I think a lot of people are used to already, of course, just from general communication.

Matan: By the way, regarding the traffic about inquiries about the domains, what I did, all the domains that I bought, which are 200-ish, are redirecting to my .com webpage. Then I was controlling the traffic with Google Analytics and saw how it goes, because people were trying with their phones, you know? Even manually. It was for two years almost. And then one day I woke up with 10 requests, and each day I got around 10 requests. And I didn't figure out after four or five days what's going on. Something changed. I thought maybe someone is checking me, and then I Google it and found out that it's a Hackathon winner.

Michael: That's awesome, Jon. So you're actually putting money in Matan's pocket by publicizing these domains.

Matan: It's crazy.

Jon: Yeah, I mean we're trying to start an ecosystem here, and if you want to start a domain ecosystem, you have to start with the registered system.

Michael: Yeah, so it's interesting. I'm a big fan of .io domain names for startups. Clearly you're a fan of emoji domain names for whatever. Do you think that these domains are going to be more successful because it's a groundswell up from the bottom, people are actually using these domain name as opposed to... And I'm not asking you guys to back or talk about new GTLD's, but the comparison between the new GTLD's being out there and not being asked for versus sort of the ground-up swell. Do you guys see that as sort of a dichotomy of these domain names?

Jon: I do, yeah.

Matan: I see for the younger generation who use it that much and becoming addicted to it, I see them use that in a different way, such as brands using this in their campaigns and then mentioning the domain on the campaign to millennials or even younger generations. Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, so they'll actually...

Jon: [inaudible 00:18:27] for them it would be strange to not use emojis.

Michael: Yeah, exactly. I don't even know what my daughter is saying half the time with her emojis. She uses a lot of acronyms as well, my 14-year old. So I'm not even sure what those acronyms are. Have you guys seen after-market sales in the emoji domain name space?

Matan: Yeah, I saw many.

Michael: Well, you're actually selling them. So you are seeing them directly.

Matan: Yeah, and actually every once in a while I'm getting in touch with a domain broker who tells me I own 200, 600, 400 emoji domains, and I'm always shocked because I thought I am one of the biggest ones. But actually people have a lot of combinations. For example, someone told me he sold the butterfly emoji. It's a bit new. It's one emoji that's one letter, I call it, for example for \$800.

Michael: So it's a brand new emoji domain name that just came out. So it's the butterfly .ws, and he just sold it for \$800.

Matan: Yeah.

Michael: I'll make a point as well that I bought a couple of domain names from you, Matan, when I was doing my research. A lot of what I do on

DomainSherpa and DN Academy is just play around in the industry and try to figure out how these things work, and build a website, and see if it actually shows the domain name, and how hard it is to get to the keyboards, and all that sort of stuff. So I bought the unicorn .ws and I bought the hang loose or call me symbol .ws, because one day I'm going to live in Hawaii. I'm just going to surf and my surf shop is just going to be hang loose .ws. I wanted to figure out, do the email addresses actually work and all those sorts of questions that you have as a business owner or an investor who wants to try to sell these domain names to a business owner? So I bought a couple from you, I created a relationship with you, and then one morning you ping me right out of the blue. I had just finished my morning run and you're like, "Hey Mike, emoji 5.0 was just released. Do you want to buy and of them from me?" and I'm like, "Yes."

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Michael: One morning you ping me right out of the blue. I had just finished my morning run and you're like, "Hey Mike, emoji 5.0 was just released. Do you want to buy and of them from me?" and I'm like, "Yes."

So I picked up a couple more from you. So yeah, it's amazing. So let me ask you about emoji 5.0. Unicode Consortium has come out, Jon, you were talking about the different sort of versions of emojis over time that they've put out. Back in the very early days they didn't have the unicorn emoji, and then they sort of added that over time, based on very similar to ICAN requests, the Unicode Consortium will look at inquiries coming in and evaluate them and discuss them through the project planning process. For a while now they've been debating Unicode 5.0, the new set of emoji characters that include skin tones. So if you want to put a thumbs up, but you're in a different part of the world and your skin doesn't look like my skin, you can put up a darker skin thumbs up, and a bunch of other characters. They had announced that they were coming out with them. They were approved, but they weren't actually available to register yet. Then the companies like Apple haven't even incorporated them into their character set yet. How does that work, Matan, between when the Unicode Consortium approves it and when they become available for registration at, say, GoDaddy? What is the timing, basically is what I'm looking for?

Matan: So I'm calling this term, I'll call it money time. It's like a race to translate the IDN. The Unicode itself is code U1F-something into a domain, an available domain. So you're kind of translating what Unicode approved, and then you get an XN--something, but it's not working, and GoDaddy and other registrars don't let you even apply for this, and nobody can promise you anything. But then at website.ws, which was the first one that sold those domains, before anyone heard about it from Jon. So this website suddenly, when I reached you, approved the new domains, the new emojis. Exactly. And in the past two years actually, every time I note a set of new emojis is approved, I'm translating them and trying to register them. One of the first times I actually lost to someone else who was faster than I. For example, in the burrito or taco.

Michael: I love those emojis, the burrito and taco emojis.

Matan: Someone from Brazil was seven hours before me. I was sleeping.

Michael: Got it.

Jon: There's talk about making those premium domains, although they haven't yet. They're talking about restricting them for the first little while and charging more.

Michael: The country code, Western Samoa was talking about restricting them.

Jon: Yeah, the new ones that get issued. And having like a sunrise period or something like that there. I don't think they've implemented that, but that's probably coming.

Michael: Yeah, so basically the registry in this case is the country of Western Samoa, and .ws is the country code top-level domain for them. So nobody has ever wanted any Western Samoa, in great quantities, in the past, because how many people live in Western Samoa? And you can't use it as a domain hack in a lot of cases, unless you Straws, and it's Stra.ws or something like that.

Jon: [inaudible 00:24:41]

Michael: Yeah, so these emojis have probably caught Western Samoa off guard and they're like...

Jon: So these days it's not actually Western Samoa themselves. There are organizations that licensed the right to do it. They're out in Carlsbad, California. And if you want to read their story, it's a really fascinating tale that's on their website about how their founders went to Western Samoa and negotiated with the king and got the rights to do this. Sometimes it's an amazing world we live in.

Michael: I haven't seen that. So it's on Website.ws?

Jon: Correct, yeah.

Michael: I'll go read that. That's great. So they negotiated it. So basically you're looking to the registry, the people that are operating the .ws to find out when you can register those domain names first, because then GoDaddy, once it becomes available at the registry, GoDaddy is a reseller. They're the registrar where you can go register it.

Jon: You got it, and it happens automatically on the back end. So as soon as they enable it, then it can be sold through anybody who's a client of .ws.

Michael: Yeah, exactly. All right. So people are probably wondering now that they've figured out how these emojis are launched by the Unicode Consortium, how they're converted using Punycode into IDN's where they can go register them, and you can go to heart heart heart .ws to go there. They're probably wondering, are any large companies using them? Right? Because people that argue new GTLD's or .com's, they look at the Fortune 100 list and every single company is using a .com. So they're spending the most on marketing, they're the largest companies in the world, you're typing in Jon@whatevercompany.com. It's reinforcing. So I want to know, are companies actually using these domain names? And I've pulled together a bunch of information of large companies, but do you guys know any offhand that you want to mention?

Matan: From what I know the car, which is in front of you, is used by Honda. And there's a famous button shirt company which used the button shirt emoji. Serious brand.

Jon: I don't know how many of them are using it as their main domains, but a lot of them are using it to forward onto other things and as part of larger campaigns and other processes.

Michael: Yeah, good point, Jon.

Matan: For example, the British team for the Olympics did a domain with a heart and then the British flag.

Michael: Yeah, that's cool. Budweiser has heart and then the beer sign .ws. Honda you mentioned. Mac Cosmetics has the lipstick symbol .ws. Rayban has the sunglasses .ws. Sony Pictures has a smiley face and then once of those take, I don't know what those things are called.

Matan: Sony's another one, yeah.

Michael: There's a wine app that allows you to scan wine bottles and get their...

Matan: Vivino.

Michael: Yeah, Vivino. They have the wine glass .ws. So people are starting to make use of these. Companies are actually buying them. They're thinking of it, whether it's for marketing purposes in a campaign or as a redirect or whatever, they're buying them.

Jon: Sure, and for an app like that I think it makes a lot of sense. I mean, 60% of our traffic here is mobile these days, and it's increasing every day. And if you want to direct somebody to an app, you can either tell them, "Go to iTunes and search for this and search for this and do this," or just type in the wine bottle .ws and it will take you right there.

Michael: Yeah, it's almost a little bit easier to describe in conversation, and it's definitely more memorable, like find me at unicorn.ws. They don't have to remember anything else. That is going to stick in their mind.

Jon: And for brands I think that's pretty powerful. I mean it tells a story right there. It's a picture and people understand what it means.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. So we talked about .ws being the primary TLD of emoji domains. There are other opportunities like .tk, .ml, .ga, .cf, .gq. Those

are all country code top-level domains as well, but they haven't caught on. Like if you see an emoji domain name, it's typically associated with a .ws. A similar might be .com versus .net, right? A similar type of comparison. So why don't all top-level domains support emojis?

Jon: Right now they're restricted from it. So in 2008, IDNA 2008 was passed. That basically prevents anyone who's a GTLD like any of the new TLD's or a .com, .net, .org, etc., from adopting it. I think the original idea was they wanted to make it less confusing. They didn't want to make it so you could have... You see this sometimes with Latin-like characters, R's that look similar or whatever. So yeah, it was just done to reduce confusion and I don't think it was picked back up again or reconsidered since then.

Michael: Yeah, I think I saw one case where PayPal had an A with like a dot over it or something. So it was a character that looked like an A that somebody could use to trick somebody with a link into clicking that, and duplicating it. So they're trying to prevent that from happening using these IDN characters. So that's why they prevented all other types of characters like that from being used in the domain name.

Jon: Correct, yeah.

Michael: Even though I can go look up, like, the peace symbol. The one that's used by eBay, the peace symbol, and see that it's available in .net or it's available in .com.

Jon: You shouldn't actually be able to register it though.

Michael: You can't register it, but once it's registered, are you allowed to keep it?

Jon: Apparently, yeah. I mean people have hung onto them and traded them around and whatnot.

Michael: Got it. So people are watching this show, they might love emojis and they're like, "I'm going to get an emoji domain name." Is it too late to go hand register a single character emoji domain name in .ws today?

Matan: It depends if you're a brand, a company, or investor. That's what I think.

Michael: Like can you go hand register one today? Or are they all registered already?

Matan: [inaudible 00:31:17]

Jon: It's been a while since I scanned, but most of them are taken. Some of the obscure country flags are still left. But yeah, all the ones you can think of are gone at this point.

Michael: Got it. So Jon, are you able to say on your website, do you see people searching and buying like five character .ws? Emoji character .ws? Or do people try to stick around like two or three?

Jon: I think I kind of primed them in the way that the site works to go two or three. So occasionally we do see it, especially with repeating ones, you know, five hearts, six hearts, seven hearts, whatever. But yeah, for the most part the whole idea is it's short and it's punchy.

Michael: Right. So how many emoji domain names do you own today, Jon?

Jon: I'm not a domainer at all. That's not my thing. I'm a developer. So whenever I start a project I buy a domain. I think I have four or five.

Michael: Yeah, so you've got heart heart heart .ws. Did you think about trying to contact the owner of, I assume heart .ws and heart heart .ws were taken when you registered heart heart heart .ws for this project?

Jon: I don't know about two hearts. That didn't seem right. It just feels kind of off-balance. I don't know, maybe it's just me. No, I didn't try. My budget for this is all super limited. So I just went with what's available.

Michael: Got you. How about yourself, Matan? How many emoji domains do you own?

Matan: Around 300.

Michael: So why don't you use an emoji domain name for your main URL?

Matan: This is a good question. I was thinking about it when I printed my business card, but then I told myself maybe someone will want it. And then it will be useless. So just because of that, yeah. Everything is redirecting to my website.

Michael: Awesome. All right...

Jon: I felt like I had to use an emoji domain for this project, just because, you know, it's a thing that illustrates itself. It's one of those things like you described. It's a tough thing to kind of get your head around until you see it, and then you immediately get it.

Matan: I was thinking about doing a combination, like an emoji and then some words, and then .ws or .com, but changing keyboards is not that comfortable.

Michael: Are you allowed to register, like, heart Matan .ws, to mix emoji and ASCII characters?

Matan: Yeah, you can do like I heart U or something like that.

Michael: Interesting.

Matan: Yeah.

Michael: That one's probably taken. That's a good one. I heart LA. Having grown up in LA, I'll go check that one right after we're done here. So we mentioned what your favorite emoji domain name was, the poop for both of you guys, amazingly enough. If you could own any one besides the poop, which one would you buy? Beer.

Jon: That's a good one. I honestly couldn't come up with a good one. You know, I started before this, and so I got to register what I wanted.

Michael: Yeah, you got what you wanted.

Matan: I think over beer it's a good conversation, you know? Over beer, talking about domains, emojis. That's why.

Michael: And it's funny, there's a website out there that actually shows the number of emojis that are being used in Twitter. It's just taking the firehose from Twitter and parsing it out and looking at the emojis. I forget the exact...

Matan: Tracker, EmojiTracker.

Michael: EmojiTracker.com. And the numbers just fly. Like so many people are using hearts or...

Jon: [inaudible 00:35:06]

Michael: Yeah, and so it's amazing to watch how it's exponentially increasing. Does it make sense to say that if emojis are on an upward trend, that domain names are going to ride along with that? Is fair to say? Or do you guys as technologists say no?

Jon: I mean domain names are all about communicating ideas, and so emojis are a big part of that now.

Matan: I agree.

Michael: All right. And so companies are using these domain names. They may not be putting it on their business card, but Jon, if you're going to a domain event and you're not representing GoDaddy, but you're representing heart heart heart .ws, do you have a business card that says, "heart heart heart .ws and Jon@heartheartheart.ws"?

Jon: Well, email is a little problematic right now. Gmail tends to block things coming from IDN domains. So that I don't do. I'm Jon@domainresearchgroup.net. If you want to reach out to me, I do it that way. But yeah, if I had a business card, which I don't, then it would probably say heart heart heart .ws.

Michael: Yeah, you helped me figure that out as well, that my Gmail just wasn't working even though I was using the GoDaddy servers to forward all email. Yeah, never quite got that worked out, although technically it works, right? It's just that it blocks it.

Matan: Yeah, for me too.

Jon: It's valid. I mean it is a legal, valid domain. It's just some of the transport systems have issues with it.

Matan: I was sending my family some emails with the genius emoji, and they all got it, but reply to me, some did have problems and some succeeded.

Michael: Awesome. All right, and for anyone that's interested in emoji domain names, when I was researching this topic I gathered a whole bunch of information, much of which Jon and Matan described today, but I put it into "The Definitive Guide to Domain Names." In it I've done extensive research with the help of Luke Lezon at Intellium, the makers of DomainIQ and EstiBot, and determined the earliest registered emoji domain names. So basically it was a pictograph initially that was accepted into the Unicode Version 1, has gone all the way up to Version 5. It is the oldest one. There are actually three that were registered on the same day in .com and .net. If you

want to know what those are, sign up for the DomainSherpa newsletter. I'll give you the whole eBook, and so it supplements the information that these fine gentlemen have described here. Gentlemen, is there anything else about emoji domain names that I didn't ask you about that you think would be interesting to share with the audience?

Jon: Well, I just want to say that awareness is growing. We haven't quite cracked into the mainstream with this yet, but we're getting there. I still run into people in the tech world who are like, "Wait, what? That's possible?" So we have to clear that hurdle first, but as soon as we do, the early adopters are already on board, and we're getting towards mainstream acceptance.

Michael: Yeah, definitely. Matan?

Matan: Yeah, I think the fact that every time around 50-60 emojis are coming to the keyboards. So the conversation about it in the old media is growing every time. Every release, ever iOS update, every time Unicode tells something to everyone, and then new domains are available, you know? Single letters of emojis are available. And it's sometimes funny to see a dancer who's a woman who's a guy, and then pregnant, and then a steak for example, or a pretzel, or a zombie.

Michael: Yeah, it will be interesting to see. In addition to just the publicity of emojis and emoji domain names, tracking the sales, which I've had some difficulty doing. In "The Definitive Guide" I've put in the cloud symbol .com did sell for \$13,600 on Flippa recently from one investor to another investor. It's interesting though that the cloud symbol, even though it can be converted into IDN and it works, you can't actually access it from your emoji keyboard. So it's a pictograph. It's not one of the official emoji characters from Unicode. So it may never get onto the iOS keyboard or the Android keyboard. Is it possible, guys, that an emoji character in Version 5 may actually be removed in a later version, like a Version 10, let's say? Is that possible?

Matan: I don't know, but a lot of work goes into implementing them, so...

Michael: Likely not.

Matan: Yeah.

Michael: All right, and the other question I had for you, Matan, is that your pricing is on your website. So if somebody wants to go buy the cowboy smiley face, they can see that it's priced in a range, right?

Matan: Exactly.

Michael: So how do you price these emoji domain names in the aftermarket?

Matan: In the beginning I wasn't pricing them, but I was full of inquiries. So I told myself I'm going to make the time easy and shorter. So I just named the prices, and usually it's mainly regarding the possibilities of brands to use it and the inquiries I'm getting. For example, with the Unicode I got around 40% of my inquiries about the Unicode itself. Almost 40%. So people are crazy about it, and I didn't know about it in my country. It's crazy.

Michael: Yeah, that's amazing. So if you want to go check out the unicorn, you can actually see it on my Twitter profile. I changed my URL to the unicorn. So go to [Twitter.com/michaelcyger](https://twitter.com/michaelcyger). Then in my bio you can see the unicorn that shows up as unicorn character .ws.

Matan: Another thing that I saw, another thing that I got, people were really, nationality, you say? Regarding their flags. So when I buy the Indian flag, for example, I told myself, okay, there are one billion Indian people in the world. Maybe one will want it, and I got many inquiries about the Saudi Arabia flag, the Indian flag, the Swedish flag, and I was really surprised because people want it very much.

Michael: National pride.

Jon: How much do people pay for domains like that?

Matan: I price it kind of low, but I got inquiries a year ago and two years ago for more than \$1,000.

Michael: Wow. So what are the three buckets? I think I saw \$1,000 plus, I saw \$600-1,000 maybe, and then \$600 and below. Was that generally how you bucket-ize your emoji domains?

Matan: Exactly. Combinations are a bit less, and the others that are not in that use or do not mean that much to brands or to people are in the middle, but a shopping cart or a gift or a coffee cup, which has a tremendous potential, are priced high.

Michael: Yeah, so what's the most expensive? You know, you don't need to say the domain name, but what's the highest price that you've ever gotten for a single-character emoji domain name?

Matan: Around 20.

Michael: Twenty thousand?

Matan: Yeah.

Michael: Wow. Boy, after we hang up here I've got to ask you what the domain name is.

Matan: I'm not telling, I'm not telling.

Michael: That's awesome.

Matan: It was one of my first purchases.

Jon: So one of the goals for my project is to better support the after-market moving forward as well. So if anybody has good ideas as to how best to do that, feel free to hit me up and let me know.

Michael: Yeah, so when I was doing research and trying to figure out if this market, if I could get some great domain names, that's exactly what I did, Jon. I went and found this EmojiTracker.com and I looked at the most prolific, the most-used emoji domains, and then I put it into Punycoder.com, converted it into an IDN, and then I looked up the WHOIS to see who owned it. I reached out to a bunch of people, half of which didn't return my emails, half of which were, "I want \$10,000 or \$20,000 for it," after a bunch of back and forth, or, "No, I'm not interested in selling it," because they were taken up by technologists. You know, people that are on the internet, that understand how it works. They're like, "Hey, these emojis are kind of cool," and five years ago they didn't have any competition. So they picked up one or five of them, and they've got the best ones. And they're probably never going to let them expire.

Matan: I have a good example for this, actually. When I began with it I was changing the burger .ws and the pizza .ws, and each one of the owners told me it's \$125,000.

Michael: Seriously?

Matan: Yeah, which is one million in my currency, shekels.

Michael: Wow, \$125,000 is what it would take to sell those. Now, they may actually take a little bit less if the cash is on the table, but that's what they're saying, huh?

Matan: Yeah, and I saw that the burger emoji is actually owned by a tech influencer called Hillary something in New York, which she's in the startup scene.

Michael: Well, we need to get some of this data out there. Not to try and drive a frenzy in the market, but just to share some of the information. There just isn't any information about the after-market. So if somebody is watching this show and they know of some public information, we're not looking for

private, that they can share, please post that in the comments. If you have additional questions that I didn't ask Matan and Jon, please post them in the comments below and I'll ask them to come back and answer as many as they can. I also encourage you, the person who's watching this interview, to get out from behind your computer, reach out to people in the industry, follow Jon on Twitter, send an email to Matan. Business is done through relationships, and it was only through happenstance that our tables were right across from each other, basically, at NamesCon that I had the opportunity to meet him. If we were on opposite sides of the room, I still wouldn't know about emoji domain names today. So take a moment and start building relationships. Matan Israeli and Jon Roig, thank you for coming on the DomainSherpa show, sharing the details of emoji domain names that everybody wants to know and some want to invest in, and thanks for being domain Sherpas for others.

Matan: Thank you very much.

Jon: Appreciate the time. This has been really fun.

Michael: Thank you all for watching. We'll see you next time.