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Online Grocer FreshDirect Suffers Web Outage

By DANA MATTIOLI

Online grocer FreshDirect failed to do a simple but vital task for an Internet retailer—renew its website address.

The company's site was unavailable for much of Tuesday and Wednesday. And it was an embarrassing scene: Instead of customers seeing its trademark orange logo and pitches for fresh vegetables, they were greeted by a generic Web page for domain registrar Network Solutions LLC, saying the freshdirect.com address needed to be renewed.

FreshDirect, of Long Island City, N.Y., delivers groceries to customers in parts of New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Founded in 1999, the company has become a major player in the sector, approaching \$400 million in annual sales, according to a person familiar with the matter.

"There was a renewal issue with our domain name," said a spokeswoman for FreshDirect. "This issue has been fixed...Many customers already have site access back and the rest should have it back within the next few hours," she said early Wednesday afternoon.

\$37.99

Estimated annual cost to renew the freshdirect.com domain name

Despite being notified by Network Solutions that the domain name was expiring as early as November, the company failed to renew its domain name in time, said a person familiar with the matter.

FreshDirect's domain registry expired Christmas Day, and on Wednesday the company renewed its registry until 2024, the person said.

According to a representative at Network Solutions, the typical annual fee for a domain name renewal is \$37.99.

"Renewing a domain name is ecommerce 101," said Sucharita Mulpuru, a retail analyst with Forrester Research. Increasingly, retailers use auto-renew to prevent a gaffe like this from happening, she said.

While the renewal blunder is an embarrassment, the timing could have been worse. "I'd imagine this would be a much bigger issue if it happened right before the Super Bowl or Christmas," says Ms. Mulpuru.

The Dallas Cowboys experienced an equally embarrassing outage after failing to renew its DallasCowboys.com domain name with Network Solutions in 2010. Visitors to the Cowboys' site learned that the football team was delinquent on renewing its domain name.

While there have been a number of recent high-profile website outages, most have been caused by high traffic and other glitches, not because a company forgot to renew its domain name.

Last year, [Target](#) Corp.'s website crashed during the launch of a line with Italian designer Missoni. The crash not only hurt sales of the collection, but it also caused sales throughout Target's entire site to come to a halt.

Retailer Ann Taylor's website in 2011 crashed on Cyber Monday because of a deluge of high traffic.

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