Quarterly focus Interview

Beyond the Address: Neha Naik on the Future of Digital Identity



About Neha Naik

Neha Naik is Vice President of Channel Partnerships at Radix, a leading new-gTLD registry. She has been working in the domain industry since 2005 and has been part of Radix's journey since its founding in 2013. With over two decades of experience, she focuses on building strong partnerships across the global domain ecosystem and driving sustainable growth.

As the digital landscape evolves, the role of the domain name is changing with it. From search and social media to AI-driven discovery, the ways people find and interact with businesses are becoming increasingly complex. Yet, as Neha Naik argues, the need for a trusted and authoritative digital identity has never been greater.

With more than 20 years in the domain industry and a key role at Radix, Naik offers a perspective shaped by two major eras of change in the domain name space. In this conversation, she looks at the next wave of growth, the rising value of premium domains, the impact of AI, and why the human relationships at the heart of the industry still matter.

Neha, welcome back to The Domain Standard! You first appeared in our Who's Who section in our last issue, it's great to have you with us again. In your profile there, we read that you have more than 20 years of experience in the domain industry. Looking back, what do you think has changed most fundamentally about the role of a domain name and what people still misunderstand about where domains are headed?

It really has flown by. And standing on the cusp of another new TLD round, I feel very fortunate to be in an industry where you get to see a reinvention of this scale twice.

What has changed most is not the fundamental role of a domain, but everything around it.

In 2005, discovery was relatively linear. Today, people find businesses through search, social media, marketplaces, apps and, increasingly, AI. The channels have multiplied dramatically, but every one of them still needs an authoritative identity underneath it.

That is the part I think people still underestimate.

A domain is one of the very few pieces of your digital presence that you actually control. You can build enormous reach on Instagram, TikTok or any other platform, but you are still operating on rented land. You don't own the algorithm, the address, the audience relationship or the rules.

A domain is different. It is your identity outside the platform. And it is much more than a website address: it underpins your email, authentication, certificates, APIs and the broader signals that establish who you are online. The domain has evolved from simply being the front door to also being the foundation.

AI makes this even more interesting. We are moving from a world of links to a world of answers, and some people read that as a threat to domains. I see it differently. If discovery becomes less about being clicked and more about being interpreted, trusted and selected, then having a clear, authoritative identity matters more, not less. AI systems still need to work out which businesses, brands and sources are credible, and the domain becomes part of that trust layer.

So the biggest misconception is that domains matter less because people may type them less often. That confuses visibility with relevance.

The platforms will keep changing. Discovery will keep changing. The need to own your identity, establish trust and differentiate yourself online is not going away. If anything, it is becoming more important.

Radix has grown from a relatively young registry into a business with more than 10 million domains under management across 200+ countries. From your perspective as Senior VP of Channel Partnership, what is driving the next wave of growth in domains: new extensions, new types of customers, new use cases, new technologies like AI, or something else?

It is worth noting that we are asking this question at a time when the domain market itself is in very healthy shape. At the end of Q2 2026, there were 401.6 million domain registrations globally, up 8.1% year on year. Despite everything changing around search, social and AI, the base continues to expand meaningfully.

For me, though, the next wave of growth is not about adding more volume. It is about creating better-quality demand.

New extensions will certainly be part of that. Radix has applied for 46 string under Radix Deux, and it reflects our conviction that there is still substantial opportunity to create good-quality namespaces for the right audiences. The goal is not to launch extensions because we can; it is to identify namespaces with a clear audience, a strong reason to exist and enough relevance to become meaningful identities over the long term.

What is also changing quite dramatically is where digital creation begins. For a long time the primary on-ramps to an online presence were registrars, hosting companies and website builders. Those remain hugely important, but platforms such as Lovable, Replit, Vercel and Cloudflare are now attracting a different generation of creators and developers. AI is collapsing the distance between an idea and a business, application, product or website.

You can see it in the numbers. Netcraft detected almost 1.5 billion sites by mid-2026, roughly 19% more than a year earlier. The universe of things that need to be named, differentiated and trusted is getting larger, not smaller.

And increasingly, the audience for those identities is not exclusively human. Automated traffic now accounts for more than half of web traffic. AI agents are becoming participants in how information is discovered, interpreted and acted upon, which makes a clear, persistent and trusted identity even more important.

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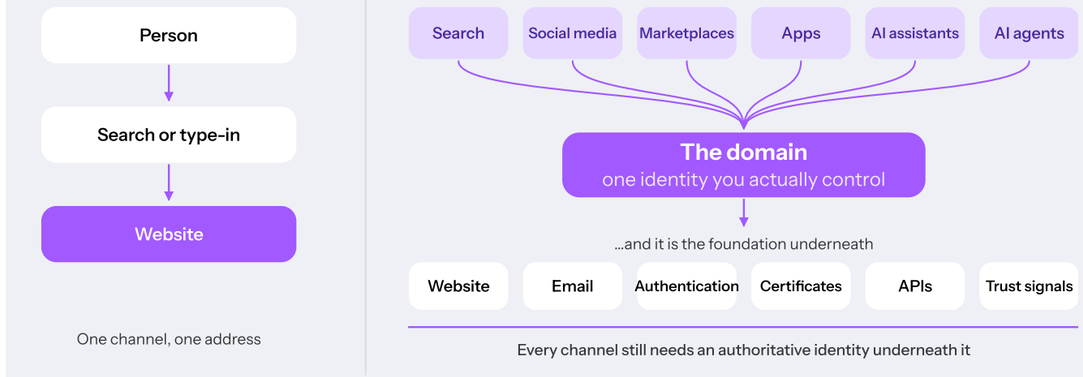
But the metric I keep coming back to is renewal and genuine usage.

A first-year registration tells you somebody was willing to try a domain. A renewal tells you the domain became valuable enough to keep. Registration volume can be influenced by pricing, promotions or distribution. Renewal tells you something more fundamental: did the customer find utility in that name? Did they build on it, establish an identity around it and decide it remained worth owning?

So the next wave of growth is a combination of new namespaces, more digital creation, new kinds of customers and technology that changes both who creates and how identities are discovered. But sustainable growth ultimately comes from creating domains that are relevant enough to be chosen and valuable enough to be renewed.

That is the real measure of whether we are growing the ecosystem rather than simply growing the numbers.

Discovery, Then vs Now



> "The biggest misconception is that domains matter less because people may type them less often. That confuses visibility with relevance."

Radix publishes a premiums report every six months, and the most recent one described the first half of 2026 as your strongest on record. There has been a lot of debate lately about where the value of a domain really comes from – traffic, data, monetisation. What does the premium market tell you about how businesses value a domain today?

The premium market is one of the clearest signals we have, because nobody buys a premium domain by accident. It is a deliberate decision to pay more for a name because you believe it will do something for your business.

In the first half of 2026 we recorded 4,424 premium registrations, up 50% year on year and the strongest half in our history. What I find more telling than the headline number is the shape of the demand. It was not concentrated at the lower end. We saw 112 registrations at $5,000 a year, 37 at $10,000 and two at $25,000. Businesses are paying those prices for names they intend to build a brand on.

.tech led the portfolio with 1,229 premium registrations, which is consistent with what we see from technology companies more broadly. .space was the surprise of the half, with a record 889 registrations, up 34% on the previous six months, driven by everything from space technology to real estate and coworking. .fun, .online and .store all had strong halves as well.

The number I pay closest attention to, though, is renewal. We renewed 6,502 premium domains in the half, and once a premium domain gets past its first renewal, our renewal rate from that point onwards is 84%. That tells me these names are being used, not held.

There was a lovely example of this in the report. IQM Quantum Computers became the first European quantum computing company to list on a major US exchange, debuting on Nasdaq at roughly a $1.8 billion valuation. They did it on iqm.tech, having upgraded from meetiqm.com. When a company at that stage decides the domain is part of the brand rather than just the address, that is a very strong statement about where value sits.

So to the wider debate: I think traffic and data will always have a role, but the premium market shows that the most durable value in a domain comes from what someone builds on it. A short, meaningful, memorable name that a business is proud to put on its front door is worth more every year it is kept. That is not monetisation in the traditional sense. It is brand equity, and it compounds.

One last question. On our pages, you've described in the past the domain industry as unusually collaborative and relationship-driven. As the industry becomes larger, more automated, and increasingly shaped by AI, what is one thing about the domain ecosystem that you hope will not change?

The thing I hope never changes is the human side of this industry.

Domains is a relatively tight ecosystem, and one of its greatest strengths has always been how relationship-driven and collaborative it is. You can compete very hard commercially and still sit across the table from each other, exchange ideas, share what you are seeing in the market and work together on problems that are bigger than any one company.

I have spent more than 20 years in this industry, and many of the relationships I started with have followed me through different companies, roles and parts of the ecosystem. That continuity creates a level of trust and openness that I think is quite unusual.

As the industry gets bigger and technology takes over more of the mechanics, whether that is AI helping customers find names, automating pricing or changing how domains are distributed, I hope we do not confuse efficiency with removing the need for relationships.

Partnerships are ultimately built on understanding what matters to the other side. Some of the best opportunities we have created at Radix have come not from a perfectly designed algorithm or a standard commercial programme, but from two teams understanding each other's businesses well enough to spot an opportunity that neither would have found alone.

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I hope that remains part of the DNA of this industry.

> **"AI will make us faster and hopefully smarter. But curiosity, trust and the willingness to collaborate are much harder to automate."**

Radix Premium Domains: H1 2026 at a Glance

4,424
premium registrations in H1 2026, the strongest half on record

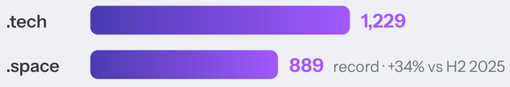
+50%
year on year

6,502
premium domains renewed in the half

High-value registrations by annual price



Leading extensions





Renewal rate once a premium name passes its first renewal

"That tells me these names are being used, not held."

Source: Radix H1 2026 Premiums Report, as cited by Neha Naik.

The Next Wave of Growth: A Market in Healthy Shape

401.6M
domain registrations globally at the end of Q2 2026

+8.1%
year-on-year growth of the global domain base

~1.5B
sites detected by Netcraft by mid-2026, roughly +19% in a year

>50%
of web traffic is now automated

Four drivers of better-quality demand

01
New namespaces
46 strings applied for under Radix Deux, each with a clear audience and a reason to exist.

02
More digital creation
Lovable, Replit, Vercel and Cloudflare are the new on-ramps. AI collapses the distance between idea and product.

03
New kinds of customers
AI agents now take part in how information is discovered, interpreted and acted upon.

04
Renewal and real usage
Registrations show willingness to try. Renewals show the name became worth keeping.