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(54) **CALCULATING DOMAIN REGISTRAR REPUTATION BY ANALYSIS OF HOSTED DOMAINS**

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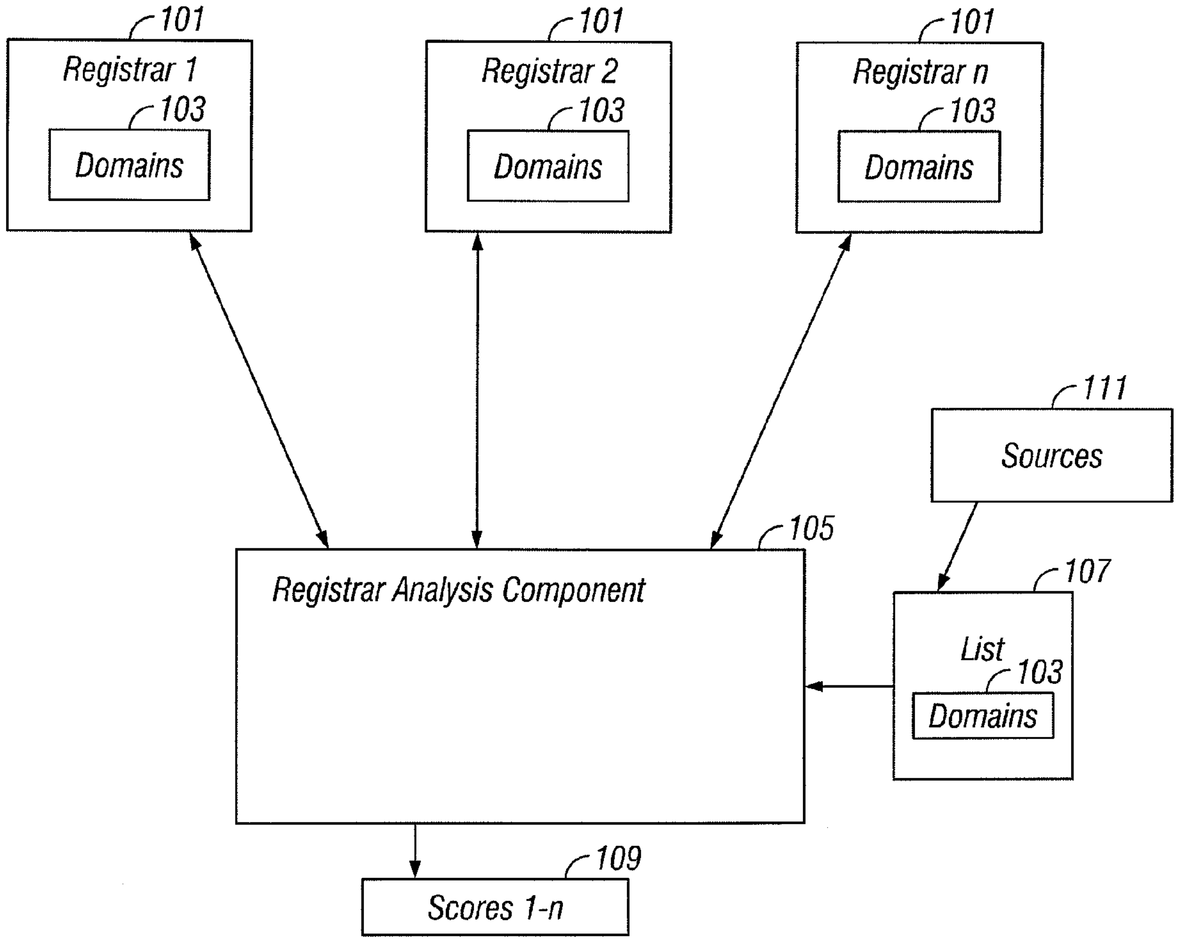
(57) **ABSTRACT**

Reputations of domain registrars are calculated based on the hosting of risky domains. The more undesirable domains a registrar hosts, the lower is its reputation. The risk level of the hosted domains is also a factor in determining the reputation. When a user attempts to access a hosted domain, the calculated reputation of the hosting domain registrar is used in determining what security steps to apply to the access attempt. The worse the reputation of the hosting registrar, the more security is applied, all else being equal.



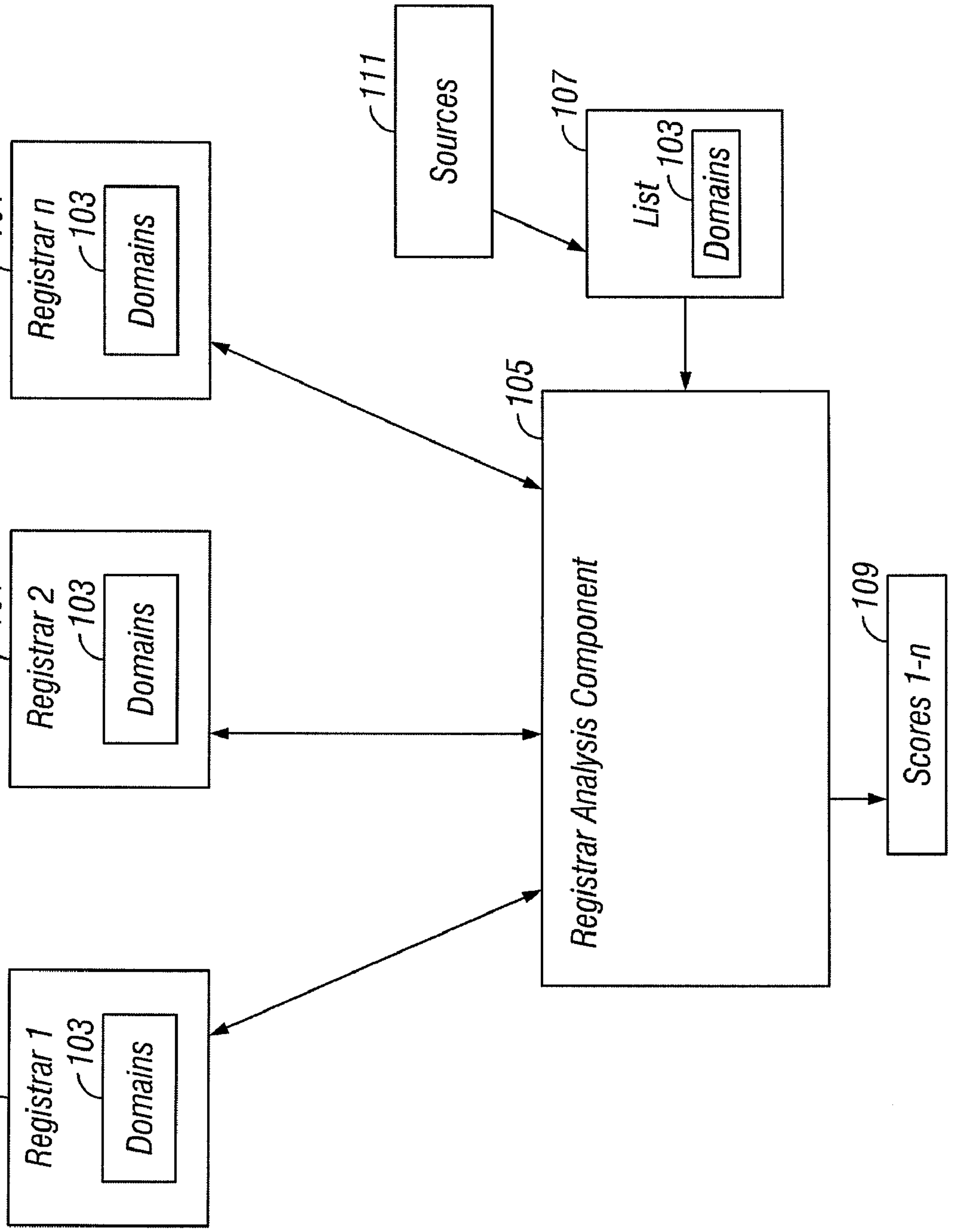

101
Registrar 1
103
Domains
101
Registrar 2
103
Domains
101
Registrar n
103
Domains
111
Sources
107
List
103
Domains
105
Registrar Analysis Component
109
Scores 1-n

FIG. 1

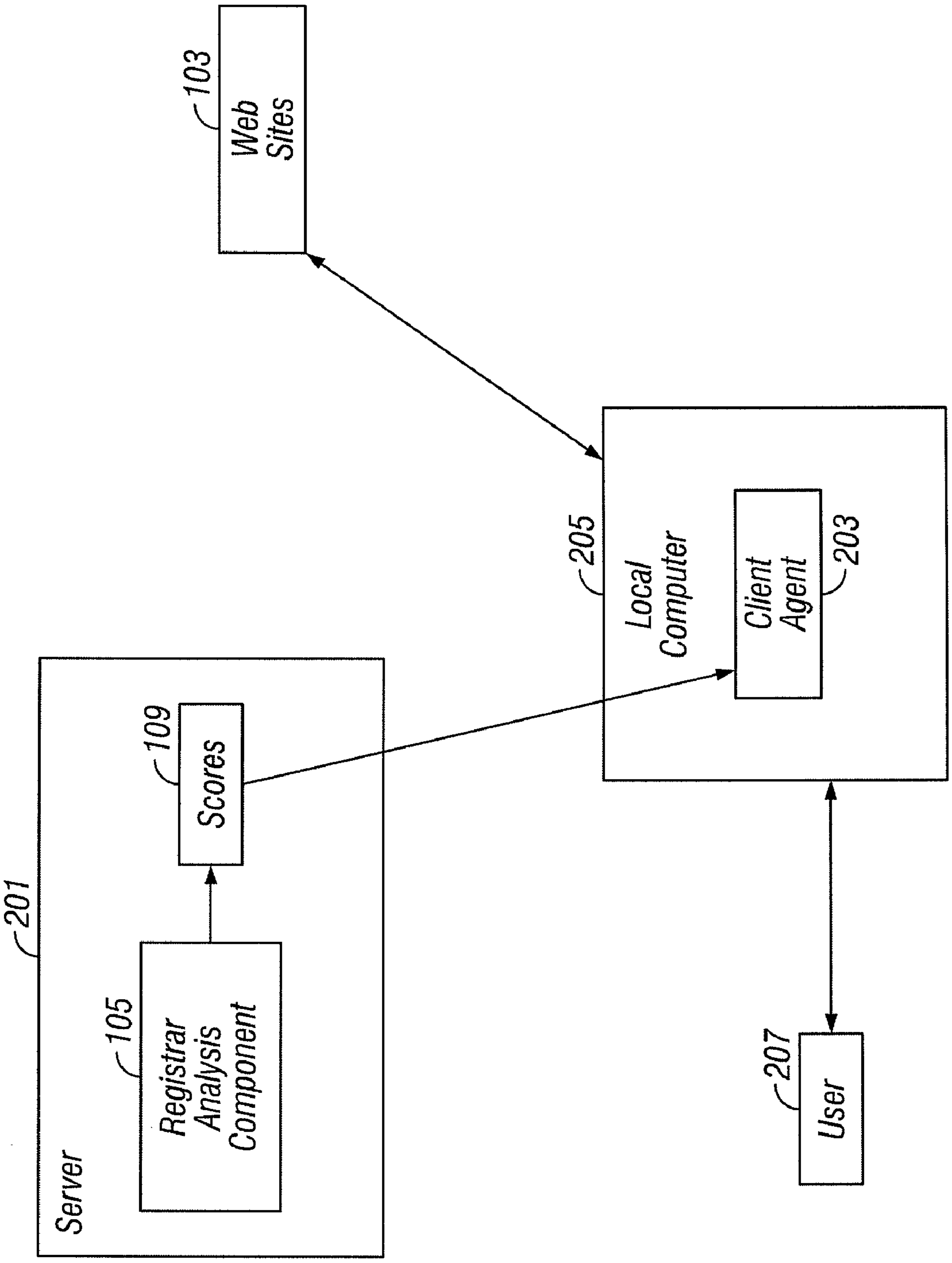

201
Server
105
Registrar Analysis Component
109
Scores
205
Local Computer
203
Client Agent
103
Web Sites
207
User

FIG. 2

CALCULATING DOMAIN REGISTRAR REPUTATION BY ANALYSIS OF HOSTED DOMAINS

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] This invention pertains generally to computer security, and more specifically to using the reputation of a domain registrar to provide guidance as to what level of security analysis to apply to interactions with a hosted domain.

BACKGROUND

[0002] The use of the internet has become ubiquitous. Unfortunately, as internet use has spread, so has the use of the internet for the distribution of viruses, spyware, hosted advertising programs, and other unwanted software. When attempting to connect to a new service (e.g., website, URL, etc.), there are a number of analysis methods that can be used to determine how safe the remote target is. However, the more effective the method, generally the more expensive it is to apply in terms of latency and computing resource usage. The most risky sites certainly merit the use of the most effective methods despite the cost, but it would be appropriate to apply less expensive security checks to many safer sites. Unfortunately, it can often be difficult to determine which level of security analysis to employ to which target without detailed contextual information. It would be desirable to address this shortcoming.

SUMMARY

[0003] Reputations of domain registrars are calculated based on the hosting of risky domains. The more undesirable domains a registrar hosts, the lower is its reputation. The risk level of the hosted domains is also a factor in determining the reputation. When a user attempts to access a hosted domain, the calculated reputation of the hosting domain registrar is used in determining what security steps to apply to the access attempt. The worse the reputation of the hosting registrar, the more security is applied, all else being equal.

[0004] The features and advantages described in this summary and in the following detailed description are not all-inclusive, and particularly, many additional features and advantages will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the relevant art in view of the drawings, specification, and claims hereof. Moreover, it should be noted that the language used in the specification has been principally selected for readability and instructional purposes, and may not have been selected to delineate or circumscribe the inventive subject matter, resort to the claims being necessary to determine such inventive subject matter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] FIG. **1** is a block diagram illustrating calculating the reputation of a domain registrar based on an analysis of its hosted domains, according to some embodiments of the present invention.

[0006] FIG. **2** is a block diagram illustrating using the reputation of a domain registrar to provide guidance as to what level of security analysis to apply to interactions with a hosted domain, according to some embodiments of the present invention.

[0007] The Figures depict embodiments of the present invention for purposes of illustration only. One skilled in the art will readily recognize from the following discussion that alternative embodiments of the structures and methods illustrated herein may be employed without departing from the principles of the invention described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0008] FIG. **1** illustrates a system for calculating the reputational score **109** of a domain registrar **101** based on an analysis of its hosted domains **103**, according to some embodiments of the present invention. It is to be understood that although various components are illustrated and described above as separate entities, each illustrated component represents a collection of functionalities which can be implemented as software, hardware, firmware or any combination of these. Where a component is implemented as software, it can be implemented as a standalone program, but can also be implemented in other ways, for example as part of a larger program, as a plurality of separate programs, as a kernel loadable module, as one or more device drivers or as one or more statically or dynamically linked libraries.

[0009] As illustrated in FIG. **1**, a registrar analysis component **105** maintains a list **107** of common risky, fraudulent and otherwise undesirable domains **103**. The contents of this list **107** can come from a variety of sources **111**, such as known blacklists, spam detection software, phishing detection software, security software, and all other methods for collecting or identifying suspicious domains (e.g., identification of domain **103** names with typo variants). The registrar analysis component **105** keeps the suspicious domain list **107** current in real time, by periodically updating the list from the sources **111**.

[0010] The registrar analysis component **105** maintains a reputational score **109** (i.e., a riskiness score) for each registrar **101** that hosts at least one domain **103** on the list **107**. More specifically, the registrar analysis component **105** identifies the hosting registrar **101** for each domain **103** on the list **107**, and adjusts the reputational score **109** of the that registrar **101** based on the risk level of the hosted domain **103**. In a simple example, the registrar analysis component **105** can assign domains **103** a risk level of, e.g., 1 to 10. For example, 10 could represent the most risky domains **103** (those associated with malware, CSS attacks, etc.), **5** could represent less virulent but still fraudulent domains **103** (e.g., those hosting spam sites), and 1 could indicate the least bad of the undesirable domains **103** (e.g., hosted ads). It is to be understood that the specific methodology used to calculate risk levels of domains **103** is variable design parameter. The registrar analysis component **105** can apply any weighting factors to distinguish between types of suspicious sites **103** deemed appropriate.

[0011] Turning now to the reputational scores **109** of domain registrars **101**, the registrar analysis component **105** can initially assign each registrar **101** a neutral score, e.g., 0. As the registrar analysis component **105** determines the hosting registrars **101** of individual suspicious domains **103**, the registrar analysis component **105** can adjust the reputations **109** of the hosting registrars **101** accordingly. Generally, the more domains **103** of higher risk levels hosted by a given registrar **101**, the more risky the registrar **101** is scored as being. For example, in a weighing scheme in which malware is adjudicated as having a higher risk factor than spam, hosting 10,000 malware sites **103** would typically result in a score **109** indicating more risk than hosting 10,000 spam sites **103**, whereas hosting 10,000 spam sites **103** would typically result in a score **109** indicating more risk than hosting 5,000 spam sites **103**, all other factors being equal.

[0012] It is to be understood that the specific methodology used to calculate reputational scores **109** of domain registrars **101** is a variable design parameter. In one embodiment, the registrar analysis component **105** can simply calculate the reputation **109** of a hosting registrar **101** as the average risk level of all hosted risky domains **103**, with some tuning for minimum sample size. The registrar analysis component **105** can apply any weighting factors in calculating the reputational score **109** deemed appropriate. Other factors that can be included in the calculation of the final score **109** are, for example, a quantifiable evaluation of the given registration process used by the registrar **101**, percent of risky domains **103** as total of those hosted, etc. In any case, each registrar **101** is assigned a reputation score **109**, which is adjusted in real time as new samples are seen, new evaluations are made, etc.

[0013] Turning now to FIG. **2**, the registrar analysis component **105**, which is typically centrally located, for example on a server **201**, makes the reputational scores **109** of the various domain registrars **101** available to client agents **203** running on local user computers **205** (only one such local computer **205** is illustrated). When a user **207** attempts to access a website **103** the client agent **203** evaluates the reputational score **109** of the registrar **101** that hosts the target domain **103**, in order to determine what level of protection or guidance is appropriate to apply to the access attempt. In some embodiments, this evaluation is only made when a user **207** attempts to access a site **103** that he has not previously accessed, and/or is not on a list of known safe sites **103**. In any case, the greater the risk factor indicated for the registrar **101**, the more likely that the domain **103** itself is fraudulent or the like, and thus more robust (and expensive) measures are typically applied in the corresponding security analysis of the site **103**.

[0014] Where the registrar **101** hosting an unknown domain **103** that the user **207** is attempting to access has a score **109** indicating high risk, the client agent **203** might employ more expensive scanning of the site **103** for malicious code, may introduce more latency while a honeyclient probes the site **103**, or may provide more disruptive guidance to the user **207**, in the form of warnings and such. It is to be understood that the score **109** of the registrar **101** is just one factor that can be taken into account when determining how much security analysis to apply to a target site **103**. The registrar's score **109** can be combined with, for example, information indicating the riskiness of the site **103** itself, using any weighting factors as desired. It is to be further understood that what specific security analysis methods to apply to given domains **103** under which circumstances is a variable design parameter. The above described methodologies enable robust domain **103** risk assessment by using the reputational score **109** of the registrar **101** as a factor. Client agents **203** and other security components can respond to this risk assessment as deemed appropriate.

[0015] Wide usage of the above described methodologies should have the effect of creating an environment in which some domain registrars **101** are rated as being more trusted than others. If a domain publisher wants its users to experience faster and smoother interaction, it will use a highly trusted registrar **101** to host its domains **103**.

[0016] As will be understood by those familiar with the art, the invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. Likewise, the particular naming and division of the portions, modules, agents, managers, components, functions, procedures, actions, layers, features, attributes, methodologies and other aspects are not mandatory or significant, and the mechanisms that implement the invention or its features may have different names, divisions and/or formats. Furthermore, as will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the relevant art, the portions, modules, agents, managers, components, functions, procedures, actions, layers, features, attributes, methodologies and other aspects of the invention can be implemented as software, hardware, firmware or any combination of the three. Wherever a component of the present invention is implemented as software, the component can be implemented as a script, as a standalone program, as part of a larger program, as a plurality of separate scripts and/or programs, as a statically or dynamically linked library, as a kernel loadable module, as a device driver, and/or in every and any other way known now or in the future to those of skill in the art of computer programming. Additionally, the present invention is in no way limited to implementation in any specific programming language, or for any specific operating system or environment. Furthermore, it will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the relevant art that where the present invention is implemented in whole or in part in software, the software components thereof can be stored on computer readable media as computer program products. Any form of computer readable medium can be used in this context, such as magnetic or optical storage media. Additionally, software portions of the present invention can be instantiated (for example as object code or executable images) within the memory of any computing device. Accordingly, the disclosure of the present invention is intended to be illustrative, but not limiting, of the scope of the invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A machine implemented method for calculating reputational scores concerning domain registrars, the method comprising the steps of:

maintaining reputational scores for a plurality of domain registrars;

maintaining a list of known undesirable domains;

for each undesirable domain on the list, determining a domain registrar that hosts that domain;

adjusting a reputational score concerning that domain registrar based on the hosting of the undesirable domain; and

making reputational scores concerning domain registrars available to at least one party that accesses domains.

2. The method of claim **1** wherein maintaining a list of known undesirable domains further comprises getting information concerning at least one known undesirable domain from at least one source from a group of sources consisting of:

at least one blacklist;

spam detection software;

phishing detection software;

security software; and

an identification of at least one domain name with at least one typo variant.

3. The method of claim **1** wherein maintaining a list of known undesirable domains further comprises maintaining a list of domains comprising at least one domain of at least one domain type from a group of domain types consisting of:

phishing domains;

spam domains;

domains hosting malware;

suspicious domains;

risky domains;

fraudulent domains; and

domains hosting advertisements.

4. The method of claim **1** wherein maintaining a list of known undesirable domains further comprises:

periodically updating the list in real time.

5. The method of claim **1** wherein maintaining reputational scores for a plurality of domain registrars further comprises:

initially assigning a domain registrar a neutral score.

6. The method of claim **1** wherein adjusting a reputational score concerning a domain registrar based on the hosting of an undesirable domain further comprises:

adjusting the reputational score concerning the domain registrar based on a risk level of the hosted undesirable domain.

7. The method of claim **1** further comprising:

adjusting at least one reputational score concerning at least one domain registrar according to at least one weighting factor.

8. The method of claim **7** wherein adjusting at least one reputational score concerning at least one domain registrar according to at least one weighting factor further comprises utilizing at least one weighting factor from a group of weighting factors consisting of:

a percentage of risky domains as a total of hosted domains;

an evaluation of a used registration process;

a sample size; and

an average risk level.

9. A machine implemented method for using a reputational score concerning a domain registrar as a factor in determining riskiness of interacting with a hosted domain, the method comprising the steps of:

detecting attempts by a user to access external sites;

responsive to the detecting step, examining a reputational score concerning a domain registrar hosting an external site the user is attempting to access; and

utilizing the reputational score concerning the domain registrar as at least one factor in determining at least one security step to apply to the access attempt.

10. The method of claim **9** wherein examining a reputational score concerning a domain registrar hosting an external site the user is attempting to access further comprises examining only reputational scores concerning domain registrars hosting a domain of a type from a group of types comprising:

domains not previously accessed by the user; and

domains not on a list of known safe domains.

11. At least one computer readable medium containing a computer program product for calculating reputational scores concerning domain registrars, the computer program product comprising:

program code for maintaining reputational scores for a plurality of domain registrars;

program code for maintaining a list of known undesirable domains;

program code for, for each undesirable domain on the list, determining a domain registrar that hosts that domain;

program code for adjusting a reputational score concerning that domain registrar based on the hosting of the undesirable domain; and

program code for making reputational scores concerning domain registrars available to at least one party that accesses domains.

12. The computer program product of claim **11** wherein the program code for maintaining a list of known undesirable domains further comprises program code for getting information concerning at least one known undesirable domain from at least one source from a group of sources consisting of:

at least one blacklist;

spam detection software;

phishing detection software;

security software; and

an identification of at least one domain name with at least one typo variant.

13. The computer program product of claim **11** wherein the program code for maintaining a list of known undesirable domains further comprises program code for maintaining a list of domains comprising at least one domain of at least one domain type from a group of domain types consisting of:

phishing domains;

spam domains;

domains hosting malware;

suspicious domains;

risky domains;

fraudulent domains; and

domains hosting advertisements.

14. The computer program product of claim **11** wherein the program code for maintaining a list of known undesirable domains further comprises:

program code for periodically updating the list in real time.

15. The computer program product of claim **11** wherein the program code for maintaining reputational scores for a plurality of domain registrars further comprises:

program code for initially assigning a domain registrar a neutral score.

16. The computer program product of claim **11** wherein the program code for adjusting a reputational score concerning a domain registrar based on the hosting of an undesirable domain further comprises:

program code for adjusting the reputational score concerning the domain registrar based on a risk level of the hosted undesirable domain.

17. The computer program product of claim **16** wherein the program code for adjusting the reputational score concerning the domain registrar based on a risk level of the hosted undesirable domain further comprises:

program code for assigning undesirable domains risk levels.

18. The computer program product of claim **11** further comprising:

program code for adjusting at least one reputational score concerning at least one domain registrar according to at least one weighting factor.

19. The computer program product of claim **18** wherein the program code for adjusting at least one reputational score concerning at least one domain registrar according to at least one weighting factor further comprises program code for utilizing at least one weighting factor from a group of weighting factors consisting of:

a percentage of risky domains as a total of hosted domains;

an evaluation of a used registration process;

a sample size; and

an average risk level.

20. At least one computer readable medium containing a computer program product for using a reputational score concerning a domain registrar as a factor in determining riskiness of interacting with a hosted domain, the computer program product comprising:

program code for detecting attempts by a user to access external sites;

program code for, responsive to the detecting step, examining a reputational score concerning a domain registrar hosting an external site the user is attempting to access; and

program code for utilizing the reputational score concerning the domain registrar as at least one factor in determining at least one security step to apply to the access attempt.

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