

Choosing a Domain Registrar at Portfolio Scale: A Dynadot Case Study

A registrar is invisible until you have fifty properties, then it becomes either a productivity multiplier or a daily friction. This piece explains why Pillar runs portfolio operations on Dynadot, what to evaluate before you switch, and the exact mechanics of a clean inbound transfer.

10 min read

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A registrar choice is invisible at three domains, costly at fifty, and architecturally decisive at five hundred. The right registrar at portfolio scale compounds into a productivity multiplier; the wrong one compounds into a recurring tax on attention, time, and capital.

The Thesis

- The five-criteria Registrar Scorecard for evaluating any registrar against portfolio operations needs
- Why bulk API support, per-TLD pricing transparency, and transfer workflow quality dominate brand familiarity in the decision
- The exact ICANN-governed EPP transfer flow, step by step, and how it telescopes for bulk migrations
- How to audit your current registrar honestly and model the cost differential before committing to a switch
- Where the registrar layer sits in the broader Pillar architecture and why it is the foundation everything else depends on

01 — The Registrar Scorecard

The Registrar Scorecard

Five criteria separate portfolio-grade registrars from retail registrars. None of them are subjective, and all of them can be evaluated before you transfer a single domain. Score any registrar you are considering against these pillars; the gaps will be obvious.

1

Bulk API Availability

Does the registrar publish a documented API for bulk register, bulk renew, bulk transfer, and bulk DNS edits? Are rate limits portfolio-friendly (hundreds of operations per minute, not single digits)? Can you script a recurring portfolio health check without hitting throttles? Without bulk API support, every portfolio operation scales linearly with headcount, not with code.

2

Per-TLD Pricing Transparency

Is per-TLD pricing published openly on the website, including the renewal rate (not just the first-year promotional rate)? Are there hidden fees for ICANN charges, restoration, or transfer? Can you forecast next year's renewal bill from public information alone? Opaque pricing is a tax on planning.

3

Transfer Workflow Quality

How does the inbound transfer process actually work? Is bulk transfer supported via CSV upload or API? Can you see transfer status in real time? Does the registrar push back against the source registrar's stalling tactics, or does the burden land on you? Transfer workflow quality is the single best predictor of whether portfolio operations will feel painful or routine.

4

Support Responsiveness for Portfolio Concerns

When something goes wrong, how does support respond? Is there ticketed support with response time commitments, or only chat? Does support understand portfolio-scale concerns (bulk renewals failing, API rate limit issues), or are they trained for consumer use cases? The answer matters most on the worst day of the year, not the average day.

5

Billing and Renewal UX

How is billing structured? Can you fund an account balance to avoid card-on-file failures during bulk renewals? Are invoices itemized per domain or rolled up? Can you set granular renewal preferences per domain or per portfolio segment? Billing UX failures are the most common cause of unexpected domain expiration at scale.

02 — The data.

\$7-10/yr

Dynadot retail .com pricing range

DYNADOT PUBLIC PRICING 2024

\$15-22/yr

GoDaddy retail .com renewal range

GODADDY PUBLIC PRICING 2024

60-80%

Reported total cost reduction at 1,000+ domain scale

PORTFOLIO OPERATOR REPORTS 2024

5-7 days

Standard EPP transfer completion window

ICANN TRANSFER POLICY

60 days

Post-transfer registrar lock period

ICANN 2024

100,000+

Properties under management or active acquisition at Pillar

PILLAR INTERNAL, 2026

Why the Registrar Becomes a Bottleneck at Scale

A single domain registered through any ICANN-accredited registrar feels identical at the surface: you pay an annual fee, you control DNS records, you renew. The differences are invisible until your portfolio crosses roughly fifty properties. At that threshold, the retail registrar workflow that GoDaddy, Namecheap, and similar consumer-facing providers optimize for breaks down. You are now logging into a dashboard designed for a small business owner managing two or three sites, but you are managing fifty, or five hundred, or in Pillar's case, well over one hundred thousand properties.

The friction shows up in specific places. Renewals require clicking through per-domain upsells for privacy protection, hosting bundles, SSL certificates, and email forwarding that you have already declined hundreds of times. Bulk DNS edits, such as pointing fifty domains at a new Cloudflare nameserver pair, require either manual per-domain navigation or a brittle browser automation script. Transfer outs and ins, which should be a routine ICANN-governed EPP code exchange, become multi-step interactive workflows. Pricing transparency degrades: the headline .com renewal rate balloons from the advertised acquisition price into the \$15-22/year range, while bulk and wholesale-adjacent registrars hold their per-domain pricing flat.

Dynadot, an ICANN-accredited registrar founded in 2002 and headquartered in San Mateo, California, optimizes for the opposite end of the market. The dashboard assumes you have many domains. The API assumes you want to script bulk operations. The pricing assumes you are sensitive to per-domain cost across hundreds or thousands of renewals. None of this matters when you have three domains. All of it matters when you have fifty.

What an Honest Registrar Evaluation Looks Like

Before you transfer anything, audit what you actually have. Export your current registrar's domain list to CSV. For each domain, capture: TLD, registration date, expiration date, current annual renewal cost (the real renewal cost, not the promotional acquisition cost), and any attached services you are paying for (privacy, DNS hosting, email forwarding, SSL). This list is the input to every subsequent decision.

Then quantify the time tax. How many hours per month do you spend on registrar admin: renewals, transfers, DNS edits, billing reconciliation, dismissing upsell modals? At a portfolio of 100 domains, this is often 4-8 hours per month. At 1,000 domains, it can become a part-time job. The cost of that time is real, even if it is not on a line item. Multiply hours by your blended hourly rate or the rate of whoever you would hire to handle it.

Finally, model the cost differential. Dynadot's public retail .com pricing typically sits in the \$7-10/year range against GoDaddy retail in the \$15-22/year range. Portfolio operators have reported 60-80% lower total cost versus GoDaddy at portfolio scale of 1,000+ domains, once you net out the bundled services that consumer registrars push and bulk registrars unbundle. At 100 domains, that is roughly \$800-1,500 per year. At 1,000 domains, \$8,000-15,000. At 10,000 domains, the math compounds into a six-figure annual line item. The transfer effort, which is real but bounded, pays back inside the first renewal cycle for any portfolio above 50-100 domains.

Transfer Mechanics: How an Inbound Domain Transfer Actually Works

Domain transfers between ICANN-accredited registrars follow a standardized EPP (Extensible Provisioning Protocol) flow. The mechanics are the same regardless of whether you are moving from GoDaddy to Dynadot, Namecheap to Cloudflare Registrar, or any other pair. Understanding the flow removes most of the perceived risk.

First, at your current registrar, unlock the domain. The registrar lock is a flag that prevents transfers; you must explicitly disable it. Second, request the EPP transfer authorization code (also called the auth code or transfer code). The current registrar must provide this within five days under ICANN rules. Third, at the new registrar (Dynadot in this case), initiate an inbound transfer and paste the auth code. Fourth, approve the transfer via the email confirmation sent to the domain's registrant email address. Fifth, wait five to seven days for the transfer to complete. ICANN imposes a 60-day post-transfer registrar lock during which the domain cannot be transferred again, which is a fraud-prevention measure, not a Dynadot policy.

For bulk transfers, the workflow telescopes. Dynadot's API supports bulk inbound transfer submission: you upload a CSV mapping domain names to auth codes, and the registrar processes them in parallel. The 5-7 day window still applies per domain, but the human effort scales sublinearly. For a portfolio of 500 domains, you are doing one CSV upload, not 500 manual transfer initiations. The current registrar's cooperation is the gating factor; the destination registrar's tooling is not.

The Pillar Architecture Context

At Pillar, the registrar choice is one piece of a deliberately minimal stack. Domains are registered and renewed at Dynadot. DNS, edge compute, and static hosting run on Cloudflare. Source of truth for site content lives in GitHub. Payments route through Stripe Payment Links. Forms route through Formspree. No bespoke servers, no databases sitting in a data center, no operations team on call for hardware. This is the [zero-secret architecture](https://learn/en/the-stack/zero-secret-architecture/) ([./learn/en/the-stack/zero-secret-architecture/](https://learn/en/the-stack/zero-secret-architecture/)), that lets a small team manage 100,000+ properties under management or active acquisition.

The registrar layer matters specifically because it is the foundation everything else sits on. If DNS propagation is slow or unreliable, the Cloudflare layer cannot do its job. If bulk DNS edits require manual per-domain work, the cost of repointing a property cluster to a new infrastructure pattern becomes prohibitive. If transfer mechanics are friction-laden, acquiring a portfolio of domains from a competitor or a former operator becomes a multi-week project instead of a one-week project. The registrar is not the most interesting layer of the stack, but it is the layer where bad decisions compound silently.

03 — Watch: a real walkthrough

04 — Your Registrar Migration Checklist

Work through this checklist in order. Do not skip the audit step, even if you think you already know what your current registrar costs you. The numbers are almost always worse than the estimate, which makes the decision easier, not harder.

1. Export your current registrar's full domain list to CSV. Include TLD, registration date, expiration date, true renewal rate (not promotional rate), and all attached add-on services with their costs.
2. Sum the annual cost across the portfolio and divide by domain count to get your real per-domain cost. Compare against the destination registrar's published per-TLD rates.
3. Tally hours per month spent on registrar admin: renewals, transfers, DNS edits, billing reconciliation, dismissing upsells. Multiply by your hourly rate or replacement hire rate.
4. Test the destination registrar with five low-stakes domains before transferring the full portfolio. Verify DNS edits propagate, billing works, and bulk operations behave as documented.
5. For the bulk migration: unlock all domains at the current registrar, request EPP auth codes in bulk (most registrars allow CSV export), upload to the destination registrar via their bulk transfer endpoint, approve via the email confirmations, and monitor over the 5-7 day window.
6. Update registrant contact email to an address that is not hosted on any domain in the portfolio being moved, to avoid circular dependency lockout during the transfer window.
7. Set up account-level two-factor authentication, recovery codes stored offline, and a funded account balance covering at least 18 months of renewals to avoid card-on-file failure during bulk auto-renewal events.

Frequently asked questions.

Will moving registrars cause downtime on my sites?

No, if you sequence it correctly. DNS records (A, CNAME, MX, TXT, nameserver delegations) travel with the domain during transfer. The domain remains resolvable throughout the 5-7 day transfer window because the existing DNS configuration stays active. The only risk is if you change nameservers at the same time as initiating the transfer; do those operations sequentially, not simultaneously. For sites running on Cloudflare, the safest pattern is to complete the registrar transfer first, then verify nameservers point to your Cloudflare assignment, then make any subsequent DNS changes.

What happens to my domain privacy (WHOIS protection) during transfer?

Privacy is a registrar-level service, not a domain-level attribute. When you transfer out, the source registrar removes their privacy proxy and the registrant contact details temporarily become visible in WHOIS until the new registrar applies their own privacy service. Dynadot includes free WHOIS privacy on transferred domains for supported TLDs, so the privacy gap is typically only the transfer window itself. If a TLD does not support privacy (some ccTLDs prohibit it by registry policy), no registrar can change that.

Can I transfer a domain in the middle of its registration year, and do I lose the remaining time?

No, you do not lose remaining time. ICANN policy requires that inbound transfers add one year to whatever time remains on the domain. If your domain was registered for one year on January 1 and you transfer in on July 1, the new expiration becomes January 1 of the year after next (six months of original time plus one year added). You pay the new registrar's transfer fee, which is typically priced equivalently to a one-year renewal.

How does the API change my workflow versus a registrar dashboard?

The dashboard remains useful for one-off operations and visual inspection. The API matters when you want to script repeatable workflows: bulk DNS edits across hundreds of domains, programmatic checks on expiration windows, automated bulk renewals tied to your portfolio management system. A bulk-friendly registrar exposes endpoints for register, renew, transfer-in, DNS record CRUD, and nameserver updates, and meters them at portfolio-friendly rate limits. You can build your own portfolio dashboard on top of these endpoints without scraping a registrar UI.

Is there a downside to consolidating all my domains at one registrar?

There is a concentration risk consideration: if a registrar account is compromised or suspended, all your domains are affected simultaneously. Mitigation is straightforward: enforce strong two-factor authentication on the registrar account, use a dedicated email address for registrar correspondence that is not a personal address, keep recovery codes offline, and ensure the registrant email is not hosted on a domain registered at the same registrar (a circular dependency that can lock you out). For most portfolio operators, the operational and cost benefits of consolidation substantially outweigh the concentration risk, provided basic account hygiene is in place.
