

THE DEATH OF A THOUSAND FINANCIAL SERVICE COMPANIES By Sean Murray

Young Broker Funding America on Youtube is Controversy One Can't Look Away From

Q&A With Jennie Villano



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BY SEAN MURRAY

If you're reading this, then your career in the industry probably survived the pandemic. Congratulations.

Your competition is already off to the races, scrambling to capitalize on the damage wrought on the industry in 2020. Word on the street is that they're buying up the domain names of financial service companies that didn't make it. Could that create an advantage? I had a theory that it would, but what I learned in practice was something that everyone needs to know. I share it here and it may shock you.

Goodbye pandemic. I look forward to the Summer and doing things again in person. Man, that's going to be sweet.

-Sean Murray

Letter From the Editor



THE DEATH OF A THOUSAND FINANCIAL SERVICE COMPANIES

By SEAN MURRAY

IN MARCH 2021, DEBANKED REVEALED THAT 7.5% OF DAILYFUNDER'S USER BASE THAT HAD EXISTED IN MARCH 2020, WAS LOST DURING THE PANDEMIC.

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Featured Story / The Death of a Thousand Financial Service Companies

DailyFunder, of course, is the most widely used forum for small business finance brokers and the statistic offered one of the most compelling insights into the damage inflicted on the industry.

A loss was defined as a user whose email address ceased to exist. It was either deleted or the domain name was not renewed. It was a startling revelation. And yet, in a sign of optimism, DailyFunder added more new users in that 12 month timeframe than were lost.

And yet, is anything ever truly deleted in the digital age? And how did it come to pass that the owners of these companies believed deletion to be a preferable outcome to transference? Surely as a thousand brokerages closed, there would have been an eager buyer to scoop them up, even if the sales price was for pennies?

And so I arrived at a theory, that companies that simply wound up and disappeared rather than sold themselves off, probably left behind a digital footprint that still drew in prospective customers, a path that ultimately led nowhere. A competitor might rejoice at that outcome but it's not exactly a net gain because that customer may have decided to go somewhere else or nowhere else instead. Someone else's loss wasn't their win. Even the customer was a net loser. That could be resolved, of course, if the competition simply acquired the expired domain names of their fallen competitors, something that could be reasonably achieved for the price of ten bucks through any domain name registrar.

Outside of the small business finance industry, such tactics are commonplace. One can simply go on Godaddy's domain auctions to see the never-ending revolving door of expiring domains which are often ranked and priced on the basis of how much traffic they stand to generate, mainly because of the past owners' efforts.

According to Digital Information World, 70% of all web domains fail to be renewed 1 year after they're purchased. "[41% of these expired domains] go on to be snapped up and registered by other users to potentially benefit and profit from," they say. And there is nothing controversial about this. This is simply a standard of the world wide web. Your fallen online business is recycled as someone else's marketing tool.

Applying that math to the small business finance industry at hand, that would mean that of 1,000 brokerage failures, 41% of the expired domain names are going to be acquired by someone else or they already have been. And if the expired domain only costs \$10 (and they're not all this cheap), then theoretically one could acquire the web traffic of 410 failed brokers for roughly \$4,000.

WHOA.

The realization led me to conduct a controlled experiment, one in which I would try to prove this theory for a deBanked story.

I bought roughly twenty expired domains, intentionally leaning toward older ones, domains that had been expired for 2-10 years rather than recent casualties of the pandemic. Once completed, I jotted down my hypothesis, that these domain names probably produced some level of prospective customer traffic.

When my experiment concluded, I became alarmed, even sick, over what the results taught me. Deletion, I learned, is an outcome that no business, let alone a financial services company, can afford to surrender themselves to.

Here's why:

Among the first steps taken was to create a "catchall" email account on each domain so that if a former owner of a domain came along and tried to contact me, I would get it no matter which address they tried and that I would be able to tell them that I had acquired it accordingly and even tell them my theory!

No marketing or anything was done for any of the domains. I simply acquired them and let them sit stagnant. I did not resurrect the old websites or anything of that nature. And yet, I received thousands and thousands of emails, none from what I could tell, were from former owners.

It's important to state that I did not use these accounts to actually do anything, but that these vulnerabilities came to light by virtue of monitoring the inbound emails these domains accrued.

Some domain names still had control of social media accounts like business facebook pages and twitter accounts. Someone could not only acquire your old domain, but use it to resurrect and use dormant social media accounts, including being able to view all past private correspondence on them. Yikes.

Some domain names were still attached to active bank accounts, credit card accounts, or financial services. Correspondence regarding these accounts was still being transmitted to them. When you delete a domain, you need to make sure its access is revoked from every account you have, especially bank accounts. Some received NSF notices or were being subject to debt collection efforts.

Every domain name was subscribed to newsletters or communities or some service in which one could use to learn personal information or business information about the previous owner.

Unknown but likely is that some of these domains may have been the "lost password" email address of record for other accounts online, a particularly troubling thought.

As the litany of stroke-inducing vulnerabilities piled up, then came live correspondence. Lenders wanted to know where to send a still-owed commission, a borrower was reaching out for customer service, old business partners were trying to rekindle past relationships.

Presumably such domains could give someone

access to portals or databases where previous customer data was held. This implies that not only is the old domain owner at risk but that business vendors that had not disabled access to their systems for the defunct users could also be at risk from nefarious actors now in control of email addresses belonging to former customers.

A nefarious actor could surely dream up still more ways to carry out compromising acts. I disabled incoming email altogether for the domains pretty soon into my aforementioned discoveries so that emails to those domains would simply bounce back and indicate to the sender that there's nobody there anymore.

And my original hypothesis had been blown to smithereens. These domains generated no material web traffic of note, except for probing "bots" instead of human users. What I thought might be a hidden source of web traffic, a clever insight on internet marketing 101 something not uncommon in the pages of deBanked, instead turned out to be a glimpse into a business's worst nightmare.

No matter how much one's business has failed, control over the domain name should be preserved at all cost, that is unless, all of the above vulnerabilities are addressed first and completely.

Originally, the costs of this journalistic experiment were to be recouped by simply reselling the domains onto the public market for fair market value. Instead, they were simply cancelled, cast back in the sea anonymously, where anyone else could buy them and do whatever they want with them. I, however, made no effort to alert anyone's attention to them.

The publication of this story was delayed as I, the journalist, had to weigh the merits of disclosing my findings. But as the data says, 41% of expired domains are going to get snapped up anyway. And true to form, I was actually outbid by other unknown buyers by some of the original domain names I had hoped to acquire for my experiment. A financial service company's domain and all the vulnerabilities with it, were sold to bidders willing to pay \$30, \$40, or \$50+ versus my \$10-\$20 or so budget. That seems a terrifyingly small cost. And I highly doubt they were journalists.

Perhaps those domains are generating web traffic, but if they're not, one has to ponder why someone would want to acquire the lapsed domains of so many dead financial service companies. And post-pandemic, there are too many to count.

If the death of a thousand companies has taught me anything, it's that even business failure needs a well thought-out security plan. Otherwise one risks death by a thousand cuts.

YOUNG BROKER FUNDING AMERICA ON YOUTUBE IS CONTROVERSY ONE CAN'T LOOK AWAY FROM

The twenty-two year-old MCA broker that launched his business with the help of Youtube, upped the ante of his antics after he was profiled by deBanked in early February. Davron Karimov, originally from Staten Island,



moved his shop down to Miami and began a Youtube reality show, titled **Funding America**. The twelve-episode independentlyfilmed show which aired almost exclusively on social media took



viewers behind the scenes of his day-to-day operation. In his humble sized office, viewers were able to listen in to his company's sales calls and witness the emotion of both success and failure in deal-making. The successes were often marked with dancing fist pumps and chants of "We're Funding America!"

Reviews among his industry peers were mixed, especially as the episodes increasingly focused on Davron's extracurricular afterhours activities like drinking, dating, and getting kicked out of hotels.

deBanked informally surveyed folks in the industry about what they thought, all considered. A resounding theme was that it wasn't a good impression to create about brokers and that it was probably best not to encourage him. Several brokers even referenced specific scenes they took issue with. When we asked one broker how they recalled so much detail if they didn't like the show, he replied, "it's not that I liked it or didn't like it, it's that I couldn't look away!"



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GOVERNOR PHIL MURPHY ON FINTECH IN NEW JERSEY

By SEAN MURRAY

I n a joint webinar between Choose New Jersey, FinTech Ireland, the New Jersey City University School of Business, and others, NJ Governor Phil Murphy kicked off the event by saying that his state's object is nothing short of being the state of innovation, where new ventures can take shape, companies can expand, and people can raise a family.

Murphy's participation in Irish fintech collaboration was steeped in his commitment to international relations and business.

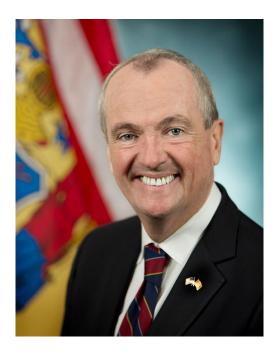
"The fintech business in particular is a big part of our economy," Murphy said. "We've got proximity to New York City's financial markets and as a result we've become sort of the perfect home for fintech companies. We have 145 fintech companies headquartered in New Jersey."

The island of Ireland, by comparison, is home to nearly 250 indigenous fintech companies, according to the latest Fintech Ireland map. Recently, Irish fintech companies ranked the United States and Canada as their #1 priority region for expansion.

New Jersey is hoping to benefit from transatlantic opportunities this might present.

"There's no better place in America than to plant your flag here in New Jersey," Murphy said. "To those who are considering [it], it'll be the best decision you ever make."

The Governor also revealed that his family is descended from Donoughmore, County Cork and that he hopes to make a state trip to the republic soon.





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Q&A WITH **JENNIE VILLANO**

In a March 31st livestreamed Q&A on deBanked TV, NewCo Capital Group ISO Manager **Jennie Villano** talked to **Sean Murray** about what the business has been like for her coming out of the pandemic. Below are some abbreviated excerpts.

What Was 2020 like for you?

So 2020 for me was very good. I know that not everyone can say that. Part of that is perception and part of that is just reality. We were still funding, that didn't stop. And did I lose some ISOs? We did because some went out of business, some decided to focus on the stimulus package, the money that they were giving for small businesses. Some of my ISOs even started buying and selling masks, the gloves, the sanitizers. But I have to say, I, the majority of my ISOs stayed in the industry. And I'm sure like myself, they're thankful that they did because it paid off for anyone that did stay in.

Q:

I've seen some emails from NewCo and posts on social media that are creative and sometimes I might say "aggressive," and they get people's attention. Does that kind of marketing work? Does it bring in brokers?

Absolutely. You know, marketing is just that, you're marketing to a certain group. But in our industry, as you know, especially with the different facets of it: the funder, the broker, everyone has their own goal that they're looking to complete. Sometimes the marketing works. We might put something out there and it might work for 60% of the people that received it and not for the 40%. It really just depends on the perception of the person taking it in. I have to say, though, a lot of ISOs tell me that they love our marketing. that help them rebuild.

Q:

Do you believe virtual networking is going to become the standard or will personal networking still be very important.

I think we're all looking forward to in-person again, I have actually been visiting my brokers. Last year, I would go visit any broker's office that was open. I just think it's so important to meet people face to face. I will tell you, having signed up so many ISOs that, and not that I don't connect with them on the phone, I'm good at talking on the phone, I connect with them, we laugh, we'll talk about their kids, their family, talk about their deals, but when I go into an office, within 24 hours I'll have funded at least two deals with that broker office. Everyone there you connect with, not just the person on the phone. If you're working with a one-man show, then that phone call might be all you need, but most shops aren't like that. You need to meet each rep there, you need to make eye contact, know their name, they know your name, sit at their desk, go over their deals, it just builds a relationship. We'll do really good from when I visit, and then sometimes it tapers off a little and I'll go right back.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

4/14/21	Square business loans come to Australia	Square announced it would begin offering business loans in Australia.
4/14/21	Coinbase surpassed \$100 billion	Coinbase surpassed \$100B in market cap shortly after going public.
4/14/21	Bernie Madoff died	Bernard Madoff died thirteen years into serving a 150-year sentence in Federal Prison. He was 82 years old.
4/11/21	Attorney Gregory Nowak passed away	Gregory J. Nowak, a partner at Troutman Pepper, passed away suddenly on April 11th at 61. Nowak was a renowned MCA and securities lawyer and friend to deBanked.
4/13/21	Bitcoin surpasses \$63,000	Bitcoin climbed to a new record high above \$63,000 as Coinbase went public.
4/13/21	Borrow a Boat launches in the US	Borrow A Boat, "Airbnb for boats" launched in the US.
4/12/21	NYSE announced NFTs	The NYSE will begin selling NFT First Trades of notable listings.
4/12/21	Better.com raised \$500M	Mortgage lending fintech Better raised \$500M in a round from SoftBank, valuing the company at \$6B.
4/9/21	Lendified announced \$5M private placement	Lendified announced a private sale of \$5M
4/8/21	IOU announced purchase of convertible debentures	IOU Financial said they plan to repurchase up to \$2M of its debentures.
4/7/21	Avant acquires Zero Financial	Avant acquired Level, a neo bank.
4/7/21	Plaid valued at \$13.4B	Plaid raised \$425M in a funding round led by Altimeter Capital
4/6/21	Tom Brady announces launch of NFT co	Tom Brady is launching a sports, pop culture, entertainment, and fashion NFT platform called Autograph.
4/6/21	Fora secured a \$100M credit facility	Fora Financial got a new credit facility from Credit Suisse
4/6/21	Clubhouse announced Payments	Clubhouse, the live-streaming podcast app, added a payments feature to enable creator monetization.
4/6/21	Coinbase revenue was greater than \$1B in Q1	Coinbase reported revenue of \$1.8B and a profit of nearly \$800M.
4/6/21 4/6/21	Combase revenue was greater than \$1B in Q1 Lendified got LOI for \$10M credit facility	Coinbase reported revenue of \$1.8B and a profit of nearly \$800M. Lendified Holdings announced a \$10M loan from Windsor Private Capital and Fire Power Capital.
	than \$1B in Q1 Lendified got LOI for	Lendified Holdings announced a \$10M loan from Windsor Private Capital and Fire
4/6/21	than \$1B in Q1 Lendified got LOI for \$10M credit facility	Lendified Holdings announced a \$10M loan from Windsor Private Capital and Fire Power Capital. The SBA released a watchdog report, finding more than \$70B in PPP or EIDL funds
4/6/21 4/1/21	than \$1B in Q1 Lendified got LOI for \$10M credit facility \$70B tallied in PPP, EIDL fraud The S&P 500 surpassed 4k,	Lendified Holdings announced a \$10M loan from Windsor Private Capital and Fire Power Capital. The SBA released a watchdog report, finding more than \$70B in PPP or EIDL funds may have been lost to fraud.
4/6/21 4/1/21 4/1/21	than \$1B in Q1 Lendified got LOI for \$10M credit facility \$70B tallied in PPP, EIDL fraud The S&P 500 surpassed 4k, new all time high Biden signed PPP extension	Lendified Holdings announced a \$10M loan from Windsor Private Capital and Fire Power Capital. The SBA released a watchdog report, finding more than \$70B in PPP or EIDL funds may have been lost to fraud. The S&P 500 topped 4,000 points for the first time. Biden signed the PPP Extension Act, pushing emergency Lending until May 31st,
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3/26/21	Yardline partners with Perpetua	Perpetua partnered with Yardline Capital to offer capital and optimization tools for eCommerce, opening \$1 million in funding access.
3/26/21	American Fintech Council names Reeder CEO	The newly formed American Fintech Council chose Garry Reeder as CEO. Reeder previously worked in the FDIC and the CFPB.
3/25/21	Cerebro Capital partners with Ken Singleton	Cerebro Capital partnered with Professor Ken Singleton to create an analysis of the commercial middle market.
3/24/21	Robinhood filed confidential IPO docs	Robinhood filed confidential paperwork with the SEC for an IPO on the Nasdaq.
3/24/21	LenderClose raised \$10M Series B	LenderClose, a real estate and lending tech platform, raised \$10 M in a Series B round led by Next Level Ventures.
3/23/21	Illinois signed 36% consumer Ioan APR cap	Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker signed a 36% APR cap into law.
3/22/21	Affirm, Clearbanc partnered	Affirm partnered with Clearbanc to bring \$10 M in funding to their e-commerce partners through an online portal.
	Enova acquires Pangea Universal Holdings	Enova announced it acquired Pangea Universal Holdings, Chicago-based mobile payments and international money transfer platform.
	The SAFE Banking Act was introduced in the House	The Safe Banking Act, a bill that would protect financial institutions from sanctions for funding weed firms, was reintroduced in the House.
	lsabel Guzman became new head of SBA	The Senate confirmed SBA chief Isabel Guzman.
	BlueVine appoints Steve Allocca as COO	BlueVine added Steve Allocca, former president of LendingClub, as COO.
	LendingPoint closed \$110M facility	LendingPoint got a \$110 million, 5-year corporate credit facility with new partners MidCap Financial Trust, and Apollo Investment Corp.
3/14/21	Stripe became worth \$95B	Stripe raised \$600 million in the latest round, valuing the company at \$95 billion.
3/12/21	It's revealed that Binance is being probed by CFTC	The probe is to determine if U.S. residents use the platform to trade securities.
	Brock Blake named CEO of the year honoree	Brock Blake was named one of Utah's top CEOs in 2021 by Utah Business for helping Lendio adapt to last year's new normal.
	Ant Group CEO resigned	Simon Hu stepped down as CEO of Ant Group during an ongoing fintech crackdown in China.
	WeFund released new portal	WeFund announced the launch of a simplified lending process through a new vendor portal.
	Fintech law goes into effect in Mexico	A new fintech law is launched in Mexico, enabling firms to apply for a Financial Technology Institution (FTI) license.
	PayPal announced it would cquire Curv	PayPal will acquire the crypto security startup Curv. Curv aims to make it easy and secure to transact and own crypto.
	SoFi announced acquisition of Golden Pacific Bancorp	SoFi bought Golden Pacific Bank for \$22.3 million and will apply to take ownership of the Golden Pacific national banking charter.
	Dwolla announced new president & COO	Dwolla added Dave Glaser as president and COO, former VP at Mastercard.
	Kevin Clark joined FundMore.ai as advisor	FundMore.ai added Kevin Clark to the strategic advisory board.
	MLA and OLPI merged	Market Lending Association and the Online Lending Policy Institute, two trade associations, combined to form the American Fintech Council.
	Alchemy entered Latin America	Alchemy implemented a buy now pay later software platform through a lender based in Mexico City, extending its services to Latin America.
	Apple Bank partnered with Upstart	Apple Bank, a mid-sized nyc metro area firm, partnered with Upstart to Provide personal loan products.

INDUSTRY NEWS

3/3/21	Parris Sanz became new EVP-GC of WebBank	WebBank appointed Parris Sanz as the Executive Vice President-General Counsel. Sanz, former COO of Petal and CEO of CAN Capital, has 16 years of finance experience.
3/2/21	Northteq, River Capital launch new portal	Northteq and River Capital Finance launched River Capital Connect, a new vendor self-service portal.
3/2/21	Axiom Bank expanded factoring, ABL division	Axiom community bank expanded its factoring and asset-based lending division, hiring Mark J. Simshauser as SVP of Allied Affiliated Funding.
3/1/21	Atalaya closes 5th asset income fund	Atalaya Capital Management closed its alternative lending fund for the fifth and final time after granting \$1B to pension plans, sovereign wealth funds, foundations, and endowments.
2/27/21	Andrew Smith left the FTC	Andrew Smith, who became Director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection in 2018, stepped down on January 29, 2021, as the FTC awaited new Biden administration executive appointments.
2/26/21	Youtube suspended Coindesk's channel	YouTube booted the cryptocurrency media company CoinDesk off the platform. It was eventually brought back online after Coindesk's protests
2/25/21	Coinbase filed for an IPO	Coinbase filed an S-1, a significant step in listing an IPO on the Nasdaq.
2/25/21	The GameStop rally returned	GME and AMC shares shot up yet again after toppling from January highs. GME launched from trading around \$40 to \$120 in four market hours.
2/25/21	Fundation, ODX merged, become Linear	Enova's ODX brand is splitting off to combine with Fundation, forming a new SMB digital banking company called Linear.
2/24/21	MicroStrategy bought another \$1B in bitcoin	MicroStrategy Inc rose after the firm said it spent \$1.03 B to buy more bitcoin, now owning more than 90,000.
2/24/21	Peak Rock Capital partnered with NepFin	Peak Rock Capital partnered with NepFin to expand capital access and provide financing solutions to middle-market and "growth-orientedbusinessess."
2/23/21	Jolt Partnered with Lendio on PPP	Jolt Software partnered with Lenido to offer the next round of PPP.
2/23/21	Square bought another \$170M in bitcoin	Just before earnings posted, Square purchased \$170 million bitcoin in February, adding to the \$50 million it already bought in October, bringing the total value to ~\$394 million.
2/23/21	NY AG settled with Bitfinex/ Tether	Tether and other crypto firms agreed with the New York Attorney General to pay \$18.5 million in penalties after the NYAG's office alleged Tether covered up an \$850M loss and lack of 1-1 USD to USDT backing since 2018.
2/23/21	OnDeck partnered with HomeAdvisor	OnDeck partnered with HomeAdvisor to offer online financing options on the platform.
2/22/21	LoanMe, Liberty Tax merge, become NextPoint Financial	NextPoint Financial expects to compete directly with Intuit, H&R Block, Enova, and Elevate.
2/22/21	Borrowell raises \$25M	Borrowell, a Canadian credit education fintech acquired Refresh Financial, a credit provider, and raised \$25 million in a funding round from Kensington Capital Partners, and BDC Capital.
2/22/21	Knock hires Laura Gray as head of lending	Knock, a real estate fintech, hired Laura Gray as Head of Lending.
2/22/21	LendingTree launches auto lending platform	LendingTree launched an indirect auto lending platform that will let users shop and compare pre-qualified indirect auto loan rates.
2/20/21	Ethereum surpassed \$2,000	Ethereum set a new all-time high
2/18/21	goeasy Ltd. reports Q4 results	Alt-finance service provider goeasy released q4 earnings, showing a record improving level \$334 million in total loan originations, strong credit performance, and financial results.
2/16/21	Bitcoin eclipsed \$50,000	Bitcoin traded over \$50k for the first time.
2/16/21	Merchant Growth launches LOC product	Merchant Groth launched a "Line of Credit" product for their small business customers.
2/16/21	Ex-Funding Circle CRO heads to Australia	Former Funding Circle risk officer Rahul Pakrashi joined Cape, an Australian corporate credit card fintech, as risk chair.



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