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2026 Domain Market Predictions: Where the Capital Is Moving

2025 closed with a 31.9% surge in aftermarket dollar volume. Here is where Pillar expects the next twelve months to concentrate.

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2025 delivered a 31.9% expansion in domain aftermarket dollar volume, the strongest single-year move in more than a decade. European country codes outperformed. AI-adjacent domains repriced upward. .com supply tightened past the point of meaningful substitution.

Pillar Media & Entertainment operates across 100,000+ premium domain properties under management or active acquisition, publishes to 500M+ monthly readers, and has fifteen years of inside view on how capital actually moves in this market.

01 — Prediction 1: .ai consolidates as the credible alternative to .com

The AI sector absorbed more than \$150B in venture funding in 2025. Every funded entity needs an address, and .ai has become the default for AI-native companies, research labs, and tooling providers. We expect .ai to surpass every extension except .com in total aftermarket value by Q4 2026, with premium single-word .ai inventory repricing 150%+ year over year.

Single-word .ai names that traded around \$10,000 in early 2025 have already crossed \$25,000 in private transactions. By the end of 2026 we expect the comparable floor to sit north of \$50,000.

02 — Prediction 2: Premium .com appreciates 20–35%

Despite ccTLD growth, .com still holds roughly 72% of aftermarket dollar volume. The structural reason is unchanged: 100% of single-word .com inventory is taken, 99% of two-word combinations are taken.

Premium .com inventory (above \$25,000) appreciating 20–35% on average.

Category-defining names potentially doubling.

At least one public sale above \$15M, and several eight-figure transactions held private.

03 — Prediction 3: Editorial partnership models reach the mainstream

The pattern is familiar from software, entertainment, and mobility: outright ownership gives way to structured access. Operators who cannot justify a \$75,000–\$150,000 capital outlay can now run editorial coverage on the same address through a partnership structure for a fraction of that, monthly.

A \$75,000 premium domain accessed under a \$300/month editorial partnership is \$3,600 of annual cost — 4.8% of the acquisition price — against an asset that is itself appreciating into the next bracket.

04 — Prediction 4: European ccTLDs continue outperforming

2025 surfaced unmistakable strength in European ccTLDs: .de grew 31.9%, .ch surged 43.4%, and .uk crossed \$1.2M in reported sales. We expect the trend to extend through 2026 with European ccTLDs collectively gaining another 25%+ in aftermarket value.

05 — Verticals where authority is repricing

Artificial intelligence. Across every extension. Lexical terms (*neural, cognitive, machine, agent*) command sustained premium.

Climate and energy transition. Carbon, grid, and sustainability authority domains.

Digital health. Telehealth, mental wellness, clinical-grade consumer health.

Creator economy. Domains serving creator infrastructure.

Multilingual editorial. Premium .com and category ccTLDs across Spanish, French, and Portuguese markets — where Pillar is allocating most aggressively.

06 – What this means for Pillar — and for operators reading along

Pillar holds 6,608 domains in launch inventory across English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese, sitting alongside 100,000+ premium properties already under management or active acquisition. Our read of 2026 is straightforward: premium digital real estate continues to compound, the partnership model becomes the default access path for operators who refuse to overpay for capital efficiency, and .ai consolidates as the credible second standard.

The window for accessing premium addresses at 2024 economics is closing. The right question for operators is no longer whether to secure authority real estate. It is whether to do so by acquisition or by partnership — and Pillar is built to offer both.

Frequently asked questions.

Where does the 31.9% 2025 growth figure come from?

It is derived from aggregated NameBio aftermarket data, corroborated by registry-level reports from Verisign, DENIC, SWITCH, and Nominet, and reconciled against Sedo and DNJournal year-end sales summaries.

Is .ai really going to outpace every extension other than .com?

On current trajectory, yes. AI funding alone added more than \$150B of demand in 2025, and .ai has become the default address for the category.

Does the partnership model really make sense versus outright purchase?

It depends on capital efficiency. A \$75,000 domain accessed under a \$300/month partnership costs roughly 4.8% of the purchase price annually — capital that compounds into product, distribution, or editorial coverage.

Should operators still acquire generic new gTLDs?

Extreme selectivity. A short list (.io, .co, .xyz, .app) has earned durable positions in specific niches. The remainder underperform legacy extensions.

Where is Pillar concentrating its own 2026 acquisition?

Premium .com and category ccTLDs across English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese markets, with particular focus on AI-adjacent, climate, and creator-infrastructure verticals.
