

A VISUAL HISTORY FOR HUMANS ♦ AGENTS

Alternative roots keep coming back

Thirty years of naming experiments—
and why the agentic web changes the
stakes.

SkyInclude • Mike Michelini



The shared DNS root came first

IANA coordinates the root-zone data; root server operators serve it.

1972–



Shared identifiers

Jon Postel coordinates names, numbers, and protocols

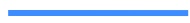
1983–85



DNS designed

RFCs define one root, delegated zones, and resolvers

1998–



ICANN ♦ IANA

Technical coordination moves into a global nonprofit

Four names explain who does what

Person. Documents. Technical function. Organization.

01 JON POSTEL

Coordinated shared identifiers; edited the RFC series.

02 RFCs

‘Requests for Comments’: permanent technical records.

03 IANA

Internet Assigned Numbers Authority.
Technical coordination function.

04 ICANN

Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. Nonprofit governance home.

The default root is DNS's top phone book

IANA coordinates it; root server operators serve it.



Different root, same spelling, different destination.

The first wave borrowed somebody else's distribution

Each experiment found a door into the web. None controlled the building.

1995

AlterNIC

Alternative DNS root

Not Afternic: resolver opt-in was still required.

1997

RealNames

Live inside Internet Explorer

A browser deal can disappear overnight.

2000

New.net

Use plugins + ISP partnerships

Plugin friction and later collisions destroy trust.

Then roots became communities—and protocols

The authority model changed. The distribution problem did not.

2000–



OpenNIC

Community-run resolvers and namespaces

2011–



Namecoin .bit

Blockchain naming for a single alternative TLD

2020–



Handshake

A decentralized root zone using ordinary DNS below it

Every alt root met the same four walls

Different technology. Repeating adoption failure.

01 NO DEFAULT

Operating systems and ISPs already ship another root.

02 COLLISION

The same label can later point somewhere else.

03 FRICTION

Install a plugin. Change DNS. Trust a gateway.

04 SILENCE

When a name fails, users close the tab.

Handshake changed the root design—not the default path

WHAT CHANGED

Compatibility first

- Existing ICANN root-zone names pre-reserved
- Ordinary DNS beneath the root
- Permissionless root ownership

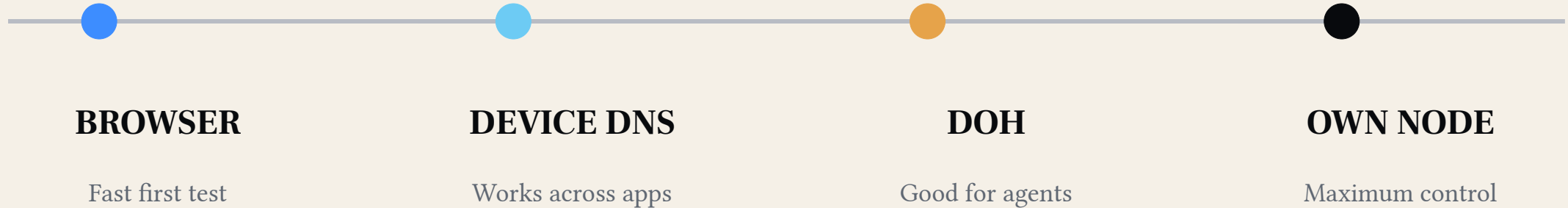
WHAT DID NOT

Distribution still wins

- Normal devices already use the default root
- Users still need an HNS-aware path
- Compatibility is not adoption

The root war moved into the resolution path

Four doors exist today. Each trades convenience for control.



A gateway is useful for showing a name—not for owning the identity in the address bar.

Agents turn naming into an operating decision



RESOLVE

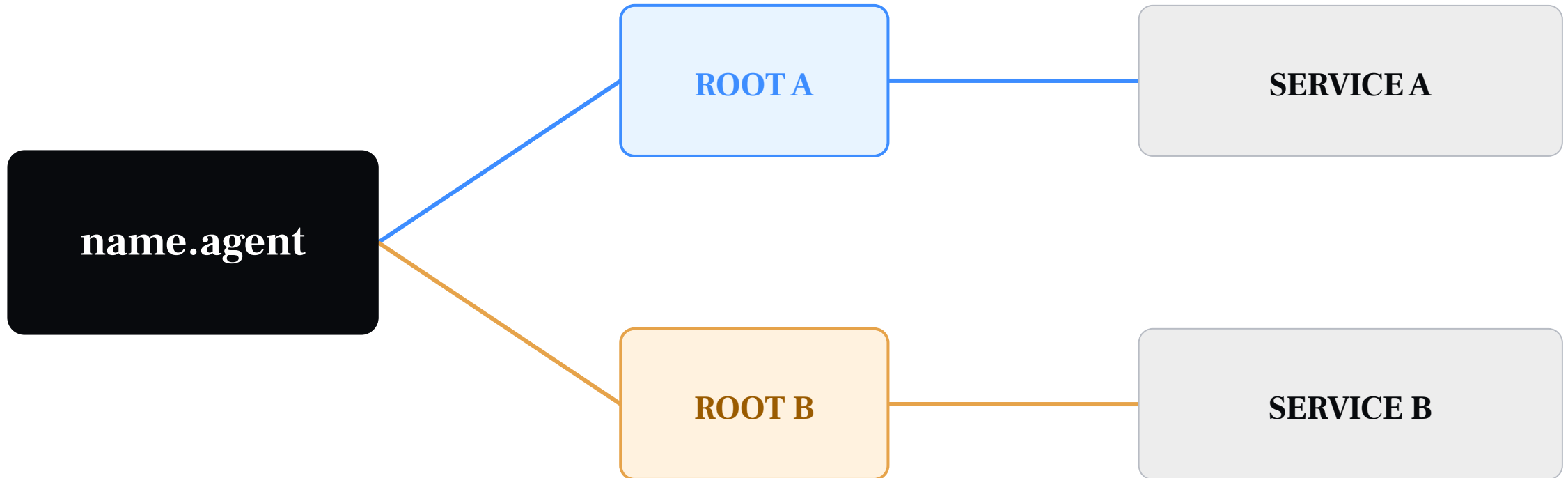
VERIFY

DISCOVER

AUTHORIZE

For an agent, the resolver can choose the identity

Same typed name. Two roots. Two possible services.



Resolver choice is part of agent security—not a hidden network preference.

THE NEXT USEFUL TEST

Make one name useful before making a thousand claims

TEST RESOLUTION

Open a normal DNS name and a Handshake name in SkyInclude Browser.

skyinclude.com/browser

BUILD IDENTITY

Search for a persistent, machine-readable .agent identity on HeadlessDomains.

headlessdomains.com/agent

What should become boring first: resolution, identity, or capability discovery?