TLDs include dot-com, dot-net, dot-edu, dot-jp, dot-de, and the like. This is achieved by developing policy recommendations to the ICANN Board, nurturing consensus across the ccNSO community, including the works of the ccNSO as the Internet's naming and address allocation system. Its charter includes a focus on risk analysis and auditing. ICANN consists of approximately 20 technical experts from industry and academia as well as operators of root servers, registrars and TLD registrants.

ICANN – Generic Names Supporting Organization – one of ICANN's supporting organizations, formed of its constituencies: Commercial and Business constituencies: gTLD registry constituency; ISP constituency; provider constituency; public interest constituencies. ISP – Internet Service Provider – An ISP provides access to the Internet to organizations or individuals. These services may include web hosting, email, Voice over IP, and support for many other applications.

String – the set of characters comprising an applied-for gTLD.

String Contention – The scenario in which there is more than one qualified applicant for the same gTLD or for gTLDs that are so similar that user confusion would result from more than one being delegated to the root zone.

Script – a collection of symbols used for setting a language. There are three basic kinds of scripts. Abrahamic (Arabic, Cyrillic, Latin) has individual elements termed letters. Syllabaries (Japanese, Korean, Thai) have individual elements that represent syllables. The setting systems of most languages use only one script but there are exceptions. For example, Japanese uses different scripts for different characters representing all three categories. Scripts that do not appear in the Unicode code chart are completely unavailable for inclusion in IDNs.

About ICANN

ICANN was formed in 1998 to coordinate the Internet’s unique identifiers around the world. Without that coordination we wouldn’t have one global Internet. It is a not-for-profit public-benefit corporation with participants from all over the world dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable and interoperable. It provides a forum for governments, the global business community, the internet technical community and the global civil society to work together to develop policies that ensure the stability, security and sustainability of the Internet. For more information please visit: www.icann.org.

Did you know?

- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is responsible for introducing new generic top-level domains (gTLDs). The priority is to ensure that new gTLDs are awarded in a fair and transparent process to organizations that can effectively manage them on behalf of Internet users.
- ICANN is currently developing the program that facilitates the creation of new Internet top-level extensions, or gTLDs. Under this new process, more extensions will be created, and with them, potentially a whole new way of using the Internet. Also, for the first time, Internationalized Domain Names (IDN) will be available at the top level, enabling new extensions in different scripts such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Hindi, and more.
- Millions of people around the world speak in a variety of languages, and they often require a way to express themselves in their own languages. The Internet’s fundamental protocol – TCP/IP – has passed its 30th birthday, and the naming system on top of it – DNS – has passed in 2008 by 25th birthday.
- The Internet has grown from a few networked computers to a network accessed by a billion people, from a Western phenomenon to a truly global one, and from research roots to an engine of commerce accounting for trillions of dollars in commerce.
- During that time, the use of top-level domain (TLD) identifiers, such as dot-com, dot-net, dot-sf, has actually changed very little. The most widely recognized global TLD is dot-com. While the scale of these TLDs has changed dramatically since the Internet’s inception – more than 20 years ago for dot-com – the availability and usage of these top-level names has been permitted to change very little.
- The entity responsible for operating a gTLD is called a registry. Depending on the kind of TLD, these organizations are referred to as registry operators or sponsors. The gTLD Registry is to sign agreements with ICANN.

New gTLD Program

New gTLD Program in Brief

Since ICANN was founded in 1998 as a not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder organization dedicated to coordinating the Internet’s addressing system, one of its foundational principles has been to promote competition in the domain name market. This helps to improve Internet security and stability. The expansion of the generic top-level domains (gTLDs) will allow for more innovation, choice and change to the Internet’s addressing system, now represented by 21 gTLDs.

The decision to introduce new gTLDs followed a detailed and lengthy consultation process with all constituencies of the global Internet community represented by a wide variety of stakeholders – governments, individuals, civil society, businesses and intellectual property constituencies, and the technology community. Also contributing to this policy work were ICANN’s Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO), and Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC). The policy was completed by the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) in 2007, and adopted by ICANN’s Board in June, 2008. The program is expected to launch early 2010.

The ICANN Board continues to share with the Internet community the ongoing program developments through the release of Draft Applicant Guidelines, expedite, exploratory memorandums in and in-person meetings. All details can be found on this page.

In a world with over 1 billion Internet-users – bridging ‘diversity, choice and competition’ are key to the continued success and reach of the global network.

Fast Facts

- According to Internet World Stats, there are estimated a 1.6 billion Internet users worldwide.
- An Internet address is made up of a series of characters separated by dots. For example, in the website address www.icann.org, the top-level domain is “org” and the second-level domain is “icann.” In some cases, you can also find third-level domain names.
- There are currently 21 gTLDs. A gTLD can, in some cases, identify the nature of the organization operating a specific website. For example, a website with a dot-com address usually indicates a commercial organization; dot-museum is dedicated to museums, dot-mobile for mobile phone users, dot-aero for the aviation industry, and so on.
- There are around 252 two-letter country-code TLDs (ccTLDs), which identify a country or territory. For example, the Internet extension dot-gt corresponds to Japan, while dot-de corresponds to the European Union.
- The year 2008 ended with a total base of 177 million domain name registrations across all of the top-level domains (TLDs). This represents 16 percent growth over the previous year and 2 percent growth over the third quarter of 2008. Of the 177 million second-level domain name registrations, approximately 96 million are gTLDs.
Competition and innovation best occur when a stable and open platform is considered and implemented in TLD management decisions, including the consideration and implementation of new TLDs. "ICANN shall maintain and build on processes to ensure that competition, consumer interests, and Internet DNS stability and security issues are identified and considered in TLD management decisions, including the consideration and implementation of new TLDs." 

Opening the top-level space so that names can be proposed rather than being restricted to the existing 21 gTLDs could open up a new wave of innovation. Competition and innovation both occur when a stable and open platform is available and the barriers to entry are reduced. 

Will this change how the Internet operates? 

This planned increase of the number of gTLDs is not expected to affect the way the Internet operates, but it will potentially change the way people find information on the Internet. 

What is ICANN doing to protect trademark holders? 

First, an objection-based process will enable rightsholders to demonstrate that a proposed gTLD would infringe their legal rights. Second, applicants for new gTLDs will be required to describe in their applications the rights protection mechanism they propose for second-level registrations, which must be made public. Third, all new gTLDs must ensure that second-level registrations are subject to ICANN’s Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP), a process that has worked well to protect rights for many years. Finally, ICANN has been working closely with the trademark community through the Intellectual Property constituency to find solutions to potential issues for trademark holders in implementing new gTLDs. 

Will ICANN prevent the registration of objectionable or racist extensions? 

Offensive names could be subject to an objection-based process based on public morality and order. This process will be conducted by an international arbitration body using criteria drawn on provisions in a number of international treaties. 

How are IDNs related to gTLDs? 

IDN is the short name for Internationalized Domain Name. IDNs are domain names with characters other than a...b,...c,...d,...e...g,...h...u...v...w...x... and "’". 

Such domain names could contain characters with diacritical marks as required by many European languages, or characters from non-Latin scripts; for example, Arabic or Chinese. During the 2010 gTLD application round, IDN top-level domains will be allowed for the first time in Internet history. The IDN top-level domain names will offer many new opportunities and benefits for Internet users around the world by allowing them to establish and use top-level domains in their native languages and scripts. 

How many new gTLDs are there? 

There is no way of knowing the exact number of applications ICANN will receive during the 2010 application round or how many of these applications will qualify and become gTLD Registrars. Market speculations have estimated anything from hundreds to thousands of applications. 

Is applying for a new gTLD the same as buying a domain name? 

No. Applications will be reviewed and evaluated based on the criteria outlined in the Applicant Guidebook. 

Can I register my idea for a new gTLD with ICANN in advance of the next application period? 

No, ICANN will not be taking reservations or pre-registrations of new gTLDs. 

Can I simply reserve a gTLD and decide later whether or not to use it? 

One of the reasons ICANN is opening the top-level space is to allow for competition and innovation in the marketplace. The application process requires applicants to provide a detailed plan for the launch and operations of the proposed TLD. ICANN expects new gTLDs to be operational shortly after the agreement is signed. 

When can I apply for a new gTLD? 

Any public or private organization from any part of the world can apply to create and operate a new gTLD. Applicants will need to demonstrate the operational, technical and financial capability to run a registry and comply with additional specific requirements. 

What is the New gTLD Applicant Guidebook? 

The Applicant Guidebook is a step-by-step guide for future applicants for a new gTLD to understand what to expect during the application and evaluation periods and how the process works. Since late 2008, the Applicant Guidebook has been released in drafts posted for public comment. It is part of ICANN’s bottom-up decision-making model and is a great opportunity for the Internet community to weigh in on the final set of criteria and processes. The final Applicant Guidebook is expected late 2009 and will contain a set of rules and requirements. 

What is ICANN asking for so much information from the applicants? 

One of ICANN’s core missions is to preserve the security, stability and global interoperability of the Internet. Future new gTLD registries are expected to comply with ICANN’s contract and follow all best practices and standards to ensure this mission is fulfilled. 

Can I apply for more than one gTLD? 

Yes. However, each application will be treated individually and there is no discount for multiple applications. 

Can I apply for any kind of gTLD or are there any specific restrictions? 

ICANN has set out specific rules that apply to the gTLD or TLD strings that must be carefully considered by each applicant. For example, an application for a gTLD composed of numbers only will be rejected. Applicants for IDN-gTLDs must carefully follow the additional technical specifications for IDNs outlined in the Applicant Guidebook. 

Applicants representing a community-based TLD or a geographic TLD must meet additional specific requirements. 

What will happen during the application period and how long will it take? 

The application period will likely last for several weeks. Applicants will use a dedicated interface named TAS (Top-Level Application System) to answer questions about the application for TLD and their business and technical capability to operate a registry. The interface will also allow applicants to upload supporting documents as a tracking and verification management tool for ICANN staff, applicants and the various service providers supporting the evaluation or objection processes. 

What happens if there are other applications for the same gTLD? 

ICANN does not allow for two or more identical gTLDs. If there are two or more applications for the same gTLD, applicants will be required to follow the strong contentions procedures outlined in the Applicant Guidebook. Applicants should also be aware that the same specific rules will apply to two or more gTLD strings are considered to be similar by the strong contention evaluation panel. The two processes proposed by ICANN to deal with the identical and similar gTLD applications are auctions and comparative evaluation. The latter applies only in cases where there is a community-based applicant. 

Can I do if someone applies for a gTLD that represents my brand or trademark? 

ICANN will have a dispute resolution mechanism managed by a dispute resolution service provider (DRSP) that will process objections from third parties that feel that their legal rights are being infringed upon. 

Can third-parties prevent an applicant from getting a new gTLD? 

After the list of all TLD applications is published on ICANN’s website, there will be an open objection period followed by established dispute resolution procedures. 

Details about these procedures, such as who has standing, who has objections are filed, how many objections will cost and others can be found in the Applicant Guidebook. 

When can I apply? 

The application period is expected to take place in 2010. The application period will have specific open and close date and time. 

How much is the application fee? 

The application fee is estimated at US$185,200. There is also a US$110 user registration fee to access the TAS. All applicants will be required to pay the same initial application and user registration fees. Various methods of payment will be accepted. Because an application might follow different paths, such as going through an objection or auction process, additional fees may be applicable to some applicants. 

Will ICANN issue refunds? 

Yes, refunds will apply in specific circumstances. Details about refund conditions are specified in the Applicant Guidebook. 

Are there any ongoing fees once a gTLD is approved by ICANN? 

Yes. Once an application successfully passes all evaluation steps, the applicant must sign a Registry Agreement with ICANN. Under the agreement, there are two fees: a fixed fee of US$5,250 per calendar quarter and a transaction fee of US$0.20 on future domain registrations and renewals. 

The information presented here about the application and evaluation process is the most up-to-date available. However, it is a high-level summary and is subject to change. For exact details about the program please review the actual text of the Applicant Guidebook with the proposed Registry Agreement as it is being revised and finalized. For information about the New gTLD Program, please visit www.icann.org or email ICANN staff at newgld@icann.org. 

Where can I find more information? 

For current information on the New gTLD Program, go to http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtld-program.htm. 

To learn about GNSO Policy Development, go to http://gnsogn-collab.org/. 

A full list of current gTLDs is available at http://www.icann.org/en/topics/tlds/listing.html. 

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