
ABU DHABI – Information Transparency Initiative
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DUNCAN BURNS: Hi, good afternoon.

This is because of the lights, nothing else. I wanted to welcome you to the session; we do have live interpretation and there is remote participation, obviously, as well, and this will be posted and transcribed for people to access after the meeting if they're interested or they want to share it with friends, because this is the most interesting session of the week. I'm going to introduce, or let them introduce themselves, fellow presenters starting with David.

DAVID CONRAD: I'm David Conrad, ICANN Chief Technology Officer.

MARK SEGALL: Mark Segall, Director of Community Collaboration Services, responsible for the technical side of this project.

JANA JUGINOVIC: Jana Juginovic, Communications.

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DUNCAN BURNS:

Excellent. So we have a few slides which we will try and go through fairly quickly to provide some context and background for what we're talking about, The Information Transparency Initiative and how we've got to where we are now. And then we will have a mic and welcome to on to any questions you may have, and stay here as long as we can and answer the questions. We'll have a roving mic, so you don't even have to get up too much if you don't to.

So why is ICANN's content important? I think at the moment, while we live in work that ICANN does, our information in many ways is everything; it's the history, it's the memory, it's the background and genesis of policy making, it's how the policy making is then implemented and it's that knowledge that you as stakeholders in the ICANN community will draw from as you do your work, find out what is going on, and really is a lot of the oil to the multistakeholder model at ICANN. It is one of our most valuable assets. There's nearly 20 years worth of ICANN history and documents and we need to make sure we are preserving them, organizing them, and protecting them.

Over the last couple of years we've come to the conclusion that our content is at risk; that we really need to focus in on the time resources needed to safeguard this information, this content. At

the moment, ICANN.org, the website, is effectively our de facto document management system, and I think all of you, I won't even ask the room, will have struggled at some point with finding a document you are looking for, or finding it in a language you might be looking for it in. And that's a real challenge, content findability for our stakeholders and for all the work we're doing.

As part of looking at this problem, we've really been coming at it from our mission and the goals accountability and transparency for ICANN. Making content easy to find, making it available as appropriate in the six UN languages that we support is part of our commitments to accountability and transparency. And our hope is, and I'll explain more, through this content, through making it accessible, you will be able to see and we will be demonstrating our commitment to that.

As our content has grown, and I think with the lack of a document management system, which is DMS up on the slide, to enforce our content governance internally, it makes it very hard as we present that information internally on the website for stakeholders to find it. Both the site search and the information architecture on the current website are suboptimal, for a term that David likes to use.

I think you may have heard Göran in the opening ceremony talk about the volume of content we have. At the moment, it's about 104, it's probably grown a bit in the last few days, thousands of

pieces of published content, and that's everything from a webpage, to a PDF, to images, contracts, you name it, the whole range of content. This is really just on ICANN.org for the moment. I'll touch on other external platforms in a minute. And that content is growing significantly every year. So it's not a problem that's going to resolve itself. It's going to get worse, and I think that's part of what has driven us to address this now; address it before the problem compounds and it gets more expensive to remedy.

So as we look at content governance which is a fairly -- you know, might not be the most fascinating topic, but it is critical to making this work. I think two elements of that is making sure we have a consistent, coherent multilingual taxonomy, that is the foundation of then a tagging ecosystem, an environment that we're building the platform on, and that against that we have consistent information architecture.

Now, a lot if of this is going to be happening internally. But you then need to have established and enforced workflows, and that's really to make sure that you follow the document life cycle internally as it heads towards external presentation. And I think the lack of that at the moment is part of what's causing the many issues we're having on ICANN.org and indeed on other platforms within the ICANN web ecosystems.

So, the cure characteristics. And I think this is where it starts to hone in on how we're approaching trying to remedy this. The first part is really focusing on a consistent taxonomy, focusing on the architectures I've talked about and that content governance, but I think the critical bit and the bit that is least visible externally but is probably 80% of the project is really tackling the document management system side of this. How you then apply the content governance, how you apply the tagging internally and then sort of the 20% external bit is how you then surface that through a content management system on to ICANN.org.

So we're looking at this as not a -- do you leave here today -- please remember one thing, this is not about a new website. There will be a refresh, but it is really about trying to fix the foundational guts of how we process and deal with documents, and govern documents that are going to be surfaced externally. And I think that's critical, that's really where a lot of the heavy lifting is going to happen, it's going to take a couple of years to really do this properly. And I think that's something we haven't perhaps had the time or resources to do in the last few years and do want to do now.

And then by building that foundation of content governance, and building a foundation of tagging, we then create this environment that we can both execute on and deliver those commitments on

our accountability transparency, but also provide a platform for the broader ecosystem and other sites, other presentation environments to draw from and build on.

And I think as bullet point three talks about, this is really the first step in building out that ICANN wide infrastructure and will eventually have benefits. Not eventually, will soon have benefits we hope for you all both on Org, but then also more broadly across the ecosystem.

This is a bit of an eye chart. This is really how we're seeing our project goals for this. I think focusing on the content strategy I've talked about. Focusing on the governance of those documents, making sure that what needs to be translated for example is translated, what's appropriated, what's the right resources for that.

As we approach this, really looking at a mobile first approach. And I think, you know, you look at the data from different meetings, different sites, how people are accessing our site, and we need to be ready for that, we need to be building a platform that is future proof as much as one physically can and technology can.

And then using that to enable users. And not just power users -- we meant to take that off -- but the users content preferences. I

think we will have to explore how we do that tied to some of the various data privacy conversations that are going on. But so people can sign up for things, sign up for the meetings for example through the platform, and then really I think the key here is it's scalable. This is the first step in a ongoing work, ongoing effort around our web ecosystem.

So we wanted to include this slide to show as we've looked to the project now as it's currently scoped, what is in the scope and what is out of scope. I think for those of you who've worked on projects like this, one of the biggest challenges is scope creep, and that everyone suddenly goes, "Oh, I need this included or I want this included," and we're really trying to bound our scope. And so, as you probably heard Jana talk about, we have 38 different content properties out there and we are using part of this effort to collapse 15 of them into one; that will still be 22 plus others that are outside the scope.

Now, some of those are community sites, some of those are sites that for the time being we are not able to bring in for a whole variety of reasons. So really those on the 15, and the main ones, one of the big ones obviously is bringing the meeting site in. If you think about our meetings and once they've wrapped up, that's where you have to go to for transcripts, for Adobe sessions etc. That's a critically important part of our accountability and

transparency. So trying to bring that into the same ecosystem is important but will be a heavy lift.

So, the benefits; as much as us organizing our filing cabinets is important, I think, how does that affect you, what are the benefits to you? The findability and transparency part of this is critical, that we're putting down a foundation for a shared ecosystem that will allow other sites within that ecosystem to draw from the same taxonomy, that will help search, it will help findability, it's going to dramatically over time decrease our maintenance cost. If you run 38 platforms, that's a long tale of cost that you have to manage; different platforms, different technologies, different users.

It's going to help us with our accessibility in terms of languages; while we're obviously focused on making sure that we have the six UN languages covered, we need to build a presentation platform for this that can cope with other languages. If we have a document in our Turkish regional office that should be public, it needs to be able to cope with that.

That's what we are looking at, and I think as many of you know, particularly the presentation of the content management systems can change quite quickly. Technologies evolve, progress, so we're trying to make sure that we're as future-proof as is possible and really get the guts right with the document

management system. And then, if in a few years' time, as often seems to happen, the content management layer needs to evolve, then we're in a position to do that without incurring the same level of resource or technical costs. And then I think meeting these commitments will continue to save us money and reduce our financial risk.

So with that, I've probably took longer than I meant to, so apologies. This is something where we're not just going to go off and disappear and come back to you at some point. We really want to have an ongoing conversation with the community, with those who have opinions. Starting in Puerto Rico, we'd love to come meet or present if there are any interested constituency groups, we're committed to publishing regular blogs about this.

At the appropriate point in the project, we'll launch a beta site where people can see how this is working, and have access and have visibility into that as we create user journeys, as we create the personas that we need to develop what the site looks like. That's really based on the demand, on you, and what you need. And I think that's an important part of this.

With that, if anyone has any questions, we also have a remote room, so I can't see them waiving at the moment, but if you have a question, waive your hand in the air and we have a roving mic. There we go. Alan.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: MSL here, good evening. At the beginning I apologize for being delayed in attending this session, but the information that you have demonstrated now, especially I consider myself as a new comer to the GAC committee. And I would rather that such a session could have more focus and more concentration and more attendees because I noticed here about the documents and all the information regarding the ACs and SOs are very valuable, and about also the acronyms, that is considered as one of the challenges. And even staff members are suffering of these acronyms. I like your presentation.

My question here is, I would like it to be another session or more than one session on this topic that clarify things. My other question also is, for promoting the transparency within ICANN, why did you choose this word? The transparency? And thank you.

DUNCAN BURNS: Thank you. So yes, I think we see this probably as the start of the conversation. So maybe from here we can build -- you know, maybe by Panama we will have an overflowing room of people with interest. There is a lot of content on the community sites. And we [inaudible] near the stage not focused on the Wikis, on

some of the SO/AC sites. That said, for example the new GAC site uses the CMS that we'll be using for this project, so that's being a base of where we've been able to work with the GAC on exploring how that could work.

I think your point on acronyms and on the complex technology, complex terms and that's part of what we need to look at. How do we both tag in a way that if you're searching for GDPR, cause that's the word of the week, that you can find that thread of all relevant content all the way through from, you know, when there may have been a meeting discussion, through to if there's a policy development, through to implementation. And quite what that's going to look like, I don't have an answer.

One of my responsibilities is our language services team, so we're very conscious of how do we do that, how do we build out and make this an accessible site from a multilingual point of view. And I think there are various threads that we need to work on; everything from what are the other tools that we have out there, like Quizlet, where you can download an app and it's a glossary list where you can then both see what a word means, but also have it said back to you in the UN six languages, which is a great toll. And I'll help you download the app later, Alan, otherwise my team will beat me up. But I think, Dave, is there anything you wanted to add?

DAVID CONRAD: Yeah, just in case, CMS is content management system. One of the reasons we chose the name Information Transparency Initiative was, as Duncan mentions, an effort to try to make the information that we have more available to the community. The intent being that, as I'm sure you're aware, the new Bylaws have required us to be open and transparent and accountable. If we can make the information that we have sort of transparent to the community, that will aid in our ability to be accountable to that community.

We went through a bunch of different code names for this project, but when we sort of finalized on sort of the ground goals and scope of the project, it seemed that information transparency was sort of the overriding concept behind the entire project.

DUNCAN BURNS: Alan, and the gentleman in front, so Alan, go for it.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you so much. What I understood from the explanation that the transparency is the right to reach out to the information, as you said. Now that will enable to provide all the information and

all the contact to all people who are interested or engaged with us in the work. And that will help a lot for the new comers.

I would like, and I appreciate if there's any new documents published and provided to the new groups, to the new members, to the new comers, that will handle or address all the elements, all the factors and all the terms that [inaudible] and that would be so the new comer can be very well oriented and very well informed about all these new things for him. And also that will enable him to reach out to the document that he's seeking to clarify things that he's looking into. Thank you.

DAVID CONRAD:

Thank you very much for that input; it's actually very important for us to receive those sort of comments, particularly from folks who are, you know, less familiar with the various way things work within ICANN because, you know, once you're in this environment for long enough, you just start speaking in acronyms, it's sort of a natural outcome I suppose.

So again, thank you, and we will definitely work on ways in which we can present sort of user journeys for the people at any stage of entrance into ICANN in terms of knowledge, level or experience, to ensure that they are able to find the information

they need to understand the various topics that are being discussed that are of interest to them.

So again, thank you, and I encourage everyone to provide similar input about the things that they believe it's important for this initiative and the areas that we should focus on. [David Conrad]

DUNCAN BURNS:

Just as a follow up on that; one of the early deliverables on the project will be a glossary. At the moment, I think we have three or four different glossaries on the website; well, that's confusing enough. We want to have a definitive one, something to draw from that provides, again, that foundation. I mean, that's an example of the challenge we face; 70% of the visitors to our homepage on ICANN.org are new, first time visitors.

You start to think about that, who are they, where do they come from, and that's in the millions. That's largely because they're coming from domain registration issues, compliance issues. We have to think about how do you tackle that in a public facing way that both works for someone like David with 20 years deep technical experience, and works for someone who just wants to figure out a problem on a domain name they're trying to buy, or have bought. Thank you, Alan.

MICHAEL KARANICOLAS: Hi, my name is Michael Karanicolas. I'm the rapporteur for the Cross Community Working Group on transparency, and I'm also as part of my day job, the head of the Right to Know Coalition and the candidate researcher for the Open Government Partnership. So designing and implementing and assessing these transparency systems is very close to what I do, it is what I do.

I want to congratulate you on this very important work. I think that it's vital to improve ICANN's transparency. I think that it's great that you're starting with the document management side. Particularly because I think a lot of organizations and governments that are setting up these systems struggle a lot with accessibility and contextualization, and there's this rush to put as much information up as they can, and it presents this very confusing layout for users. It's great that, if I'm hearing you correctly, you're starting with the organization and management side, and tagging side, because that's fundamental going forward.

I do want to caution you in terms of the consolidation. Consolidation is good, but I would caution you to be a little careful that you don't dumb down the data, if you want to think about it that way. Because contextualization and the data's original home can be an important context and resource for

researchers. And that's why you have to think about how data is cross-referenced and presented.

My question is, I wanted to ask to what extent you've reached out to the resources of the ICANN community to support this work in terms of its design and execution. And I say myself, I mean there's a lot of people that work either on this issue or close to this issue on the nonprofit side; I'm with NCUC. It's very important to get this kind of feedback early on if you want to develop a site that has a user-centric approach.

You know, you're going to get business constituency people that are telling you, "I want this raw data because it's of commercial value to me," but then it's important to also hear from researchers, academics, journalists; it's important to design a site in a way that serves the needs of the diverse users that are going to be accessing it. So hopefully, rather than it just being a one-way conversation where you're bringing your message out, there's a strong possibility for dialogue on this.

DUNCAN BURNS:

Thank you. Both on what you first said,. I think -- and this is something David and the team and I've been talking about a long time; really, we need to start the talking of management system. If we just rush to try and fix a website, that won't really fix the

underlying problems. And I think that's where we will need your patience as we tackle it because a lot of that it's not going to be as visible to you. We're going to have to have people -- we use machines as much as we can who are going to have to look at every one of those 100,000 plus documents to make sure they're tagged right, is the content right.

I think that's a really interesting insight about losing contextualization, and that's something we need to bear in mind and explore. In terms of the community, absolutely, I think this is the start of a conversation, and one of the things we want to do, and we need to work that into sort of the next steps, is do interviews with community members, community groups.

You know, one of our big challenges candidly is, how do you represent them in one external platform, the diversity of this community, how do you represent all those different user journeys, all those different personas in a way where you're not by trying to be everything you're nothing. And I think that's going to be one of the central challenges on this. Which is why we also need to get the guts right and the foundation right because then in some ways that allows people to build their own access points. David, did you want to...

DAVID CONRAD:

Yeah, I just wanted to add one comment about sort of access to raw data. There is a different, separate project known as the Open Data Initiative that we've undertaken that is, you know, eventually and sort of the far-off mists of the future there will undoubtedly be some integration between the Open Data Initiative and the Information Transparency Initiative.

Information Transparency Initiative is focused on our existing document base, whereas the Open Data Initiative is focused on making data that we generate -- sort of you can think of it as sort of the tabular data spreadsheets, those sorts of things, that we generate or we curate in one way or another, available via APIs; restful APIs, if you know the technology.

In the long run, there will be an integration between those two projects. Initially, they are separate projects, primarily because we are focusing in the initial phase of ITI, Information Transparency Initiative, on tagging and developing a taxonomy for the documentation that we have as a means first to address the challenges that we have with findability and other aspects of the existing website, but also to ensure an effective form of content governance for the documents that we produce.

DUNCAN BURNS:

Did you have a lot?

MICHAEL KARANICOLAS: Just briefly, because I was at the open data session in the morning. And sorry, this is Michael Karanicolas for the record. I was at the open data session this morning, and their focus also was almost entirely on document management. And I said the same thing, I said, “Oh great, you guys are focusing on document management first, that's the right approach.”

So I'm a little confused just to why these two approaches are kind of moving along in parallel, and I was hoping to follow up briefly, because is there some concern that there would be some duplication or problems connecting those two systems?

DAVID CONRAD: Yeah, I'll have to go through the recording for the Open Data Initiative talk. If there was an impression that it's a document management system, that's incorrect; it's actually an open data platform that we're looking at four different platforms right now, including Enigma, and Socrata, and Open Data Soft. That's very different than the document management system that underlies the Information Transparency Initiative project.

So, you know, with the Open Data Initiative, it's taking data like the registry reports which are now documents, they're PDFs, but they really shouldn't be because they're basically spreadsheets

that are then dumped into PDF. That seems a little silly because people actually want the actual spreadsheet context. So that's what the Open Data Initiative is focused on.

There will be links between the two because when you're working with a document that references a registry report, it would be nice to sort of be able to actually see the spreadsheet as a link from the document management system or the Information Transparency Initiative's frontend to the actual data. But they are separate systems that do very, very different things. So I'll have to review the presentation, maybe have words with my team.

DUNCAN BURNS: Thanks. Do you have another question? Give me time to find my headphones.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you. I will give an example about what happened in GAC yesterday. I was a member of the team force of the documents on categorization of these documents. So many of my colleagues have faced difficulties in doing that task. And they said that the way of arranging the website of the GAC, it all depends on the feedback and comments coming from the GAC members themselves. Because the GAC members are the most knowledgeable people about the work of the GAC.

And also, about the work -- I expect that the most efforts made about categorization, and listing the items of these documents are depending on the efforts that each GAC member is doing and also that will be in collaboration with the people who are designing these pages of GAC. Thank you.

DUNCAN BURNS:

Yes, one of the ways we've looked at this, and what we're actually starting off in mid November, is the audit of all the content on the site so that we can with both a small team of auditors and then representatives from every function within ICANN the organization, including for example representatives from all policy development team who work very closely for example with the GAC or the GNSO, that we can then build that taxonomy that we can understand what it should be, that we can understand the various hierarchies, the tagging, so that we can do that work by and large for you; so that it's not a massive -- you know, I think it would be unfair for us to go, "Okay GAC, please, can you do all of this?"

That doesn't mean we don't want input, that doesn't mean we don't want clarity on -- you know, the English glossary for example is a base. Then you start to do the other languages that are coming off that. We have that, but we need to make sure it's appropriate, and those are the right words and choices for what

are still living languages. But I think that's a core part of what we need to do now.

And I think sort of related to that is the interviews we're going to do to understand with, for example, members of the GAC, what their journey is, how they want to use the site, how they think about the site, where they want to go, so we can build all that in to helping them access the content and the documents they're trying to reach. Hopefully, that answered your question.

Any other questions from anyone? And it's okay if you don't. This is the start of a conversation, you can always email. The email address will be live and sort of ongoing from here if you have questions. We'll certainly be doing a session in Puerto Rico, we will have blogs, we'll look forward to an ongoing discussion about this. And we will need your help.

And I think what I'd also ask for is just your patience as we really start. We want to do this right. We're trying not to rush it. We've had the board really sort of dig into this and understand how we're addressing the risks that come with projects like this. How we are looking at tackling this in a sustainable way, being responsible, how this ties back to the mission, and I think to do that right is going to take us some time.

So it may not always be visible to you, but we want to be visible and we want to understand what your needs are, what your concerns are, and I think at some point there'll a point where we'd -- and you [inaudible] sites that are going to be collapsed in, and those that aren't we have to draw a line, there will be priorities we'll have to make and things that'll have to wait for the last stage.

Any last questions? Otherwise, thank you. Thank you very much, and we're here if you've got any more questions and comments.

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