
ICANN79 | CF – GNSO: RySG DotBrand Registry Group Membership Work Session
Monday, March 4, 2024 – 1:15 to 2:30 SJU

SUE SCHULER: Hello, and welcome to the meeting of the DotBrand Registry Group Membership. My name is Sue and I'm a participation manager for this session. Please note that the session is being recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior.

If you would like to speak during this session, please raise your hand in Zoom. When called upon, virtual participants will be given permission to unmute in Zoom. Onsite participants will use a physical microphone to speak. Please state your name for the record and speak at a reasonable pace. I will now hand the floor over to Crews Gore.

CREWS GORE: Thank you, Sue. Hello, everybody. Welcome to the dotBrand Registry Group session here in Puerto Rico. Today, we'll be talking about several different topics. I'm going to be presenting on the security benefits of dotBrands. We have Martin Kuechenthal who is going to talk about the steps dotBrands need to take for the next round, Kroopa Shah from Identity Digital, who's going to be giving us some insight on dotBrand DNS statistics. Susan Payne will be joining us later and giving us an update on the Applicant Guidebook. And lastly, Mike Rodenbaugh will be giving us an update on the linkification letter that we had sent to the ICANN Board a little over a month or two ago.

Note: The following is the output resulting from transcribing an audio file into a word/text document. Although the transcription is largely accurate, in some cases may be incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages and grammatical corrections. It is posted as an aid to the original audio file, but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

So we wanted to take time today and just discuss the actual security benefits that a DotBrand has for your organization. We've highlighted a lot of use cases in the past. As we mentioned in our last session, a lot of our domains are not publicly visible to the public. And that's because we're using them for security setup infrastructure in different ways within an organization that the public may not see.

Some of the security benefits I wanted to go through today, they highlight on e-mail security through DNS, web browser security, registration security. So the first thing I wanted to highlight is DMARC at the root with Craig at fTLD and what he's done and launched with his two domain extensions, it really gives a dotBrand a great opportunity to set up the security infrastructure on all of your entire zone with DMARC at the root. For those that don't know, DMARC is an e-mail authentication protocol that uses SPF and DKIM to decide the authenticity of an e-mail. So if you implement this at the root, DMARC is going to be added to all of your domain names, registered and unregistered. And how this works is, if you have an active domain name that already has DMARC setup on your domain name, it will not apply that DMARC record that you have set the root. It will take it for whatever you have set up on that active domain. And then if you do not have DMARC set up on that domain, it will then fall to the protocol that you have set at the TLD level. So that gives you the opportunity to enable DMARC on all of your domain names in your entire zone. This is a great security benefit for when you're owning your entire zone for a dotBrand, of one DNS record that you can implement to really bolster the security of your TLD.

The steps you have to take here to enable this at your registry would be submitting an RSEP to ICANN, and once approved, then your registry service provider would then add those records to your TLD at the TLD level. So it's just one way through DNS that you can enable security on your dotBrand and create that policy within your organization that we are going to have DMARC on all of our domain names. It's just one way to enforce it right at the root level.

For web browser security, there are two things I wanted to talk about here. HSTS preload, which many of us will know from if you're going to add this to your primary domain name, and then SSL certificate. So HSTS preload, you have the ability with a dotBrand or a TLD in general to upload the entire TLD into this HSTS preload list provided by Chrome. This security benefit forces HTTPS in the web browser for that domain name. So you have to enable an SSL certificate, an HTTPS, on the domain name or it will not resolve. This is another great benefit just as an organization where when you're putting it together a security—I want to say protocol—for your domains. You're going to want to make sure all of your domains have SSL certificates. This really forces you to have to have an SSL certificate on your domain name.

Then I've talked about this before. But it's such a great benefit of when you're installing SSL certificates on the dotBrands. Once you have your dotBrand and you're working with a certificate authority, you can receive approval on your entire dotBrand namespace for any dotBrand that you have registered, it will be automatically verified. And therefore, you can install that certificate right away, rather than going through and trying to validate those certificates through DNS, through a phone call, through e-mail. That's just one step that it saves me a lot

of time because I know I have to approve those EV certificates that are not on a dotFox domain name. There's some phone number listed there that I have no idea where they got that phone number, but it's not reachable. It comes close to like, "Are we going to be able to verify this domain name or not?" So this is a great example of how SSL certificates are pre-approved and authenticated and ready for you to install on your server.

Registration security. This comes as a great benefit to domain name managers, organizations, Infosec teams, where you're always having that fear in the back of your head. Not that it's probably going to happen, but there's always a risk of a domain name getting hijacked and transferred over to a different registrar. You're going to have domain names that were registered by rogue employees where they register them at a personal registrar account rather than at our corporate registrar account. That always causes issues for us because they'll then set up those domain names on different DNS that we don't have control or visibility over. So, myself as a domain manager, we make sure to have all of our domain names managed within our corporate portfolio so that we have the best oversight possible of all the domains that we have registered. With a dotBrand, because you are only signing one RA with your registrar, that is the only registrar where that domain name is able to be managed. So there is no way that a domain name could be transferred to a different registrar. It wouldn't go through. You would not have those rogue registrations because you could not just go to a registrar of your choice and register it if it wasn't through our corporate account.

Then domain names lost to expiration. This is one that our Infosec team at Fox, they have to make sure that domain names are renewed for as long as they can to make sure that you don't let a domain name lapse. And then once it lapses, this is where it comes into rogue domain name registrations. When you have an active domain name registered by a former employee where you don't have access to that account anymore, you very well could lose that domain name and have to try to backorder it and pay an exuberant amount of price for it, or you may lose that domain name. So having your dotBrand eliminates that risk in general, where if that domain name expires, you own that entire zone so you can just renew it, and it's going to be managed in your corporate registrar account.

So the final takeaway I just wanted to mention about the security benefits of a dotBrand is it gives your organization the opportunity to enforce security policies that you want to have on your domain name portfolio. You're eliminating risks that you're going to have with other TLDs. You eliminate that risk with the dotBrand. And you're taking control of your domain name portfolio, you're protecting your brand, and most importantly, you're protecting your customers.

I wanted to share the vision and mission of the BRG. The BRG is here at all ICANN sessions, we're here to create a safer, more secure, and trusted Internet for companies and consumers around the world with their dotBrands. Within the BRG, we are talking about with different brands of the benefits that they may be seeing the disadvantages that they're seeing use cases, you're sharing your ideas and just getting an understanding of how I can best use my dotBrand and help bring ideas back to the organization to see what best fits you and your customers.

We have two different memberships at the BRG, the regular membership for those members that already have their TLD delegated. And we also have the associate membership where we have members that are seeking to apply in the next round with ICANN.

So, if anybody's ever interested in becoming a BRG member, you can visit our website, brandregistrygroup.org, to learn more. On the website, you'll see that we just released a new BRG whitepaper where it highlights the coming round, the steps that you should be taking as an organization, a brief history of that last round and how it played out, strategic planning for you and your organization on how to best prepare yourself for when the application window opens, and how the BRG is here to help you in any way that we can. So from that, I am going to pass it on over to Martin to present his piece.

MARTIN KUECHENTHAL:

Thank you. Just move a little bit closer. Oh, perfect. Sue's helping me. Thank you, Sue. Thanks, Crews. Thanks for having me to the BRG, and I'm happy that even though there are so many other interesting sessions right now that some people found the way to the last corner of the building. I start the presentation, I was really thinking how to start, because somehow we sound like a broken record or maybe the biggest running gig in the industry when we always say, "Oh, what's the timeline? And what's the timeline? And how does it go? And how did we prepare?" because I think we have done that for, I don't know, forever. Since the first domains or the first TLDs from the first one had been delegated. But somehow, we have now the best of what we have, and I think it has never been that close. I hope most of the people in

here agree with me. When the timeline really realizes it's our strong belief that it's necessary for advisers on the one side, but also for the companies and corporations who want to apply for their own their own dotBrand, it's already now time to get started to prepare. I just want to make a quick run through. Sue, next, please.

From our experience, especially from the first round, it's super important to initiate this project early enough. In the end, I will show you a quick overview with the timeline. Most of the times, the contact and the information about the idea of the possible dotBrand is actually not necessarily ending up on the C level. But my experience and our experience, I think most of the colleagues who are in the same business than I am, they made the experience that those who have integrated a C level sponsor from the beginning had a much easier life to get this whole process through. Because it's a lot of departments in the company involved a lot of different budgets should somehow be combined or extra, not so small budget has to be implemented somewhere. And a single department never wants to take extra costs, we all know that. And to get separated or divided cost between departments is not the easiest thing either. We are quite confident that it's necessary to involve the legal, the marketing, and the IT, and the IT security part. But Crews just went into, shows it very clearly, I personally think the IT and IT security part has a much bigger meaning for dotBrands these days than it had 10 years ago. Actually, it's 12 years ago, oh my God. It was 12 years ago. Try to initiate the process. Try to get people together. Make presentations and present if you're not already have access to serious decision takers in your organization in a brand owning company or corporation. Get these people by the

table and discuss the needs and the use cases to support this business opportunity.

I think it's very, very important to do at an early stage, the pro and con assessment because it has to be a copyrighted work over so many different departments that it will go 100% wrong if you don't get that aligned very, very early. And of course, people have to be educated, especially people in the organization who have to get money. But I think a very, very important step is get involved somebody from the C level or as high as possible on the organization, because I think it needs a top-down decision for this kind of project. It's also not very likely, if you don't do that, that you get through with it. Next, please.

Finally, the decision-making process and the preparations are not so different to other decision-making processes in big corporations. You have to, as always, develop a strategic plan and to make a business case. The big difference here is most people, even senior and experienced people in your organization do not have a clue about what we're talking here. So at one point, you will need to seek assistance from outside consultants to bring you knowledge, which help you to make decisions within the corporation, if it's a go, it's a no go. You need to reach a consensus about the cost, what I said before, and you should also talk about the whole setup and running through of the phases before the application finally really happens.

One good tip here from my personal experience is to join the dotBrand Registry Group as early as possible in the process because Crews showed us we have the possibility to be a member on the way to your own application for the TLD. This gives you so much insight knowledge

and also helps you to take decisions, maybe not only based on consultancy you're receiving, but also in the exchange with existing dotBrand owners and also potential other dotBrand applications in the next round. I think it's a place where also potential dotBrand owners can really be safe and exchange their opinion and get a lot of insights which they will never get outside somewhere in the wild. Additionally, it's a very nice group to work together with, and I can really recommend that to any potential dotBrand applicant to join the Brand Registry Group. Next, please.

At one point, when the whole application, pre application process has been run through and has been planned, the process of applying and managing a TLD starts. Not only in the application process, you need expertise in legal, financial, and technical. A lot of this expertise you will have insight of the cooperation, but you also need TLD expertise. Only very few companies have that. There are a couple of dotBrand owners which have been taking part in ICANN and the surrounding things going on already before the first round of TLDs because they saw and understood the potential of a dotBrand or even other open TLD for their company in some cases. So it's very important to get these things together before you start your application because we have seen how long time it took from the first to the second round. It is almost more than 12 years that the last application window closed, and who knows when and if the next possibility comes. So everything should be right with the application. It looks easy but the devil is in the detail. And it's very, very important to get a good application done, to make it without headache, and get this knowledge from inside, gather

the knowledge, and get also the knowledge you need from outside, including, of course, the BRG.

One thing, which is part of the whole processes, of course, talking about what is the intent of the use. I think in the first round of TLDs, and I think we all agree on that, was mostly driven by defensive purpose. We did that or most of the corporations did that, not to lose the TLD to somebody else. That was also the driver within the corporations, mainly legal, very little marketing. Legal got the application through. And that's also one of the reasons why a lot of applications or a lot of, actually, TLDs have not been used in a good manner and a good purpose after that. So that's also a very strong consideration to give also the other departments a clear role with that, the branding, the communication, also the infrastructure and security aspects, so that you have all people aligned, and that it's a common project and not a single department's project to make it successful also after the launch, because actually then it's when the real work starts.

So it ends with, of course, establish and lead a planning and Go-to-Market team in 2025. Let's see if that will be 2025. But that's at least something which we wish for and Christmas is only nine months away, so maybe it will happen. Next, please.

We will just give you a very, very short timeline. Of course, we don't take any—what do you call that in English? We are not reliable for this information?

CREWS GORE: You're not liable.

MARTIN KUECHENTHAL: Liable for this information, sorry. I'm still not 100% back on my feet. Actually, the phase of ideas and brainstorming starts now. Because you need to start to get this group of people together who can advocate within the organization, and after the summer holidays, we would recommend to start really getting more deep into that to make a plan, to get people on board. And then by the end of the year, try to get the ideas evaluated to have the stakeholders within the organization on your site to get started with the planning and preparing in the beginning of next year. When the new AGB and the list of the pre-evaluated RSPs will be published in about one and a half years, we can at least expect to be able to start writing the applications and to prepare the applications. Then in April 2026, which is two years almost from now, then the application submission period opens and the application should be submitted.

Let's hope that all this will be going to happen and the case in reality. We believe that in the BRG but it's somehow also our purpose to believe that. I hope that that's the closest what we have right now. A very important thing is not to miss the turning points, but because we need and you need in the organization's time for all these things. And it's no need for rush when you can deliver the message already and can prepare in good time. Get the budget straight and start with the work as soon as possible to have as many supporters within the organization as possible. That was me. I'm not 100% sure who's next but I think it's Kroopa, right? Thank you.

KROOPA SHAH:

Thank you. Perfect. Okay, awesome. Well, greetings, everyone. My name is Kroopa Shah. I lead the Registry Services department at Identity Digital. We are a global registry operator for over 270 TLDs such as .info, .pro, and provide registry services to a number of Brand TLDs as well, including .audi, .ril, to ccTLDs like .au and .pr, and to other gTLDs as well such as .org and .post. If you could go to next slide, please.

As many of us are preparing for the new TLD round, which is currently projected to start in April of 2026, I thought that it would be good to see what the usage of Brand TLDs has been so far. How can we leverage this information to better educate other brands who might be thinking or who might be evaluating whether they should or should not apply for a dotBrand in the next round. We've heard about overall benefits, security benefits, etc. But what story is the data really telling us? Next slide, please.

So for this, I looked at the publicly available data that's reported by registry operators as part of the monthly reports published on the ICANN website. Much of the analysis that I'll present here will be broken down into three components. One is legacy or more established TLDs such as .com, .info. And then for new TLDs such as .live or .app. And then dotBrands such as .apple or .audi.

Overall, we've seen that DNS traffic to dotBrands continues to grow. So the usage from a DNS side, the usage looks like it continues to grow. Let's do a little bit of a deep dive, though, to see what that really means. Next slide, please.

So let's do a little bit of an overview. Here, the x axis that you see represents the month and year, and the y axis represents total number of queries in the DNS. And you'll see that overall, the DNS traffic for gTLDs continues to increase. But what really stands out in this chart is that the legacy gTLD traffic has almost doubled from about 5 trillion to 10 trillion over the past five years. That's a big spike that you see there. The second line just below that, there's a little bit of a bump, and then the purple line right at the very bottom is Brand TLDs. And if you look at it from this perspective, you'll see that it's mostly flat. But we'll do a little bit of more of a deep dive to see what that really means. Next slide, please.

Most of the legacy TLD traffic is driven by .com and .net. It represents about 80% of all DNS traffic. Then legacy TLDs, except .com and .net, drive about 10%, and new gTLDs overall about 10% as well. Next slide, please.

Now, if you dig a little bit deeper into the usage for new TLDs, you'll see a sharp spike over the past five years. You'll see that traffic there has quadrupled. So in five years, we've gone from about 250 billion, I think that's the number there, to one trillion. The x axis represents month and year. The y axis represents the DNS traffic. Next slide, please.

Now, another way to slice this is to see what is the percentage share of new gTLD traffic versus established TLDs or TLDs overall. And you'll see that the share in new gTLD traffic over the past five years has increased by 25%. So it's not a very sharp increase. But there has been

an increase by about 25% in the past five years. And this is for all new gTLD traffic. Next slide please.

Let's drill down now into dotBrands. The share of Brand traffic has nearly doubled in five years. It's a small percentage because it's really gone from about 0.5% to 1%. But it has doubled. It's slow growth, but it's growing steadily. So how exactly has that impacted the Brand TLD usage? How has it increased? And what does that look like? Next slide please.

Well, it turns out that the traffic to dotBrands has increased by about 400%, so quadrupled in the past five years. So it's a pretty big jump. Now, we did an analysis similar to this, I want to say a few years after the new TLD's launch, and we saw that there was a spike then. But that trend continues here. It hasn't slowed down. And in fact, in the past five years, we've seen a four times increase in dotBrand DNS traffic. Next slide, please.

So where is this traffic coming from? Most of it, actually, 12% of all that dotBrand traffic is driven by these top five: .aws, .ice, .google, .hsbc, and .apple. But if you look at the percentages, it seems really small because all the other dotBrands drive about 78% of all dotBrand traffic. However, the numbers that are listed here, they're basically traffic share over 1%. So all the other dotBrand share, the traffic share is under 1%. But these top five drive about 12% of all dotBrand traffic. So we've talked about increase in traffic, right? And some might say, "Well, of course traffic has increased because registrations have increased." But is that really the case, though? Next slide, please.

It turns out not quite. Registrations in dotBrands have mostly been flat over the past five years. There have been some spikes as you can see there. But for the most part, domains under management or registrations have been mostly the same. There hasn't been a sharp increase there. So there doesn't seem to be a correlation between registrations and usage for dotBrand TLD specifically. Next slide, please.

So now what? What's our takeaway here? I think it's important to understand that traffic to dotBrand TLDs continues to grow 1%. And as all DNS traffic grows, Brand TLDs are within that trend. And traffic to Brand TLDs also continues to grow. Brands who currently have a dotBrand that are not using it should look into leveraging their Brand TLD for their business. And for Brands who are evaluating whether to apply or not to apply for the next round, I think data is really key. Because it is a real opportunity for Brands to be in complete control of their namespace and leverage it for their overall business goals. But as a group here, I think we have a job to do in terms of educating Brand owners and letting them know that domains under management is one metric. And while it's an important metric, but when we evaluate successful Brand TLD, it is not the only metric. The way to slice success for Brand TLD is different from just looking at domains under management.

With that, I will thank the BRG for the opportunity to present this analysis and invite any comments for a discussion afterwards. Thank you.

CREWS GORE: Thank you so much, Kroopa, for presenting on that. That was really interesting and I love digging into that data. So I think that's definitely important. Did anybody have any questions?

JIM PRENDERGAST: Thanks, Crews. Jim Prendergast with the Galway Strategy Group. Could you back up? You showed a slide that had an initial spike, and then it dropped off, and it was the 400% increase, I think, over the last... No. Keep going. There. So what is that? In January of 2016, it just falls off.

KROOPA SHAH: It does. No, I'm not sure what that spike is. I didn't dig into that deeper. But maybe it was an anomaly because, again, this is data that's reported by registry operators to ICANN. Perhaps it was an error. Perhaps it was something else. I didn't dig into that deeper. But everything else, after that seems to be consistent. So that seems like an anomaly.

JIM PRENDERGAST: Got it. Thank you.

CREWS GORE: Great. Okay. Thank you so much. I will pass it on over to Susan Payne to give us an update on the Applicant Guidebook.

SUSAN PAYNE: Super. Hi, everyone. I'm Susan Payne. Do you have the slides, Sue? I can send them again. Can I share my screen then?

SUE SCHULER: Hey, Julie, can you please promote Susan Payne?

SUSAN PAYNE: Okay, cool. Hopefully, this will work. Yes, perfect. Okay. So this is really just to give a bit of an update on where the worker has progressed to on getting to the next round. So on the implementation of the various policy recommendations that were made as a result of the policy development effort. In the past, we've called it SubPro. Obviously, there were a suite of policy recommendations, and then they all need to be implemented in order for us to get to the next round. A huge part of that implementation, although not all of it, is about what the Applicant Guidebook looks like. It's the document that will guide you as a potential applicant for a new gTLD on what you need to do, what's available to you, what you can't have, how some of the processes work, how evaluation happens, how objection processes happen, and so on.

A group has been working on this. It's a staff responsibility to do the implementation but there is a community group called the Implementation Review Team or IRT that sits alongside staff and assists in that effort of getting to the implementation.

This isn't very easy to see, this slide. This is taken from the ICANN implementation plan, but it's just to give a sort of idea of the overall timelines. You may have seen the timeline from Martin, I'm not sure. As

you've heard, we're looking at an application window opening in around 2026. So there are various other efforts that are happening in the run-up to that, including this work on the Applicant Guidebook.

There are a couple of other steps or programs that are happening in parallel. One is work on what's called the Applicant Support Program, which will be a program where applicants from underserved regions and who require sort of financial or other assistance in order to put an application together, there will be a process to allow for that. So the Applicant Support Handbook will explain what that is about. That Applicant Support Handbook is out for public comment at the moment. There will also be a similar sort of parallel effort looking at accreditation of registry service providers. So these are the entities that will provide the backends for operating a registry, assuming that in some circumstances, an applicant may operate their own back end or you may contract with a third party to do it. But either way, whoever is providing those backend services will be expected to go through this sort of evaluation process. So that's another effort that's about to go out to public comment.

But in terms of the Applicant Guidebook, this is kind of the timeline for that. We're in that first blue bubble there that obviously doesn't reflect the start of the work. As I said, we've been working on the AGB for around about a year now. But we are in the first Public Comment on some sections of the Applicant Guidebook, and I'll talk about them in a minute. Then we'll be looking forward to having two additional Public Comment periods during 2024, looking at further sections of the Applicant Guidebook as they get completed by the IRT group. And then it's envisaged there'll be a final Public Comment exercise in early

2025 which will pull together all of the sections. So if anyone was involved in the previous 2012 round, we tended to have multiple Public Comment exercises on pretty much the whole Applicant Guidebook and it's not being handled this way. Basically, we're sort of updating sections of that AGB where things need to be changed, and then putting it out in chunks. There'll be, as I say, this sort of funnel wrap-up opportunity to comment on the full guidebook when it's finished. And then that will go to the ICANN Board for approval, and then there'll be a formal publication which is scheduled towards the end of 2025. And then bearing in mind that, as we've been saying, the idea is that then that's available in advance of the April-ish 2026 application window opening, so that a potential applicant or an intended applicant have a pretty decent idea of what the rules are looking like in quite some time in advance. Because by early 2025, you'll see a sort of close to final version of the Applicant Guidebook. And then by later in 2025, though, you'll see the absolute final version is the intent anyway.

So we are in the first Public Comment period. It's open through until the 19th of March. So that's just a couple of more weeks. There are no plans to give people extensions of time on that Public Comment period. That's because this isn't the last opportunity to look at this, and also because we are all working on quite a tight timeframe. In ICANN, there's a tendency for people to frequently request extensions of time and for timelines to slip. It's an aggressive timeline. So there's no time for slippage, really. So no extensions of time.

The first sections that were ready and have gone up to public comment are dealing with these items that are listed here. I would say,

obviously, as a member of that group, and having previously been a member of the group that worked on developing the policy, I don't think there's anything terribly controversial in what's being proposed in the form of how it's being implemented. It does reflect what the policy was expecting. There aren't really any surprises. It deals with what's called the predictability framework, which is something that the Policy Development Team developed or came up with as a mechanism to help deal in the future if there are unknowns that arise, which might need a change of approach, rather than having kind of no process envisaged for how to handle something where it's not going to plan or something needs to be changed. So this predictability framework is a sort of mechanism and process for how to deal with things if there's a problem that comes up either during the next round or for future rounds, because this isn't intended to be necessarily a single window of applications.

There's a group called—I've spelled that wrong, actually. It should be SPIRT which is the Standing Predictability Implementation Review Team or something like that. It's a dreadful acronym, but it's intended to be the group that will be managing—thank you—that predictability framework. So work is just starting now for a cross-community group to draft the charter for how that group would operate in the future. The SPIRT part isn't out for public comment but the predictability framework itself is.

Then there are codes of conduct and some conflicts of interest provisions for how ICANN's arrangements with vendors will be handled, all the expectations of vendors, I suppose. That includes people like whoever is doing the evaluations of the applications and

whoever is handling Dispute Resolution Procedures. The Independent Objector, who is, as it says on the tin, an independent ICANN-appointed person who can make their own objections to applications irrespective of whether third parties are also filing objections, that kind of thing. Some provisions there, just ensuring that all of those entities have some Conflict of Interest obligations and Code of Conduct obligations.

Then there's a very short section on applicant freedom of expression, which is pretty much saying ICANN is committed to it. Universal Acceptance, which is something we all here talk about significantly. The section on which names are reserved and blocked. Then Geographic Names. I think that one probably for the last round was one of the more controversial topics. But in terms of this section of the Applicant Guidebook, as they say, it very much reflects what the policy work developed over the course of a fairly significant period of time. I'm smiling at Martin Sutton because he chaired that particular work effort. As I say, it actually also very much reflects with some fairly minor tweaks what we had in the Applicant Guidebook for 2012.

So there's nothing particularly terrifying in there. There are things that you will have to be aware of it, particularly as a brand in terms of what you can and can't apply for high level country and territory names are out. And so that's the actual names, and also the codes that reflect countries and territories as listed on the ISO 3166 list. Also out are capital cities unless you have the approval of the sort of local authority or government in question. There are also some provisions around other city names, if you're intending to operate it in relation to the city. This is where we start finding some overlap with brand names. So if

your brand happens to be a city name and you want it as a TLD but it's not a capital city, and you're not planning to run it as a ccTLD, you shouldn't be requiring the governmental approval in that circumstance. But those are the sorts of situations. Obviously, if you've got a brand that is in other contexts, also a geographic name, that's a very important section of the Applicant Guidebook for you to pay attention to when you're putting your application together. But as I say, in terms of this Public Comment exercise on the Applicant Guidebook, I would say very much reflects what the policy work said it should reflect. So there's nothing unexpected in this public comment from my perspective.

Then we will have, as I said, a couple of others. A bit later in the year, we'll have another one, which is looking at these topics. If any of that work slips, if we haven't finished all the work on, say, applicant fees or on terms and conditions or something like that, then that might get slipped into the next Public Comment exercise, rather than the timing of when this public comment goes out. So there will be a Public Comment covering all or most of these items a little bit later in 2024. Then we'll have another one, the final one, in late 2024, which is probably some of the more difficult topics and the ones that maybe are a bit still up in the air or requiring a bit more significant work. So that's why those are coming last.

Then just in terms of what else is going on, there is what's called the Small Team Plus, which has been working again for about a year in total, talking to the Board about a handful of recommendations that the ICANN Board didn't accept from Subsequent Procedures, and really trying to understand and drill down on what the Board problem

was, what they were concerned about, and trying to understand what could be done to make those recommendations or some element of those recommendations acceptable to the Board. That effort has been going on for some time, as I said. It's very close to wrapping up. There is a public presentation of where these new recommendations have come out that will be held on Wednesday. Then depending on whether any sort of tweaks are needed as a result of that exercise, it will then go to the GNSO Council to approve and then go up to the Board.

There are a couple of specific dotBrand provisions in there. One is about sort of limiting the obligations to have some of the Public Interest Commitments that are in Specification 11 (3)(a) and (b) of the Registry Agreements, in particular circumstances provided that the Brand meets certain criteria. You may not have to have those particular commitments because they are less meaningful for a dotBrand TLD. Also, potentially, there might be an exclusion for a dotBrand to need to have what's called a COI or Continuing Operations Instrument, which was what was put in place in the last round to fund a registry, if for some reason the registry operator was unable to continue operations of its registry. It was basically to cover the cost of transferring the registry over to an emergency registry operator. We don't actually know what's happening with COIs at the moment because ICANN Org has said that they think the way this was implemented in the last round wasn't satisfactory. So actually, there's some work going on still in Org for what the replacement for the COI may be. Then depending on where that comes out, it may be dotBrands need an exemption from whatever that new proposal is, or

it actually may be that it's irrelevant and it doesn't need dotBrand exemption anymore.

Also, we've been working on some provisions or some revised recommendations relating to appeals from some of the parts of the application process, which I think we've come to a reasonable place on the covenant not to sue ICANN. We've come to a sort of proposed recommendation. I wouldn't say it's quite so clear-cut. The one that's very much not clear-cut is singulars and plurals of the same word. The policy recommendation was that you shouldn't get the same word as a TLD in both the singular form and the plural form. And to date, the Board hasn't been able to get itself comfortable with that. So we do have a supplemental recommendation on how to try to address the Board concerns. But I think there's a decent chance that the Board won't actually accept that one. But as I say, that work effort is close to being finalized, and assuming those recommendations get accepted, they will all go back into the implementation mix and will be part of the Applicant Guidebook in due course.

Then finally, we have a couple of other public comment efforts open at the minute or about to open. I mentioned two of them already. One was the Applicant Support Handbook, and one was the RSP Handbook, which is just about to be published for public comment. There is also one that's already out for public comment, which is String Similarity Guidelines. They're aimed at evaluators who will have the task of determining whether two strings are too similar to each other to be allowed to coexist. It's open until the end of March. It's a very interesting document in terms of it's very academic and quite a difficult read. As I say, it is out for public comment. There's a lot of

review of sort of linguistic matters and matters of internationalized domain, script variations and variants, and that kind of thing. It is very complex. But it's aimed at, as I say, being some guidance for evaluators for when they've got two or more strings in front of them and how they determine whether or not they're too similar to coexist.

Then we are also in the midst of a community consultation about Public Interest Commitments and Registry Voluntary Commitments, which many of you may have been to the public session this morning, that was a discussion on whether these sorts of voluntary commitments can be allowed into contracts. I think the BRG's position is that they should be many registry applicants used what would now be called Registry Voluntary Commitments. So contractual provisions promising to do or not to do certain things. Many applicants use them and a number of dotBrand applications use that concept of putting provisions in their contract as commitments as to how they would operate their TLD in order to get over problems that they would otherwise be facing, for example, an objection from government or even advice from the Governmental Advisory Committee as a whole. I think it's fair to say that the BRG's position would be that future applicants should have that same access to that same opportunity to try to resolve conflict as applicants in previous rounds did. So, yes, there was that plenary session. But I think that probably is not the end of the discussion on this topic of Public Interest and Registry Voluntary Commitments, which is really very important and does need to get resolved before we can have our next round open.

I think that's kind of it, really, from me. That's my kind of whistle stop tour on where we are on kind of getting into the next round in terms of

the Applicant Guidebook and the documentation. I'm happy to have some questions if anyone's got any.

CREWS GORE:

I'll play devil's advocate just from a beginner's perspective. Well, I'll ask a question from a newcomer's perspective. It seems like there's a lot coming out from the IRT right now, a little bit too much to overwhelm us. If I was a newcomer looking to kind of, I guess, apply for a Brand TLD and wanted to get a lay of the field of what I should be looking at out of the material that is coming out from the IRT, what would you recommend for, I guess, that newcomer to be looking at specifically with so much content coming out right now?

SUSAN PAYNE:

I think if I was a newcomer and I wanted to get the lay of the land, I'd actually probably look at the Applicant Guidebook from last time around, and the Registry Agreement that is currently in place for current registry operators. With the health warning, what we have going forward, won't be identical because there have been some tweaks. But that, I think, would give you a really decent starting position. And the Registry Agreement that you're going to have to sign up to is a really useful thing to read or you need to have your lawyers to read, and start getting yourselves comfortable with the kind of contract that you're going to sign that you won't be able to negotiate. So there'll be provisions in there that as a corporate, you'd probably never willingly agree to and you would expect to be able to negotiate, and you have to get comfortable in your organization with the fact that you can't negotiate them, and you will have to accept them or not

go forward. But yeah, the last AGB is probably a good place to start as a kind of guide.

CREWS GORE:

All right, great. Thanks, Susan, for the update. Now I'm going to pass it over to Mike Rodenbaugh to give us an update on the linkification letter.

MIKE RODENBAUGH:

Thanks, Crews. So the background on this was late last year, an issue was raised by not a dotBrand, but the dotTube registry operator, another new gTLD, who's pointing out to ICANN that some 10 years after new TLDs had begun entering the root, they still were not really functioning as legacy TLDs such as .com or whatever, operate in really important popular applications such as WhatsApp. So if you go and you type a text message in WhatsApp and you want to link to a .hsbc or .apple or almost any of the new TLDs that had launched after I think it was in 2015 or 2016, then it doesn't turn itself into a link as it would if you typed the .com URL into your text chat. So it creates a little bit of a pain for the users and certainly some pain for people who have adopted new TLD domain names for their websites.

So ICANN, to their credit, did start paying some attention to it. And Meta paid some attention to it, and research was done. It was determined that it was actually a problem with Android operating system from Google that was using a list of TLDs from 2016 and had not updated it since then. So that was fixed by Google. Now, in time, as Android updates are pushed out through all the myriad Android

devices in the world will generally be fixed. But it's taken a long time and several years. There's a lot of other problems like this still. I mean, our understanding is it's the same in WhatsApp, on iOS for Apple, even still today. And also in Twitter, there's similar problems going on.

So the BRG realizes this is obviously a problem for our members because they are all new TLDs and all have been delegated after that 2016 date, so we're suffering this problem. We wrote a letter to ICANN putting out the issue, asking them a few specific things such as I just mentioned with iOS and with Twitter on top of the Android WhatsApp issue, and told them what we saw as the problem that they can help solve, which was to push that the IANA authoritative TLD list as an RFC, formal rule that software developers would typically follow when building their applications. So it would look at one place and regularly update. We also mentioned that ICANN could do much more outreach to the software development community specifically, encourage them or go to their trade shows, things like that. And then we pointed out that the group that ICANN has working on this issue, the Universal Acceptance Steering Group has really been focusing almost entirely on IDNs and making sure that IDNs are implemented into software code. While that is important work, we argued that it's not as important or it certainly needs to be more balanced with the ASCII new TLDs and these sorts of problems that are affecting a lot more users and a lot more companies than IDN issues are having so far to date.

So ICANN responded two months later, which is pretty quick for them, and they responded as they often respond, they don't really answer any of your questions directly, but they said they are working on it, they appreciate us reaching out to them. And certainly, they're

strengthening their team to look at these issues. So they give us a bunch of generalizations that it's an important issue to them, they want to work on it. And specifically, if we raise more specific issues to them, then they will continue to look at them as they did with the Meta and the WhatsApp issue.

So I guess the long and short of it is there's a dialogue that is open with ICANN on these issues. And to the extent any of our members or anybody else in the community has found any of these issues, there's an avenue open for ICANN take a look, they have researchers that will dig into it, and that will contact third parties and point out the issues on how it's affecting Internet users. So it's a net positive so far, but there certainly could be more follow up done based on any input that any of us will have as to future problems.

So yeah, that's not a lot to talk about there but that is the update on that issue. Any questions, I'm happy to address, or more importantly, if and when your organization ever learns of any issue like this where dotBrand or new TLDs are being treated differently in the wild than legacy TLDs, then we'd love to hear about them. We'd love to raise those issues with ICANN.

CREWS GORE:

Okay. I'm going to pass it over to Andee from ICANN staff.

ANDEE HILL:

Thanks, Crews. Andee Hill for the record, ICANN't staff. We'd love to hear. Please report. You guys should probably all figured out my e-mail address at andee.hill@icann.org. Let me know. I'm happy to run that

up. We do have a whole team that's working on this. Obviously, we can't be in the whole world knowing everything that's not working, but please send those to us. We want to help resolve.

CREWS GORE:

Okay. Thank you so much. Does anybody else have any questions on that topic? We have finished for what we had prepared for this meeting. But if there's anybody that have any questions, thoughts, please feel free to come up to the mic and ask them, or sit down and ask. I just want to give this opportunity.

All right, then I'll give a chance to end early. Thank you all so much for joining today in our BRG session. I hope you have a great rest of the week. Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPTION]