LOS ANGELES – GDD Service, Delivery, Customer Service and SLAs
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ICANN – Los Angeles, USA

CHRISTINE WILLETT: Good afternoon, everybody. I think we're going to get started here in a minute if you want to take a seat.

Good afternoon, everybody. Whew, that was close. Okay. I see lots of friendly faces. I think ICANN staff greatly outnumber non-ICANN staff at the moment in the room.

This session is on the Global Domains Division service delivery. We're going to be talking about customer service, operations, and service level targets and metrics in terms of how we're delivering services to our contracted parties.

So do we have anyone from our contracted parties in the room? Oh, good. Okay. Well, we're talking to you.

So my name is Christine Willett. And I'm happy to introduce you to -- if you haven't met them before -- they've been around a while now -- two key members of my team. Next to me is Aaron Hickmann, director of GDD operations, and Michaela Quinzy, director of customer service. And down managing remote participation is Negar Farzinnia managing remote participation. Did I do that okay? Okay. Good.

I'm going to speak to you briefly about this operations team. I'll give you a little update, introduction to the team.

Then Aaron and Michaela are both going to update you on the current state of operations. Then they will tag team and talk to you about where we're going, the future outlook for the team, where we're headed, what our goals are, and talk with you about ongoing engagement.

We'll certainly have questions, a Q&A session at the end. But we'd also like to engage you. Any questions as we go along. We're going to be presenting some metrics so if you have any questions along the way, please feel free to chime in as well.

So this operations team we're taking the approach very similar to the one we used when -- about two years ago when I joined ICANN and took over the new gTLD program. It's really focused on three key areas. Going back to the basics, I'm sure you've seen many consultants tell you this approach -- to focus on people, processes, and tools. And I say "tools" because sometimes they're systems and sometimes they're not.

I think starting with people is the most important thing. You have to assemble the right team with the right skill set.

I think I've been fortunate to have very seasoned managers, very seasoned operational professionals with over -- over 40 years combined experience amongst themselves to bring to their respective areas. In terms of process, it's something that we're developing and we're instilling so that services are repeatable and consistent. And tools, I think the community speaks out. Although we have some tools, CRMs and portals, they're still not where we'd like to see. Not from our perspective either. But those three things really come together to develop scalable operations. And the registry operator side of the contracted parties really is scaling this year and in the year ahead on two orders of magnitude. And on the services, the functions that we have to deliver in support of those contracted parties are growing, are different than they were two years ago. So we really need tools. We need these repeatable scalable processes. And we need the seasoned professionals. So that's what we're bringing to bear.

I'll turn it over to the team now to provide an operational update.

MICHAELA QUINZY: Hi. As Christine stated, I'm Michaela Quinzy, director of customer service. And before I delve into my presentation, I want to share an experience I had about 10 years ago. I was hired with a company to come in and fix customer service. No one was able to articulate what that meant. I didn't know what that was. No one could really tell me what the problem was I was trying to address. So I decided I'd start with the customer service team and talk to them and figure out what is it I needed to fix. In going through the interview process, I spoke to one young lady who told me, "Well, my approach to customer service is to just keep it real. I just keep it real. That's what I do all the time."

Now that frightened me a little bit because at the time because at the time I had a teenage daughter who said the phrase, "keeping it real" whenever she said something rude to someone as justification for why it was appropriate.

So I knew I had work to do, because that seemed to be kind of a recurring theme. I thought at the time if I could just get them to practice the golden rule in their daily operations, that that would be a win.

Fast forward a few months ago I joined ICANN, and I decided to take the same approach. Let's talk to the staff and get their point of view of what's going on here.

And, in going through the interview process with the team, one of the people on the team told me about the diamond rule. The golden rule is not good enough. We need to practice the diamond rule here. I never heard of the diamond rule, so I was intrigued. And she said to me "We don't need to treat our customers the way we want to be treated. We need to treat our customers the way they want to be treated."

And that really resonated with me. And I thought ha! I've arrived.

If you have the right people in place, you can build upon that. You can fix anything with that. That was a recurring kind of theme among the team. And so here we are. I think we have a good foundation upon which to build. So thanks for indulging that story.

So who are we? We are the Global Domains Division Customer Service Center. We're the people behind the portals, behind the e-mails who field and track and route and manage your customer service inquiries.

We manage your cases from open to closure. And we escalate within the organization to the people who have the skills and expertise to resolve issues when we can't.

We also participate in other customer facing tasks that take place within the organization. We support the GDD operations team, the new gTLD program team, the registry services team in their daily operations as well.

We're also responsible for monitoring and managing the work and making sure that we hit our service level targets and that we're being responsive and communicating frequently with our customers.

So who are our customers? At this point, we are supporting the new gTLD program applicants and registry operators. However, many folks find their way through the customer service team. And, if they happen to send us an email, get routed through the phone system to one of our desk phones, we'll support any inquiry that comes our way. If we're able to resolve it, we'll take care of it. Otherwise, we'll route it to the appropriate team within the organization.

So, in doing that, we're growing our depth of knowledge and expertise within the group. And over time we'll work to expand our charter and impact within the organization.

We use salesforce.com for case management. And we've implemented simple functionality within that system for fielding, tracking, routing, and managing cases through to resolution.

We've got some work to do on that system, but it gets us where we need to be at this time. So, you know, in using that system, we also use the -- have the customer portals on the front end to help us field. And we have email to case functionality to help us field and route inquiries as they come in and as our communication channel.

In recent months we've been focused on performance improvement and looking at ways that we can be more responsive, ways that we can add depth and breadth of expertise within the areas that we support. And we continue to focus on a daily basis on how we can improve our performance and improve service delivery.

So, as we build the foundation on what we have today, we've over time enhanced the GDD portal. We've provided broadened email to case support by adding additional customer service email addresses. And we're -- we've moved recently towards a formalized tiered support structure.

In that structure we've built a process for managing cases through the process such that, no matter what the issue is, you have one single point of entry into the process. And the team will triage, field, and manage your issue to resolution. Whether they are able to resolve the issue or not, they're able to engage the people in the organization who are able to resolve the issue and then drive that resolution.

In doing that -- you know, in looking at the work, we've realized, okay. We're not really consistent in how we're delivering service. We're not always consistent in the time that it takes us to acknowledge, to communicate, or to resolve issues. And so we've, you know, looked at our data, figured out, okay, you know, where are we strong? Where do we need to work? How do we build in the right monitoring escalation processes to ensure that, as we're managing issues, that we are able to meet some level of commitment to our customers? And so, in looking at our data and in how we've performed, we've established some baseline performance targets that say okay, you know, here's where we are today in terms of -- thank you -- in terms of responsiveness and resolution time and our ability to manage our work. What are some targets that we can set for improvement, and what are some processes that we can put in place to hit those targets?

And out of that came a set of targeted performance improvement action plans where we are looking at on a daily and weekly basis. What's in our cue? What's the aging on that work? How can we drive resolution and responsiveness faster?

And, as we've done that, we've taken a look at our performance. And so I have a number of performance charts that I want to share with you as a group about some historical performance, how we're performing today. And, as Christine said, if you have questions as I go along, please feel free to jump in, raise your hand.

So this first chart is representative of, ultimately, you know, probably what you're most interested in. And that is how long it takes us to resolve an issue.

So the axis on the left looks at the average number of days that it takes to resolve an issue. And the blue bars measure those days over the last several months. The axis on the right looks at the percentage of cases that are within a target that we set for improvement based on our historical data. So you can see that we're trending at around 10 days for average case age. But, resulting from some of the targeted performance improvement initiatives that we've taken on, we've more consistently hit our target in September than we had in previous months. So we had a goal of to be at 80% by the end of the year. And in September we hit 74% of cases resolved within seven days.

This chart looks at our last response. So we want to make sure that on cases where we're not able to resolve your issue within the seven days targeted, that we frequently update you on where we are with those cases. So on this chart the axis on the left measures the average number of days since the last time you received communication from us, and the axis on the right measures the percentage of time we hit our target of 80% within seven days.

So we're not where we need to be here. We're moving in the right direction, though. As you can see, the average days since the last update is trending down. However, we're not consistent because we see that we only hit that target in September 48% of the time.

This chart measures the effectiveness of the customer service center. So, ideally, any time you needed to interact with the customer service center, the person on the other end of that would be able to resolve your issue and not have to engage other resources in the organization. However, that's not the case all the time. And we realize that there are always going to be times when we need to engage a subject matter expert or escalate to an executive within the organization. So we set a goal, based on our historical performance, of 60% of the time we're able to resolve a case without engaging the rest of the organization. We're trending pretty close to that. And, as you can see, for September we were just under the goal.

So the last chart I want to share with you measures our case backlog. And the backlog refers to throughput. It's talking about are we able to keep up with the work that we're receiving. So in theory, one case in, one case out. We're moving right along. We tend to average between 200 and 250 cases in the backlog at any given time.

And as we -- as long as we stay within a reasonable deviation of that, we know that we're doing okay.

If the volume month over month trends up significantly, that's an indication that we're either not being as productive as we can be or we're not staffed appropriately for our workload. So we used this metric to make sure that we're able to be responsive to our customers as work comes in.

CHRISTINE WILLETT: I would add to that we distinguish between inquiry cases and some of the process management cases. So, if you are a registry operators, particularly a portfolio applicant, portfolio registry operator, you may have dozens if not hundreds of open cases as you go through the application process, predelegation testing, delegation, onboarding, et cetera. So we distinguish between here and what Michaela is reporting on are all of those inquiry cases, what you typically contact customer service about to ask them a question and get information. The cases that we're using to track and manage the process like predelegation testing or an auction are not in these factors, because those cases could go on for weeks and weeks and months.

Am I accurate there? Thank you.

MICHAELA QUINZY: Sorry about that. I talked a bit earlier about implementing a tiered support structure that we use to manage our work and ensure that we have the right level of expertise working on an issue at any given time.

So this is just an illustration of our tiered support structure. And, as you can see, if you look at it -- the work comes in either through the portal, through email, finds its way through the organization, but ultimately, filters through the Customer Service Center. And the idea is the lion's share of that work will be resolved by tier one. In that space, those are the people that triage, dispatch, perform the case management, provide standard, typical responses and answers to inquiries and do the overall case management.

And so what I mean by case management is the logging and tracking and escalation of the issue as it progresses through its lifecycle.

Tier 2: Tier 2 are our process owners like the GDD operations group and the registry services team. They're the people with the depth of subject matter expertise to resolve issues to address new items that come in. Things that we haven't seen before.

So the tier 1 organization will field it. If they're able to resolve it, they will. If not, they will manage the work in tier 2. The tier 2 people will then manage -- you know, their portion or the research and resolution of the case. If they are unable to provide a resolution, then tier 3 is our executive leadership team. And they will escalate to you tier 3 in the event that we're unable to provide a decision on how to resolve an issue.

So this is the framework that we work within today, that we work with with Aaron Hickmann's team to escalate work and provide resolutions.

At this point I'm turn over to Aaron to talk about GDD operations.

AARON HICKMANN: Thank you, Michaela. Aaron Hickmann here. For those of you I haven't met, I hope to meet all of you before the meeting is up.

I wanted to take the same tack Michaela did and talk about what we are now and what we're doing as the GDD operations team. So the first thing to really go through is what we do now. We currently operate some services from registry and registrar services. We aim to do so in a repeatable and efficient manner for both internal and external customers. So that means that you are going to see our names on cases, especially for things like RSEP and registry assignments. As part of that process, we own the issue, even if we have to involve other people like legal or registry services if we have to escalate.

But, most importantly, we manage the service level targets. These targets are things that are set by policy in some cases, or we've set an internal objective that we're trying to hit to make sure that we're delivering services as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

One of the other things that you'll see -- that Michaela mentioned is we'll also be acting as level 2 support. So, when something can't be answered by tier 1, it will be escalated to us. Currently, we're doing that in sort of a limited manner. We don't have all the services yet, but we're aiming to do that shortly.

So let's talk about how we got here. I also started fairly recently. My first day was in December of last year, so I'm not even here a year yet.

But, over the course of the year, we've managed to put together an experienced team of operations professionals. So that includes people like business analysts, operational specialists, and things like that. These are people who have had a lot of experience in an operational organization and operational departments. So they're used to building processes and procedures and so forth.

So, during the year as we've added people to transition services through registry, registrar, technical services teams, there are a variety of different ones we've been going through. But there's been a very consistent approach. We have transitioned it in such a manner that we have done our best to make sure there's no quality dropoff as we switch hands.

One of the ways we did that is we either had to build a service definition or we, in some cases, had to improve the service definition that existed. We did cross training with the SMEs that were available. We developed process and procedure documents that were in-depth documents that, you know, went probably to a degree we've never gone at ICANN before. And we've been able to do the handshake.

And now we're at a point where, for most of the services, we simply deal with escalations and exceptions.

That's, obviously, a very low number of items. Most of the things we are handling on our own. So we've been able to take a little bit of the load off of registry services and registrar services teams.

We're also -- we've also been working on optimizing the delivery of services that we've taken over. We have -- a lot of our services are manual, but we've been able to tweak the process here and there, eliminate some steps, maybe smooth through some areas where it had been sort of clunky before. So we've been doing a really nice job of sort of iterating on improving the process as we go.

So, as I've mentioned, we deliver these services. Some examples are onboarding and RSEP, a registry agreement -- registry agreement assignments. We also do services for registrars such as the application processing, early renewals, and things like that.

Along the way, with this blend of different service types and coming from two different organizations, we've had to do a lot of team development. That includes that process and procedure document. So, as we brought on new staff, we've been able to train them to provide services quickly without a dropoff in quality.

I have a chart. So I'm just going to be going to be happy with that. These are three services that get a lot of visibility, I think, in the organization. So I wanted to just talk about them briefly.

The service level target that we have here is essentially 100% or perfect. We're going to strive for perfect whenever we can, even though we know there's going to be some exceptions and escalations. But we're doing a pretty good job of hitting that in a lot of cases. I think you can see the numbers here that are pretty impressive.

The dip in September for RSEP just had to do with kind of an exception case where there was a long amendment process. But that was atypical, certainly, for what we've been seeing.

That particular item just had to do with a name change that occurred during an amendment process, so it got a little long.

With that, I want to hand it back over to Michaela so she can take us through where we want to be and how we are going to get there in customer service.

CHRISTINE WILLETT: Before we get there, Aaron, before you change the slide, the 100% -- this is Christine Willett -- the 100% refers to 100% of what?

AARON HICKMANN: Oh, it refers to 100% of either a service level that was defined by policy or one of our internal targets. So, for example, RSEP has a target of -- a required target that we will do the initial administrative review within 15 days.

So 100% would be it was within 15 days or less.

Michaela?

MICHAELA QUINZY: Never going to get used to having to turn the mic on.

So I'm going to talk a bit about our customer service strategy. So, over the past several months, the team and I have been working together on how do we enhance our service delivery? How do we continue to get better? How do we ensure that we're delivering services that are broad enough that -- with the level of depth needed by our customer base? And we settled on kind of a process to implement a global customer service strategy that results in globally available customer service with 5 by 24-hour support using multiple channels beyond just a portal and email. If someone wants to call us, it shouldn't be a hunt to figure out who they can reach. You know, maybe we'd also entertain chat.

So we're executing this strategy to globalize a group to add support channels but also to support the five additional U.N. languages in addition to English along with Portuguese. And, while we're doing that, to provide consistently high levels of service that promote trust within our customers that, if they interact with customer service, the answer that they get is going to be timely and is going to be accurate and it's going to be thorough.

And quality is measured by your feedback, not by a standard that we've, you know, kind of stuck to.

You might be having a deja vu moment and think that you've seen this chart before. But you haven't, because this chart adds in another tier of support.

So we talked about tier 1 being the global support center, tier 2 being the operational groups, and tier 3 being the executive leadership -- being our executive leadership team.

We've added in tier zero. Tier zero is technology enablement. It's a method by which we can open up those support channels, open up our language abilities, have a repeatable training program that will allow us to train individuals in remote locations such as our hubs and will allow us to route work based on the person who has the expertise to resolve your issue in the time zone that you require within the hours of support that you require speaking the language that you require.

So to get there we've got a lot of work to do. We've identified 12-15 projects that we'll have to execute over the next several months to get to where we want to be.

I've -- in this chart, I've demonstrated each of the projects along with the tier. And I'm just sharing with you just to kind of understand the magnitude of what will have to happen in order for us to be that global support organization. In order for folks in remote locations to be effective without the support of the many people that are here in the Los Angeles office, we need to build out a robust knowledge base. We'll need to implement what I call a contact center platform. And that is a telephone system, a chat system, a customer satisfaction system that is integrated with our CRM that will allow the appropriate level of tracking, logging, reporting, routing, measurement, and so on through the system. We'll also be implementing a customer satisfaction survey so that we can make sure that we're staying informed and engaged about how you're perceiving the level of service that we're providing you and then base our future improvement initiatives based on your feedback.

In the tier 1 space, that's mostly about people and people enablement, making sure that we have our hub offices staffed, that we have people working in business hours in each of the time zones so that we can achieve that 5 by 24 operation, that we have a phone system that encourages people to answer the phone and also allows us to measure and track to what degree we're doing that.

The same goes for the chat system. The customer satisfaction survey tool is a tool. If we don't put the processes behind that work, then the information that we get from it will be useless.

SLAs that hold us accountable to what we've committed and targeted as our goals. So all of those processes need to be put in place to enable this global support vision.

Tier 2 and tier 3 repeat -- excuse me -- repeat some of the processes or some of the projects that are happening in tier 1.

So the customer satisfaction survey measurement feedback loop process, the SLA management processes, and the idea of all of us marching to the same tune, having a service-oriented culture within the company so that, as work escalates through the process, that we're all performing in the same way, that we're all accountable to the same SLAs, that we understand our customer needs in the same way. So that's where we're going from a customer service perspective.

And, at this point, I'll turn back over to Aaron Hickmann to talk about the operations processes.

AARON HICKMANN: Thank you, Michaela. So we have a few things on our plate as well in terms of where we want to be.

Number one, we want to continue and complete the service transition that was started this year by the end of this year. That will free up our registry and registrar services to do their engagement management and account managements and so on and so forth.

To do that, we need a fully trained team with subject matter expertise with depth and knowledge. And we've had some people on DNS for several months. And we've gained it slowly, but we need to get there to ensure that we don't have fall off as we transition services amongst the teams in terms of backup and so forth.

Thirdly, we want to be able to be a much better partner to customer service and be able to address all, if not all the level two inquiries that come in so that we can improve response to you for escalated inquiries.

And then, fourth, we really need to be in a place where we can handle additional services. The ICANN landscape is constantly changing, and new services are needed all the time sometimes in support of policy, sometimes as identified by safe registry services. This is going to be similar to what Christine showed before. In order to get there, we need to focus on people, process, and tools.

As I mentioned we are using experienced operational professionals on the team. These people are professionals who know what an operations division should look like. They're used to maintaining process with high levels of quality and so forth. And so that's going to be our key foundation for us to build our process on. The process -- we have obviously some process in place. We'll be developing more as we continue our transition. But most importantly we want to continue to evolve those processes over time. We can hopefully, you know, in a particular week or month take 5 or 10%, get some efficiencies in the way we're doing things, and be more scalable and able to handle the continued load that we expect from the growth in registries.

And lastly, of course. Tools, Michaela mentioned that the customer service team uses Salesforce. We do as well, primarily for case management now. But we really want it to act as our system of record, so we want to begin to process all service requests through Salesforce through the GDD portal and have a standardized way of making that happen. So that it's a very consistent interface and experience for all of you.

Along the way we certainly won't lose track of making sure that we are providing transparency to the process and to the status of any particular request. And we also aim to provide realtime visibility wherever possible so that anytime you can log in to the portal and see exactly where you stand.

With that, that sort of sums up our presentation. We would welcome any questions or comments that anyone would have at this time.

CHRISTINE WILLETT: They're working on the air conditioning, by the way.

UNDESCERNIBLE: (Off microphone) Okay. Good. Michele. Could we get the microphone turned on? Can we get -- ask the IT team in the back? How about if you just -- there we go.

MICHELE NEYLON: Thank you, thank you.

[Laughter]

Let's just work our way around this. Michele Neylon, for the record. I sort of know the answer to the question, but I still think it needs to be asked because this is GDD and last time I checked, registrars were part of GDD. I think you know where I'm going to go with this, don't you. Yeah, you do. So at present you have a wonderful, fascinating, engaging set of processes and systems to serve registries. So the question from the registrars side, and I am going to put my hat on as chair of the registrar shareholder group, is when will we have all of these wonderful, shiny services? Because our members are a little bit frustrated. And by a little bit frustrated, I think they are very frustrated and they're -- expletives are usually used when talking about some of these things. Thanks.

CHRISTINE WILLETT: Thanks, Michele. So no problem. So service delivery, the functions of registrar accreditation, that process transitioned along with some staff fortunately. That expertise came over to Aaron's team a few months ago. But in terms of tools, we are -- we have a roadmap that shows the radar system and registrar data being transitioned from the radar system to Salesforce. Is it late this year? I'm looking to -- early of FY16. So it is in this fiscal year. So looking to migrate that data by the end of the fiscal year.

The challenge is -- I mean, frankly, the team mentioned that we're on Salesforce and the Salesforce platform is -- is challenging. The team right now -- and the genesis really was that this customer service team was formed to support the new gTLD applicants. As those applicants turned into registry operators, they're by and large supporting those registry operators. The team -- not the operations team but the customer service team, is funded at present through the new gTLD program. And this year we are focused on building the foundation for that global customer service team that Michaela described. The foundation with the staff, the training, the tools, to support all of the contracted parties on a global basis and even into the stakeholder community beyond contracted parties.

The Salesforce platform, we have so many simultaneous projects going on that are on the roadmap and a limitation, limited number of resources that it's -- that's really right now what's throttling the ability to transition functions and expedite the roadmap. So as Chris Gift said, we're looking at transitioning radar in early FY -- late FY15, early calendar '15. And he's also written me a note that there's going to be a webinar for registrars in two weeks to talk about the portal. And the transition. Excellent. So thank you for that question.

PHILIP SHEPPARD: Hello, it's Philip Sheppard from the Brand Registry Group. I applaud the efforts you have been making here. They looked excellent, certainly, in terms of the setting of measures and targets and all of that. And it was interesting in your response to the RSEP question as to what that target is, and that was your own internal administrative checking of the RSEP request before it went through, which is producing a satisfactually high target. Now I've been involved in discussions this week to do with

RSEPs and particularly on RSEPs and country codes in which there is essentially an external factor which is causing a slowness in a response to what those are because of political interference, if you like, and administrative system. And of course, that's what mattered ultimately to the people that you're trying to provide the best possible service to. And I wondered if you're considering measures of output there that cover things that are perhaps slightly outside of your control but nevertheless how the customer is looking at you on the end point of what they do.

CHRISTINE WILLETT: Thank you, Philip. I think we understand the point that the RSEP process as Chris has described to the registry stakeholder group this week, there's the RSEP process and then there's the contract amendment process that was the subject of much discussion this week. So we'll take your point on looking at ways to monitor and manage and track that process post the technical RSEP. Thank you. Rubens.

RUBENS KUHL: Rubens Kuhl. .BR. I will insist on the RSEP point and that looking at those statistics really doesn't reflect the reality. Reality to registries is what registries communicated in the GDD feedback letter, and it's a long way from having just 7% of certain requests not meeting target. So since I personally feel it in RSEP, that's more than nine months old so it could be a baby that was being born right now. So don't try to make numbers that look good when they don't reflect reality. That's my comment.

CHRISTINE WILLETT: Thank you. Do we have anything from the remote? Okay. Last call. Okay. The day is winding down. Thank you all. Thank you for your participation. Appreciate it. Thanks for the opportunity to meet the operations team. Have a good afternoon. Bye-bye.

[Applause]

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