

Will the new Internet domains help or hinder small businesses?

Sally Tomkotowicz, Marketing Manager at names.co.uk, explains why the new generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs) might hamper competition and innovation on the Internet

Worcester, UK, 7 February 2013: The domain '.com' is the online home to many different entities, from small businesses to global organisations, to students and politicians. In short, anyone can set up a .com domain and enjoy the prestige and benefits that the association with those three letters bring. However, it looks like the new generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs) could only be accessible to a far more exclusive group.

The first batch of new gTLDs is currently under review and many companies have applied to name, own and run a suffix after the dot. Now, we are familiar with .co.uk, .com and .org for example but the likes of Google and Amazon are vying to own generic terms like .cloud, .app and .book.

Despite the fact that the new gTLDs Program was developed to increase competition and choice in the domain name space. Businesses, individuals and organisations are expressing concern that private companies will have the sole control over some of these names. Their fear is that this will be uncompetitive, especially in the cases where smaller businesses will be blocked access to these domains or offered them at unfavourable rates.

Whilst no-one should object to, let's say Nike owning and running '.nike' domain names, individuals and organisations are objecting to private businesses owning and controlling access to generic words - especially the prospect of them closing down access to the wider community and potentially hindering innovation and competition.

Now all eyes are on The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the body that was setup to help preserve the operational stability of the Internet; to promote competition; to achieve broad representation of the global Internet community; and to develop policies appropriate to its mission through bottom-up, consensus-based processes.

ICANN made an encouraging move last month by publically clarifying that 'for strings representing generic terms, exclusive registry access should serve a public interest goal', this guidance may not be strict enough to allay concerns. While Google recently resubmitted its applications with a more open access approach, even ahead of the ICANN guidance, Amazon which has applied for .book has not.

Barnes & Noble has urged ICANN to deny Amazon's application to purchase several new TLDs stating that "Amazon the dominant player in the book industry, should

not be allowed to control the Book TLD, which would enable them to control generic industry terms in a closed fashion with disastrous consequences not only for book selling, but for the American public.¹

The opposition to exclusive ownership of .book is encouraging; however UK publishers have been significantly quieter than their US counter parts in making public statements around this. While two applicants NU DOTCO LLC and Global Domain Registry Pty Ltd have withdrawn their applications for .book there are 7 still remaining, including of course Amazon as well as Google, Top Level Domain Holdings Limited, Bronze Registry and Double Bloom.

Awareness of these new gTLDs and what the impact could be is the only way we can evolve the Internet DNS, foster competition and innovation. The truth is naming conventions are never going to be clean-cut, because they will be affected by geographies, trends and new innovations. What is not a generic term today, could well be in a few years' time. 'Cloud' and 'App' didn't exist as generic terms five years ago.

Although, individuals and some businesses in the UK are keeping an eye on the implications of this move, more of them need to be aware and work together to voice concerns. This will help to maintain the health of the entire Internet, keeping it open and fair.

¹ <http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/program-status/correspondence>

About names.co.uk

names.co.uk provides professional online services for businesses and individuals including Web Hosting, Domain Name Registration, Email services, Ecommerce solutions and Business Servers. names.co.uk has over 15 years' experience in the Internet industry and employs a team of nearly 200 expertly trained individuals across the UK.

names.co.uk is part of the DADA Group, an international group of companies who specialise in providing professional Internet services. As a group, they currently have over 1.8million domains registered in over 250 extensions, 500,000 websites hosted on our platforms and over 510,000 clients using their products and services.

For more information please see www.names.co.uk

Press contact:

Lexi Mills at Dynamo

Mobile: +44 7825 739 243

Email: lexi.mills@dynamopr.com

Twitter: @leximills

Skype: leximills