

How will the introduction of new gTLD's change the Internet?

With new gTLDs due to start appearing on the web, it's time again for brand owners to stop and think about their domain strategy.

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Worcester, UK, 6 July 2013: ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), the body responsible for managing and coordinating the Internet's Domain Name System, last week made a surprise announcement that the first new gTLD could go live in the internet as early as August 28th 2013 and we may see the first registrations from 28th September 2013.

The new generic top-level domain (gTLD) program will enable the introduction of new gTLDs into the domain name space. Within the next two years the internet will grow from having its existing 22 TLDs; .com, .net, .org etc. to over 1,000 extensions including .nyc, .bank, .secure, .app, .book. This equates to potentially 10 new domain extensions every week being introduced to the Internet.

According to ICANN, the increase in number of TLDs is not expected to negatively effect the stability and security of the internet; however many search engine optimisation (SEO) experts suspect it could have a significant impact on the way searchers use the internet and consequently have big implications for online businesses.

At present, the true nature of how search engines will handle these new gTLDs still remains uncertain, meaning brands, online businesses and consumers are left in the dark thinking about how Internet search may evolve. However there are some clues and forward thinking strategies starting to emerge.

Changes happening to existing ccTLDs

With so many small and large algorithm updates happening daily, it's hard for internet experts to isolate which ones are going to stay and which adjustments are tests or temporary. At this point, Google appears to have updated its algorithm to start treating some Country-Level Top Level Domains (ccTLDs) as generic and thus equally to domains like .com.

Previously those with popular TLDs such as .com appeared to have been given more weight in international search. Google has now added the likes of .co, .dj, .fm, .la, .me and .tv. to the same category as TLDs such as .com. This means if you're using a ccTLD that has now been classified as generic by Google, such as .la (Laos) you will start to see more traffic from outside of your country code, however if your using an extension that is still classified by Google as a country code you should not expect to see much traffic from outside of your host country. Some search experts believe that this change signals to us that Google may be intending to give more weight to the new gTLDs in the future.

How could this change affect businesses?

The likes of .com have long been expensive for some smaller firms to acquire on the secondary market if the domain had already been registered and many have therefore gone

with more regionally focused domains. So this search change will be a welcome boost to brands that want international traffic, but decided to go for a ccTLD rather than invest in a top level domains bought on the secondary market.

How could these gTLDs change searchers experience of the Internet?

How these changes affect consumers really depends on exclusivity. Whether the successful applicant for these new extensions has to offer registrations outside of their own organisation is still to be determined by ICANN.

As consumers get to grips with how to use new gTLDs we could see the rise of a whole range of niche gTLD led search engines where consumers search for content relevant to that gTLD, or the geographic region.

So if someone is looking for information specific to a region like Tokyo they could limit their search purely to .Tokyo sites or if they are looking for movie related content they may well chose to search only .movie sites.

Now this not only presents the opportunity for consumers to find the content they are looking for quicker, but also location-based extensions like .tokyo could develop into location tags, helping to push local SEO that bit further by providing websites with another way to geographically target audiences. This would provide an advantage to businesses who seek out regional customers.

What should businesses be thinking about ahead of these new gTLD's going live?

The roll-out of new commercial gTLDs will be rapid and brand owners need to be ready. They need to start planning and structuring their online presence in this new internet. If the new gTLDs are adopted, used and accepted among businesses and consumers, they'll open up new premium names at targeted domain extensions, potentially creating an opportunity for businesses to get in on names they may have had to pay large amounts for in the past.

Cybersquatting concerns with new gTLDs

The potential for cybersquatting is somewhat mitigated by the introduction of the Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH) mechanism put in place. TMCH is crucial to protect the rights of brands in the new gTLD program.

All new gTLDs will have to implement agreed rights protection mechanisms, supported by the Trademark Clearinghouse. It was developed to allow brand owners to submit their trademark data into one centralized database, prior to and during the launch of new gTLDs. TMCH will facilitate owners of registered trademarks to participate in the Sunrise (Pre-Launch) periods for any of the new gTLDs in which they meet the registration requirements. TMCH will also allow Trademark holders the option of being notified when someone registers a domain name that matches their record in the Clearinghouse during Sunrise and, as a minimum, the first 60 days of general availability.

No Need To Panic Yet

Despite the trademark mechanism, it would be prudent to anticipate a lot of cybersquatting and a lucrative aftermarket buying and selling domain names. Every brand owner needs to be clear about which trademarks they will lodge in the TMCH, and which

terms and suffixes they will or will not register. In order to do so, every brand owner and business alike needs to take a look at their corporate IP assets together with its business direction going forward.

Kelly Salter, Domain Product Specialist at names.co.uk, one of the UK's top domain name registrars, today warns, "ICANN have been plagued by delays and obstacles since the inception of the new gTLDs program. With so much uncertainty and questions surrounding when these new extensions will actually be available, it appears to be a desperate measure by ICANN to try and bring the program back on track."

Ms Salter is sceptical things will go according to plan but if it does go ahead smoothly she predicts, "The first gTLD, although at an advantage for being the first mover, will also be under serious pressure as they will be in the spotlight and a guinea pig in many ways. Whatever happens, the program is still moving forward so it's just a waiting game now."

These new gTLDs have the potential to change search as we know it, and if done right, could even make quality content easier to find, but until search engines become more vocal about how they intend to handle them and until ICANN determines which ones are to be exclusive to the owners, the future of Internet Search remains uncertain.

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 1.7million domains registered in over 250 extensions, 500,000 websites hosted on our platforms and over 520,000 clients using their products and services.

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

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