

Tips for preparing and protecting domain names

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De Puy & Asociados

Currently, very few companies keep track of the .coms, .orgs and .nets of the world, and make new ones available for sale to vendors such as GoDaddy.com.

But next year, the world of domain names will get bigger. In addition to 22 existing generic top-level domains, hundreds of new .somethings will be available. The new top-level domain program is a result of seven years of discussion and debate among Internet stakeholders

Besides new domains with brand, company and subject names, almost any character in any language can be used for the first time in a domain name, opening up the Internet to the world for the first time. Currently, domains must be in Latin letters.

It is important to develop a strategy on how respond to the coming new names and protect the brands' trademarks. There is a great deal of stress over how consumers might react to the new names, and worry over investing \$250,000 or more (the cost to manage a new domain) for such an unknown.

A few tips:

- Know how much your .com domain and brand are worth now. Consider its length and word count, clarity and memorability, the market it is after and that market's size and potential. Also consider any variations on the domain and any possible substitutes to it.
- Think about how a next generation of the Internet could impact consumers, users, customers, suppliers and/or stakeholders. Think outside the box. What new entrepreneurial idea could create value online?
- Study how online innovators like Facebook and Google are handling the coming changes. Understand the way social media, e-commerce and online advertising are changing the business landscape.
- Survey ICANN's applicant list for any potential trademark infringements. Object to top-level domains that may violate a trademark or damage your business online.
- Expand trademark protection to account for future business expansion.
- Pay careful attention to the new domains as they're launched, buying up names both offensively and defensively (candidates for cybersquatting or counterfeiting).
- If you've got the money and meet ICANN's criteria for running a domain registry, consider applying in the second round. Top-level domains may signify industry leadership, maximize search engine optimization and allow easier navigation of your Web presence.

New domains by the numbers

- 1,930 applications for new top-level domains.
- A total of \$350 million was paid for the applications.
- 230 of the applications are in conflict, including .app, .home, .inc, .art, .shop, .broadway. Only one company will get rights to each name, and it will happen by auction.
- 47 percent came from North America.
- 36 of the Fortune 100 applied.
- 50 percent of Interbrand's Top 100 global brands applied.
- 116 domain names use characters not in the Latin alphabet.
- Top filers were Google, Amazon, Microsoft, L'Oreal, Chrysler Group, Macy's, Target, Johnson & Johnson.