

New gTLD Program

New gTLD Program in Brief

Since ICANN was founded in 1998 as a not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder organization dedicated to coordinating the Internet's addressing system, one of its foundational principles has been to promote competition in the domain name marketplace while ensuring Internet security and stability. The expansion of the generic top-level domains (gTLDs) will allow for more innovation, choice and change to the Internet's addressing system, now represented by 21 gTLDs.

The decision to introduce new gTLDs followed a detailed and lengthy consultation process with all constituencies of the global Internet community represented by a wide variety of stakeholders – governments, individuals, civil society, business and intellectual property constituencies, and the technology community. Also contributing to this policy work were ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO), and Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC). The policy was completed by the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) in 2007, and adopted by ICANN's Board in June, 2008. The program is expected to launch in calendar year 2010.

The ICANN team continues to share with the Internet community the ongoing program developments through the release of draft Applicant Guidebooks, excerpts, explanatory memoranda and in-person meetings. All details can be found on this page.

In a world with over 1.6 billion Internet users – and growing – diversity, choice and competition are key to the continued success and reach of the global network.

New gTLD History at a Glance

- Eight gTLDs predated ICANN's creation – dot-com, dot-edu, dot-gov, dot-int, dot-mil, dot-net, dot-org and dot-arpa.
- ICANN has successfully carried out two previous application rounds for new gTLDs: 2000 (dot-aero, dot-biz, dot-coop, dot-info, dot-museum, dot-name and dot-pro); and 2004 (dot-asia, dot-cat, dot-jobs, dot-mobi, dot-tel, dot-travel).
- The Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) has developed policy recommendations that are the foundation guiding ICANN in introducing new gTLDs. The policy work started in December 2005 and concluded in September 2007.
- In June 2008, during ICANN's Paris meeting, ICANN Board approved the GNSO recommendations for introducing New gTLDs to the Internet's addressing system.

Fast Facts

- According to Internet World Stats, there are an estimated 1.6 billion Internet users worldwide.
- An Internet address is made up of a series of characters separated by dots. For example, in the website address www.icann.org, the top-level domain is ".org" and the second-level domain is "icann". In some cases, you can also find third-level domain names.
- There are currently 21 gTLDs. A gTLD can, in some cases, identify the nature of an organization operating a specific website. For example, a website with a dot-com address usually indicates a commercial organization: dot-museum is dedicated to museums, dot-mobi for mobile phone users, dot-aero for the aviation industry, and so on.
- There are around 250 two-letter country-code TLDs (ccTLDs), which identify a country or territory. For example, the Internet extension dot-jp corresponds to Japan, while dot-eu corresponds to the European Union.
- The year 2008 ended with a total base of 177 million domain name registrations across all of the top-level domains (TLDs). This represents 16 percent growth over the previous year and 2 percent growth over the third quarter of 2008. Of the 177 million second-level domain name registrations, 96 million are gTLD registrations.

Did you know?

- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is responsible for introducing new generic top-level domains (gTLDs). The priority is to ensure that new gTLDs are awarded in a fair and transparent process to organizations that can effectively manage them on behalf of Internet users.
- ICANN is currently developing the program that facilitates the creation of new Internet extensions, or gTLDs. Under this new process, more extensions will be created, and with them, potentially a whole new way of using the Internet. Also, for the first time, Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) will be available at the top level, enabling new extensions in different scripts such as Arabic, Chinese, Greek, Hindu, and more. Millions of people around the world will be able to use the Internet's naming system in their own languages.
- The Internet's fundamental protocol – TCP/IP – has passed its 30th birthday, and the naming system on top of it – DNS – has passed its 25th birthday. The Internet has gone from a few networked computers to a network accessed by a billion people, from a Western phenomenon to a truly global one, and from research roots to an engine of commerce accounting for trillions of dollars in commerce.
- During that time, the use of top-level domain (TLD) identifiers, such as dot-com, dot-net, dot-uk, has actually changed very little. The most widely recognized global TLD is dot-com. While the scale of these TLDs has changed dramatically since their inception – more than 20 years ago for dot-com – the availability and usage of these top-level names has been permitted to change very little.
- The entity responsible for operating a gTLD is called a registry. Depending on the kind of gTLD, these organizations are referred to as registry operators or sponsors. New gTLD registries must sign agreements with ICANN to meet technical requirements and comply with applicable policies.

What are gTLDs?

gTLD stands for generic top-level domain – what Internet users see as an Internet extension like dot-com, dot-org or dot-info – and they are part of the structure of the Internet's domain name system.

Why are new gTLDs being introduced?

The wider Internet community that takes part in the ICANN policy development process has advocated for new gTLDs. Since it was founded in 1998, one of ICANN's key mandates has been to create competition in the domain name market.

In addition the Joint Project Agreement that ICANN has with the US Department of Commerce says, "ICANN shall maintain and build on processes to ensure that competition, consumer interests, and Internet DNS stability and security issues are identified and considered in TLD management decisions, including the consideration and implementation of new TLDs."

Opening the top-level space so that names can be proposed rather than be restricted to the existing 21 gTLDs could open up a new wave of innovation. Competition and innovation best occur when a stable and open platform is available and the barriers to entry are reduced.

Will this change how the Internet operates?

This planned increase of the number of gTLDs is not expected to affect the way the Internet operates, but it will potentially change the way people find information on the Internet.

What is ICANN doing to protect trademark holders?

First, an objection-based process will enable rightsholders to demonstrate that a proposed gTLD would infringe their legal rights. Second, applicants for new gTLDs will be required to describe in their applications the rights protection mechanism they propose for second-level registrations, which must be made public. Third, all new gTLDs must ensure that second-level registrations are subject to ICANN's Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP), a process that has worked well to protect rights for many years. Finally, ICANN has been working closely with the trademark community to find additional solutions to potential issues for trademark holders in implementing new gTLDs.

Will ICANN prevent the registration of objectionable or racist extensions?

Offensive names could be subject to an objection-based process based on public morality and order. This process will be conducted by an international arbitration body using criteria drawing on provisions in a number of international treaties.

How are IDNs related to gTLDs?

IDN is the short name for Internationalized Domain Name. IDNs are domain names with characters in addition to a, b..., z; 0, 1, ..., 9; and "-".

Such domain names could contain characters with diacritical marks as required by many European languages, or characters from non-Latin scripts; for example, Arabic or Chinese. During the 2010 application round, IDN gTLDs will be allowed for the first time in the history of the Internet. The IDN top-level domain names will offer many new opportunities and benefits for Internet users around the world by allowing them to establish and use top-level domains in their native languages and scripts.

How many new gTLDs are expected?

There is no way of knowing the exact number of applications ICANN will receive during the 2010 application round or how many of these applications will qualify and become gTLD registries. Market speculations have estimated anything from hundreds to thousands of applications.

Is applying for a new gTLD the same as buying a domain name?

No. Nowadays, organizations and individuals around the world can buy second-level and, in some cases, even third-level domain names. They simply need to find an accredited registrar or reseller, comply with the registrant terms and conditions and pay annual fees. The application for a new gTLD is a much more complex process. An applicant for a new gTLD is, in fact, applying to create and operate a registry business and sign a contract with ICANN.

Can I register my idea for a new gTLD with ICANN in advance of the next application period?

No, ICANN will not be taking reservations or pre-registrations of new gTLDs.

Can I simply reserve a gTLD and decide later whether or not to use it?

One of the reasons ICANN is opening the top-level space is to allow for competition and innovation in the marketplace. The application process requires applicants to provide a detailed plan for the launch and operations of the proposed gTLD. ICANN expects new gTLDs to be operational shortly after the registry agreement is signed.

How and when can I see which TLDs are being applied for and who is behind the applications?

After the application period is closed, ICANN will verify all applications for completeness and then release on its website the list of TLDs, applicant names and nonconfidential information about the applications.

Is this the only opportunity to apply for a new gTLD?

No. ICANN plans to hold additional rounds in the future. The exact dates for these future rounds are not yet available. "Applicants who are unsuccessful may re-apply in future rounds.

Application Process

Who can apply for a new gTLD?

Any public or private organization from any part of the world can apply to create and operate a new gTLD. Applicants will need to demonstrate the operational, technical and financial capability to run a registry and comply with additional specific requirements.

What is the New gTLD Applicant Guidebook?

The Applicant Guidebook is a step-by-step guide for future applicants for a new gTLD to understand what to expect during the application and evaluation periods and how the process works. Since late 2008, the Applicant Guidebook has been released in drafts posted for public comment. This is part of ICANN's bottom-up decision-making model and is a great opportunity for the Internet community to weigh in on the final set of criteria and processes. The final Applicant Guidebook is expected in 2010 and will contain a definitive set of rules and requirements.

Why is ICANN asking for so much information from the applicants?

One of ICANN's core missions is to preserve the security, stability and global interoperability of the Internet. Future new gTLD registries are expected to comply with ICANN's contract and follow all best practices and standards to ensure this mission is fulfilled.

Can I apply for more than one gTLD?

Yes. However, each application will be treated individually and there is no discounted application fee.

Can I apply for any kind of gTLD or are there any specific restrictions?

ICANN has a set of specific rules for gTLD strings that each applicant must carefully consider. For example, an application for a gTLD composed of numbers only will be rejected. Applicants for IDN gTLDs must carefully follow the additional technical specifications for IDNs outlined in the Applicant Guidebook.

Applicants representing a community-based TLD or a geographic TLD must meet additional specific requirements.

What will happen during the application period and how long will it take?

The application period will likely last for several weeks. Applicants will use a dedicated interface named TAS (TLD Application System) to answer questions about the applied-for TLD and their business and technical capability to operate a registry. The interface will also allow applicants to upload supporting documents and serve as a tracking and workflow management tool for ICANN staff, applicants and the various service providers supporting the evaluation or objection processes.

What happens if there are other applications for the same gTLD?

ICANN does not allow for two or more identical gTLDs. If there are two or more applications for the same gTLD, applicants will be required to follow the string contention procedures outlined in the Applicant Guidebook. Applicants should also be aware that the same specific rules will apply if two or more gTLD strings are considered to be highly similar by a panel of experts. The two processes proposed by ICANN to deal with the identical and similar gTLD applications are auctions and community priority (comparative) evaluation. The latter applies only in cases where there is a community-based applicant.

What can I do if someone applies for a gTLD that represents my brand or trademark?

ICANN will have a dispute resolution mechanism managed by a dispute resolution service provider (DRSP) that will process objections from third-parties that feel that their legal rights are being infringed upon.

Can third parties prevent an applicant from getting a new gTLD?

After the list of all gTLD applications is published on ICANN's website, there will be an open objection period followed by established dispute resolution procedures. Objections can be filed only on four specific enumerated grounds. Details about these procedures, such as who has standing, where and how objections are filed, and how much objections will cost, among other, can be found in the Applicant Guidebook.

Timeline and Fees

When can I apply?

The application period is expected to take place in 2010. The application period will have specific open and close dates and times.

How much is the application fee?

The application fee is estimated at US\$185,000. There is also a US\$100 user registration fee to access the TAS. All applicants will be required to pay the same initial application and user registration fees. Various methods of payment will be accepted. Because an application might follow different paths, such as going through an objection or auction process, additional fees may apply to some applicants.

Will ICANN issue refunds?

Yes, refunds will apply in specific circumstances. Details about refund conditions are specified in the Applicant Guidebook.

Are there any ongoing fees once a gTLD is approved by ICANN?

Yes. Once an application successfully passes all evaluation steps, the applicant must sign a Registry Agreement with ICANN. Under the agreement, there are two fees: a fixed fee of US\$6,250 per calendar quarter and a transaction fee of US\$0.20 on future domain registrations and renewals.

The information presented here about the application and evaluation process is the most up-to-date available. However, it is a high-level summary and is subject to change. For exact details about the program please review the actual text of the Applicant Guidebook with the proposed Registry Agreement as it is being revised and finalized. For information about the New gTLD Program, please visit www.icann.org or email ICANN staff at newgldt@icann.org.

Where can I find more information?

For current information on the New gTLD Program, go to <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtld-program.htm>

To learn about GNSO Policy Development, go to <http://gns0.icann.org/>

To learn about IDNs, go to <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/idn/>

A full list of current gTLDs is available at <http://www.icann.org/registries/listing.html>

Glossary and useful terms

Applicant – an entity that has applied to ICANN for a new gTLD by submitting its application form through the online application system.

Application – an application for a new gTLD. An application includes the completed application form, any supporting documents and any other information that may be submitted by the applicant at ICANN's request.

Applicant Guidebook – a step-by-step guide for future applicants for a new gTLD to understand what to expect during the application and evaluation periods and how the process works.

Auction – a method for allocating property or goods to the highest bidder.

Community priority (comparative) evaluation – a process to resolve string contention, which may be elected by a community-based applicant.

Community-based TLD – a community-based gTLD is one operated for the benefit of a defined community consisting of a restricted population. An applicant designating its application as community-based must be prepared to substantiate its status as representative of the community it names in the application.

TCP/IP – Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol – the Internet's basic communication language or protocol. The communications protocol underlying the Internet, IP allows large, geographically diverse networks of computers to communicate with each other quickly and economically over a variety of physical links. An IP address is the numerical address by which a location in the Internet is identified. Computers on the Internet use IP addresses to route traffic and establish connections among themselves; people generally use the human-friendly names made possible by the Domain Name System.

Objection – a formal objection filed with a dispute resolution service provider in accordance with that provider's procedures.

DNS – Domain Name System – helps users find their way around the Internet. Every computer on the Internet has a unique address – just like a telephone number – which is a rather complicated string of numbers. It is called its IP address. IP addresses are hard to remember. The DNS makes using the Internet easier by allowing a familiar string of letters (the domain name) to be used instead of the arcane IP address. So instead of typing 207.151.159.3, you can type www.internic.net. It is a mnemonic device that makes addresses easier to remember.

DRSP – dispute resolution service provider – An entity engaged by ICANN to adjudicate dispute resolution proceedings in response to formally filed objections.

TAS – TLD Application System – The online interface for submitting applications to ICANN.

Registry – is the authoritative, master database of all domain names registered in each top-level domain. The registry operator keeps the master database and also generates the zone file that allows computers to route Internet traffic to and from top-level domains anywhere in the world.

Registry Agreement – The agreement executed between ICANN and successful gTLD applicants, which appears in draft form at <http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/>.

Registrar – currently, a domain name in gTLDs can be registered with a registrar. The registrar can provide a variety of contact and technical information that makes up the domain name registration, keep records of the contact information and submit the technical information to a central directory, the registry. Registrants are required to enter a registration contract with the registrar that sets forth the terms under which the registration is accepted and will be maintained.

TLD – top-level domains are the names at the top of the DNS naming hierarchy. They appear in domain names as the string of letters following the last (rightmost) dot, such as "net" in "www.example.net". The administrator for a TLD controls what second-level names are recognized in that TLD. The administrators of the root domain or root zone control what TLDs

are recognized by the DNS. Commonly used TLDs include dot-com, dot-net, dot-edu, dot-jp, dot-de, and the like.

GAC – Governmental Advisory Committee – is an advisory committee composed of appointed representatives of national governments, multinational governmental organizations and treaty organizations, and distinct economies. Its function is to advise the ICANN Board on matters of concern to governments.

ALAC – At-Large Advisory Committee – considers and provides advice on the activities of the ICANN as they relate to the interests of individual Internet users.

ccNSO – Country-Code Names Supporting Organization – engages and provides leadership in activities relevant to country-code top-level domains (ccTLDs). This is achieved by developing policy recommendations to the ICANN Board, nurturing consensus across the ccNSO's community, including the name-related activities of ccTLDs, and coordinating with other ICANN SOs, committees or ICANN constituencies.

SSAC – Security and Stability Advisory Committee – the standing committee on the security and stability of the Internet's naming and address allocation systems. Its charter includes a focus on risk analysis and auditing. SSAC consists of approximately 20 technical experts from industry and academia as well as operators of Internet root servers, registrars and TLD registries.

GNSO – Generic Names Supporting Organization – one of ICANN's supporting organizations, formed of six constituencies: commercial and business constituency, gTLD registry constituency, ISP constituency, non-commercial constituency, registrar constituency, and IP constituency.

ISP – Internet Service Provider – An ISP provides access to the Internet to organizations or individuals. These services may include web hosting, email, VoIP (voice over IP), and support for many other applications.

String – the set of characters comprising an applied-for gTLD.

String Contention – The scenario in which there is more than one qualified applicant for the same gTLD or for gTLDs that are so similar that user confusion would result if more than one were to be delegated to the root zone.

Script – a collection of symbols used for writing a language. There are three basic kinds of scripts. Alphabetic (Arabic, Cyrillic, Latin) has individual elements termed letters. Ideographic (Chinese) has elements that are ideographs. Syllabary (Hangul) has individual elements that represent syllables. The writing systems of most languages use only one script but there are exceptions. For example, Japanese uses four different scripts representing all three categories. Scripts that do not appear in the Unicode code chart are completely unavailable for inclusion in IDNs.

About ICANN

To reach another person on the Internet you have to type an address into your computer - a name or a number. That address has to be unique so computers know where to find each other. ICANN coordinates these unique identifiers across the world. Without that coordination we wouldn't have one global Internet. ICANN was formed in 1998. It is a not-for-profit public-benefit corporation with participants from all over the world dedicated to keeping the Internet secure, stable and interoperable. It promotes competition and develops policy on the Internet's unique identifiers. ICANN doesn't control content on the Internet. It cannot stop spam and it doesn't deal with access to the Internet. But through its coordination role of the Internet's naming system, it does have an important impact on the expansion and evolution of the Internet. For more information please visit: www.icann.org.



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