

Internet name 'revolution' hits doubts

January 10 2012, by Tim Witcher



President and chief executive officer of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), Rod Beckstrom, pictured in 2011. The body that polices Internet registrations will on Thursday launch a domain name "revolution" in the face of the concerns of global bodies ranging from the United Nations to the US Congress.

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The Red Cross and International Olympic Committee have already secured exclusions from the new sector that would allow company, organization and city names to rival .com as Internet addresses.

The head of the Zulus in southern Africa and a wealthy Middle East family have already expressed an interest in being part of what Rod Beckstrom, president of the [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names](#)

[and Numbers \(ICANN\)](#), has called a "new domain name system revolution".

The new generic [top level domains](#) (GTLDs) would allow Internet names such as .Apple or .IMF or .Paris instead of .com or .org.

ICANN says the huge expansion of the Internet, with two billion users around the world, half of them in Asia, requires the new names.

But the [International Monetary Fund](#) was among more than 25 global bodies which sent a letter to ICANN last month expressing concern about the possible "misleading registration and use" of their names.

The US Association of National Advertisers and non-profit groups such as the Young Men's Christian Association, YMCA, criticized the plan at a [US Congress](#) hearing last month.

They fear it could cause confusion about their Internet presence and force them to spend huge amounts on "defensive registration" to stop cybersquatters, who buy up names and try to sell them at an inflated price, and fraudsters.

Registration will cost \$185,000 with a \$25,000 annual fee after that.

Beckstrom acknowledged that providing servers and other technical and administrative backup means that the name could cost millions over the course of a decade.

But he calls the new generics "the most significant opening in the history of the [domain name system](#)." The aggregate number of new sites "might very well rival dot.com in 10 years time," Beckstrom said ahead of the launch.

He estimates there are now more than 220 million Internet site names, and more than 90 million of them are .com.

ICANN insists however that safeguards are in place to protect the big names the scheme is aimed at.

Jamie Hedlund, ICANN vice president for government affairs, said that while the names of international organizations are not trademarks, they would get the same protection if they are mentioned in international treaties.

If "someone applies for .unitednations, they will have lost their \$185,000 application fee because they don't have the right to that name," Hedlund told reporters.

The International Olympic Committee and International Red Cross secured an opt-out meaning their names could not be registered after talks with ICANN, he said. Other international bodies had not reacted so quickly, he added.

However Beckstrom said ICANN is "very sensitive" to the concerns raised by the international organizations last month. "We'll be responding to that letter," he said.

If anyone applied for one of the top-level domains using a known trademark or service mark, the owner could complain to a panel of intellectual property experts, who would decide who had rights to the term.

"If they have no rights to that term, you are in an extremely good position," the ICANN chief added, insisting that "defensive registrations" are not necessary.

While ICANN has not given figures, independent experts have predicted there will be anything between several hundred to 4,000 applications when applications are taken from Thursday until April 12. A list of all the applications will be published in May.

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