

Internet overlords close to opening new online domains

June 29 2013, by Glenn Chapman

The agency in charge of website addresses passed a major milestone Friday on the path to broadening the world of domain names by the end of this year.

The board of US-based Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) touted freshly-approved benefits and responsibilities for registrars that essentially act as domain name wholesalers.

Changes to contractually enforceable rules include requiring registrars to confirm phone numbers or addresses of those buying [domain names](#) within 15 days.

"People who have stolen an identity or have criminal backgrounds obviously don't want to give you their name and address if their intentions are not kosher," said Cyrus Namazi, ICANN's vice president of industry engagement.

"The intent here is to weed out bad actors."

Prior to new rules outlined in the Registrar Accreditation Agreement, there were "loose checks and balances" to make sure aliases weren't being used by people buying domain names, according to Namazi.

"It is a very serious and significant milestone in moving toward new gTLDs (generic Top-Level domains)," he said.

ICANN is considering more than 1,800 requests for new web address endings, ranging from the general such as ".shop" to the highly specialized like ".motorcycles."

Many of the requests are from large companies such as Apple, Mitsubishi and IBM—with Internet giant Google alone applying for more than 100, including [.google](#), .YouTube, and .lol—Internet slang for "laugh out loud."

California-based ICANN says the huge expansion of the Internet, with some two billion users around the world, half of them in Asia, means new names are essential.

There are currently just 22 gTLDs, of which .com and .net comprise the lion's share of online addresses.

"We spent a long time negotiating very thorny issues," Akram Atallah, ICANN's generic domains division head, said in an online video.

"The new agreement achieves everything we wished for in order to roll out the new gTLD program."

The first new website address endings should be available in the final quarter of this year, according to Namazi.

The revamped agreement will affect more than 1,000 domain name registrars around the world.

ICANN has been negotiating with domain handlers for more than two years on agreement revisions, with interests of governments and law enforcement agencies among those factored into changes, according to Namazi.

"Law enforcement agencies played a big role in it, because Internet crime is one of the biggest factors out there," he said.

"Governments are actively involved because the Internet is one thing that connects all the governments of the world and some want to control it."

The agreement doesn't require domain operators to go beyond legal limits regarding information that must be supplied to law enforcement officials, according to ICANN.

"This agreement is probably going to be somewhat invisible to consumers but it provides a mechanism to protect privacy and prevent crime," Namazi said.

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