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International - Call for ICANN to announce second round of gTLD applications

By Trevor Little

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With the new gTLDs application window two months away, the Coalition Against Domain Name Abuse (CADNA) is to ask ICANN to make known the likely timings of a second round of applications. The move follows fears that many brand owners are being forced into applying for a '.brand' now in case they are subsequently 'locked out' of the new online space for years to come.

Held yesterday in New York, CADNA's gTLD conference, *What's at Stake: The Reality of ICANN's New gTLD Program for Brands*, was attended by over 100 registered delegates, including representatives from such brands as Merck, News Corporation, FedEx and Macy's. Speakers at the event included Mike Palage, a former ICANN board member, and Esther Dyson, the founding chairman of ICANN, as well as corporate attorneys and marketers.

Asked to summarise the general sentiment amongst attendees, Josh Bourne, CADNA president, told WTR: "While there was some positive chatter about the potential marketing uses of new gTLDs, the overarching theme coming from the professionals in attendance was that they feel forced into investing in something that they don't really feel that they have had enough time to fully assess. This feeling of being forced largely stems from the fact that it could be years – a digital lifetime – before ICANN will open up another application period for new gTLDs. So while many brands would feel much more comfortable waiting out the first round to see whether or not new gTLDs are something that they should pursue, the reality is that many feel forced to opt into the new gTLD system (in many cases, by applying for their own branded gTLD) so they will not be left behind, and so that they can retain the option of seeing what others apply for in order to choose whether or not to move forward after the application period concludes."

This sentiment echoes a comment made by Stuart Durham, EMEA sales director at Melbourne IT DBS, earlier this month. Considering corporate readiness for new gTLDs, he stated: "A lot of companies are leaving it too late. If you make the final decision much later than now, then that makes it tough. I think many brand owners are unaware of just how much is involved in the process. [On the flip side], some other companies feel boxed in – that if they don't make a decision now, they will have to wait a few years."

This has led CADNA to call for ICANN to announce a definitive date when it will open up a policy development process to establish a second application round, "to allow applicants to assess their new gTLD decisions based on their needs, rather than because of an artificially compressed process. Initiating a process to conclude when another round could begin will also allow applicants more time to develop more comprehensive plans for utilising new gTLDs, as opposed to obtaining them simply to not miss out".

Bourne explains: "The current situation has led to a lot of anxiety and, frankly, it is antithetical to ICANN's motivation for launching the new gTLDs program, which was to foster innovation. For that reason, our proposal basically consists of asking ICANN to give the brand owner community some insight into when it will open a second round of new gTLD applications."

The organisation plans to submit its proposal to ICANN, via letter, this week. With time running out, and many organisations already formulating applications, potential applicants will be hoping for a speedy response.

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