

THE  TIMES

## Cybersquatters will move in if businesses fail to act fast



Coca-Cola may think it has to buy .coke if it believes Pepsi has .pepsi J. Vespa/WireImage

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Icann's decision to increase global top level domain names (gtlds) means saying goodbye to just .com and welcoming .anythingyoulike.

The idea came after pressure from non-English-speaking countries, who wanted domain names in scripts such as Arabic and Cyrillic.

So in June, after three years of debate, Icann voted to break the constraint obliging creators of new websites to choose from only 22 generic top-level domains — the familiar roster topped by .com and including staples such as .org and .net — or from about 250 geography-specific addresses, such as .uk.

At the time Peter Dengate Thrush, Icann's chairman, said: "Unless there is a good

reason to restrain it, innovation should be allowed to run free.”

Although Icannc emphasises the benefits to organisations wishing to have novel ways to market their brands, it remains unclear what benefit this expansion will have for the average internet user.

Despite repeated requests, Icannc failed to provide an independent report showing that the increase of domain names is in the public interest. However, many are concerned about its impact on British and global businesses.

Many worry that new domains will bring on a new dawn of “cybersquatting”, a plague from the the early unruly days of the internet. For example, Apple will no longer have to own just apple.com and apple.co.uk, but suddenly apple.london and many hundreds of new names.

If the company doesn’t act quickly to buy these new names, it may find that someone will buy them on the cheap — hoping to charge the rightful trademark holder thousands of pounds to acquire the addresses.

Others argue that Icannc’s application procedure is causing unnecessary headaches. As Josh Bourne from the Campaign Against Domain Name Abuse argues, Icannc has created “fear and anxiety” because “the three-month application period is in a black box. This means nobody knows what names have been applied for ... it is driving competitors to assume that their peers in industry will also apply for gtlds.”

The argument is that Coca-Cola may consider it essential to buy .coke, simply because it believes that Pepsi may buy .pepsi. The confusion is because no one knows for sure what effect the expansion will have on the internet. “Ford will want to buy .ford, if they think there will be a .volkswagen,” said Mr Bourne.

“They will not want to be seen by the audiences as out of touch and using a relic of the Nineties.”

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