

ICANN auction policy raises serious questions

Under the latest ICANN's policy, who would like to bid the highest amount for the exclusive global rights to the new domain suffix .dubai? Such a suffix will create a powerful domain root that will corner some 180 services underneath it, like go.dubai, hotel.dubai, job.dubai, cars.dubai or fly.dubai. Who would be the next global cyber-branding leader of this new millennium?

 By Naseem Javed 15 Aug 2008



Are auctions the right methods to sell such mega marketing channels? ICANN, the Internet authority, is looking into auctioning off such popular name identities. A billion dollars going once? Billion dollars going twice... sold to the person from Russia with the diamond-studded cellphone.

The new auction policy raises some serious questions... if the city of London had the www.London.London domain, it could offer thousands of sub brands to its hundreds of local services, from the main root like taxi.london to shows.london or jobs.london. This highly focused, very profitable and globally accessible marketing tool will create hundreds of new leader brands. Some 630 services may successfully operate under this new London suffix.

But if the .london suffix is offered on the auction block, there will certainly be mega funds on the table, as bidders fight all the way till the 15th knockout round and a winner is declared, while being televised via you.bid. If this were the case, there is no way London city would let this golden opportunity slip to any other outside interests and will find the big bucks at any cost.

Rightful owner

But ideally speaking, the city of London should be the rightful owner of its own domain, and not simply because it is the highest bidder. Based on rules of the rightful ownership of a domain must be traced back to its originating party, meaning that .London belongs to London city hall and Dubai belongs to Dubai.

In an [interview at BBC TV](#) following the 30 June 2008 announcement, ICANN president Dr Paul Twomey explains the issue further:

Soon other languages will be added on the Internet, and add billions of users to the Internet with hundreds of millions of new customers online. The city of Wales just allocated US\$50 000 to lobby and study the subject, so it can stay ahead of the game and make sure its Welsh name .cym, meaning "ruler", is not picked up by some other party through the popular use of CYM, the Internet abbreviation for "Check your mail."

However, auctions will not work for thousands of other cities at all, especially when city names are shared across the continent, or the same names have already been used in hundreds of brand names all over the world since the last century. Apart from who has the first, original use, most city halls would not have the mega-bucks necessary to buy their ownership that should rightfully belong to them in the first place. There are tens of thousands of community-based programmes and associations. These non-profit often use a local or regional brand name, with almost no global trademark cover, and which often end up being named with a strange combination of initials. Groups that fall into this category will have no chance to play this high-calibre, cyber-branding game.

Dozens of other combinations

Outside the bidding on city names, there are dozens of other combinations within the business sector, where some huge & unique applications of this method would create powerful new global cyber-brand names overnight.

Currently, there are million-plus business name identities of great potential interest in this race. These businesses are huge but their names, with the exception of very few, still do not have the necessary global cover and protection to be considered automatic winners, and they may lose out in big time global contests. The new selection, when applied under IP rules, will have to rule in favor of all existing, globally recognised trademarked brands as the rightful owners of their own suffix. For example, .IBM, .Sony or .PlayStation, but .apple and .orange may lose their ground during the process.

How many "Gulf" names are already registered? From Gulf Air to Gulf anything in the region and across the world, and so are the thousands of highly diluted dictionary and geographic based or family names.

Somehow, name brand identities are moving towards a serious crisis, and to begin, there will be a small number of names with a Five Star Standard of Naming Status, and this sudden change will only point to a rude awakening. The real complexities of accidental and casual naming are appearing fast on all fronts, and very soon, each and every company will have to face the music on globally-indexed charting and being a top leader within any single region will not be sufficient to win this game. Names are for marketing, and marketing today is global, and therefore, names must be globally structured. Long gone are the days when poorly crafted local names were pushed to their limits, with excessive advertising to appear global for a while.

Shortsighted naming

According to the new formal study on this subject by ABC Namebank of the 500 million business names worldwide, only some 100 000 names are well-known in their local markets and only 1000 are globally recognised. During last century, many corporations felt very confident and smugged investing unlimited budgets to create distinct logos and felt that their non-exclusive name with some distinct logo provided them that unique trademark protection. This is how thousands of identical name brands and like National, Dynamic, and Quantum came about. This shortsighted naming is going to be fully tested. Names like Sony, Microsoft, Panasonic or Rolex never had to worry as they already have Five Star Standard Status.

ICANN's suggestions of auctions creating the billion dollar domain babies is very problematic, as in each country there are always some gizzillionaires that want to cherry pick the top brand name identities. A moderate fee-based system under the common laws of intellectual property is the best way forward.

The move to open domain suffixes is very mature and positive, and so is the opening into other languages; both moves are bringing a billion more Internet users and hundreds of millions of new customers online but the old-fashioned name identities no longer have a place on this new global arena.

As the auction issue heats up and many sudden changes shake the foundation of the oldest and the biggest name brands around the world and those who are aggressively engaged today in getting the deeper understanding and evaluation of their current name identities have some chance, the rest are really headed to be drowned in the biggest domain flood of the century. Best learn to swim like a shark.

ABOUT NASEEM JAVED

Naseem Javed, author of *Naming for Power*, is recognised as a world authority on global name identities, corporate image, cyber-branding and management of digital branding assets. He introduced The Laws of Corporate Naming in the 1980s and also founded www.abcnamebank.com - a consultancy established in New York and Toronto a quarter century ago. He is currently lecturing at major conferences on cutting ideas on image building and global iconisation. [View my profile and articles...](#)