

DOMAIN YOURSELF

Most computer junkies – amateur or professional – know the importance of a domain name. Where would many companies and organizations be today without “.com, .org, .net, .info, or .gov” after their names? Would Google shares be at \$485.00 **without** these domains? Yes, it’s all about money....but it’s more than that. ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) is a private, non-profit organization formed in 1998 whose mission is to keep the internet secure, operable across the globe, and stable. They have no control on internet content, access, spam or viruses. But what they do have is the role of coordination of the internet system of naming, i.e. domain names. It has working relationships with registrars (like Godaddy.com) whose market was created to introduce greater internet competition. TLD (top level domains) of which there are currently 22, are the ones we know best and whose addresses we have grown up with (internet-wise). For example, there are approximately 94 million “.com” sites and 290 country-specific (e.g. “.co.uk, .fr, .de, etc.) sites registered...and a host of others proliferating cyberspace. Earlier this year, ICANN even approved the “.xxx” suffix for pornography sites due to the outcry from the adult entertainment business community. Expansion on the world wide web is inevitable and things just changed again – and radically so.

On January 12, 2012 ICANN will begin accepting applications from established public and private organizations for new domain names (**gTLD** meaning generic Top Level Domains) – and in this expansion, you name it and it could be yours. The application period will last 90 days and the fee is a mere \$185,000.00. The expectation is that companies worldwide will ante up to protect their brands, e.g. you could bypass “Apple.com” and go directly to “apps.ipad2” or “newmusic.itunes” or “troubleshooting.windows7”.....the possibilities are endless.

Now before you think that anything goes, ICANN does have its parameters and the approval process is not a simple one. By expanding the domain name field, companies can protect their name from trademark infringement, while developing countries have a better chance of entering the global business community. (In fact, ICANN has budgeted \$2 million to aid applicants from these countries.) But beyond the obvious, the opportunity to market products, communities, ideas and brands in creatively innovative ways is truly remarkable.

Opinions about the latest web expansion are still being formulated and pondered by techies, critics, journalists, sociologists and sidewalk observers. Nevertheless it sounds as though every search engine out there will have to work doubly hard to seek out responses to satisfy the ravenous cybertraffic world....there will be so many more places to look! The internet world is changing and expanding even more rapidly than we can imagine.....if you’re in it, keep up with it and if you’re not, get with it as soon as possible lest you are left so far behind that it will be difficult to do even simple things.