

Position Paper: Improving the service to domain name applicants

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Background

At ICANN49 Singapore Akram Atallah, President of ICANN's Global Domains Division (GDD), invited the New TLDs Applicant Group (NTAG) and others to provide feedback on issues of customer service. The Brand Registry Group (BRG) has since joined a discussion group to coordinate that feedback, and this paper is the BRG's input to that group. The BRG's feedback covers over-arching issues relevant to both the current and future rounds and some specific issues that may be corrected in the short-term.

1. Applicant Guidebook

The Applicant Guidebook (AG) suffers from a fundamental problem. It was written for two separate audiences.

The first audience was an internal one of ICANN's policy-development body the Generic Names Supporting Organisation (GNSO). The guidebook attempted to explain how GNSO policy was being implemented. As a result it included history and background.

The second audience was an external one, the domain name applicant who was interested only in the process of how to apply.

As a result of trying to speak to two audiences, it failed both. From the applicants perspective, the guidebook is:

- overly long
- confusing
- duplicative
- poorly indexed.

Consequences of a confusing Applicant Guidebook

The confusing nature of the AG had two negative consequences.

1. Applicants were confused and asked ICANN more questions than necessary
2. ICANN staff were confused and sometimes did not know the answers. Sometimes unless a question was absolutely precise, a response was an unhelpful repetition of the text from the AG.

Recommendation 1

Write a new Applicant Guidebook now stripping out background, and create a step by step guide for applicants. Number and index the guidebook consistently.

2. Customisation of the Applicant Guidebook and other materials

With respect to the Registry aspects of owning and operating a domain name, applicants may elect to appoint a Registry Services Provider to (a) assist with the Registry aspects of the application and/or (b) to execute some or all of the Registry aspects of the launch and operational phases. It follows therefore that the audience for ICANN documentation will cover a range in the depth of knowledge that an applicant should need to acquire. ICANN materials could be much better structured if this situation was better recognised in its documentation. Keep it simple for the end customer.

Recommendation 2

Improve the customisation of documentation to differentiate between the registry operator, and third-party providers of registry, back-end technical and financial services.

3. Certainty in response times

A key success factor for any service-provider responding to a client is certainty in timing. Both parties, can work with problems if there is certainty as to when they will be addressed. BRG members report wait times of 3 weeks without acknowledgement. Such certainty is lacking in the GDD's responses to domain name applicants.

Recommendation 3

Acknowledge all enquiries within 24 hours of receipt with an estimate of the actual time frame to provide a substantive response. That time frame should be adhered to and used as a performance metric.

4. Client Services Manager

In other fields, a client paying a service fee in the hundreds of thousands would expect a dedicated and named Client Services Manager.

Recommendation 4

Allocate a named Client Services Manager to each applicant.

5. Troubleshooting and new issues

In the absence of our recommendation for a dedicated client services manager (which would meet the same objective), when there is a failure of service (such as an overly long time lag to respond) or new issues to raise it would help to have a series of subject specific points of contact to address the issue. Focusing all troubleshooting and new issues through the Vice President, DNS Industry Engagement, has issues of scale.

Recommendation 5

Create a series of subject specific points of contact for troubleshooting and new issues.

6. Acronyms

Both the Applicant Guidebook, continued ICANN advisories, and staff presentations at ICANN meetings are replete with acronyms. (The homepage of ICANN's new website on the day of writing had 6 undefined acronyms (IANA, NTIA, DNSSEC, ALAC, gTLDs,

AOC). The landing page of ICANN's applicants portal contains 8 undefined acronyms (gTLD, PIC, GAC, EW, IE, EE, PDT, IDN). Brand Registry Group members have been at a number of ICANN presentations where speakers have talked in acronyms the whole time and informal audience feedback is that sessions are wasted because audiences have had no idea what was being discussed. Often, the golden rule of any external communication using acronyms is ignored. If you must use them, always define them upon first use. Only a handful of acronyms are so well known they do not need to be defined.

Recommendation 6

Define acronyms on first use and where appropriate frequently provide links to a glossary.

7. New gTLD Customer Service Center (CSC)

Questions asked of the CSC which are posted are not indexed according to subject or date asked so other applicants seeking the same information have to trawl through everything. This is inefficient for both applicants and staff.

Recommendation 7

Index by subject and date all published questions to the Customer Service Centre.

8. Improved website logic and navigation

It is often challenging to find information on the ICANN site. Typically a user has to go to a number of different places to find what they are looking for. For example, GAC advice, ICANN decisions and Customer Service Centre requests may all be found in different places. This may also have the effect that a user misses something because they didn't know they needed to look for it.

Recommendation 8.

Associate all relevant material relating to a particular application in one place on the website.

About Us

The Brand Registry Group (BRG) is an independent membership organisation of owners of a top-level domain name that matches their existing brand. The turnover of the respective groups behind these domain names is some \$880 billion. The BRG is registered by Royal Decree as an international not-for-profit under Belgian law. It represents members' common interests and offers services paid for from fees.