

webnames CORPORATE

New gTLD Strategies: 5 Key Considerations

The launch of the new generic Top Level Domain (gTLDs) is well underway and your brand needs to strengthen its position online. While close to 900 extensions have already launched, ICANN expects gTLD registries around the world to continue launch extensions through 2017.

This creates a unique situation for brands online - new branding opportunities are now available but new challenges also emerge. With a large number of new gTLDs, brands often find themselves bewildered and lost due to the sheer quantity and types of TLDs.

"Should my brand register geographic TLDs like .QUEBEC, .NYC or .LONDON? What are the implications of leaving my domains unprotected? Which extensions are attracting online criminals and cybersquatters? How will the gTLDs affect our budget? Which TLDs are other brands using?"

These are just some of the questions that our team regularly fields, but the truth is, the answer is dependent on each business. Extensions that range from .attorney to .finance to .ninja to .sucks to .xyz require brands to review existing strategies and policies.

1) Re-evaluate and Review Existing Domain Management Policies

Brands need to analyze and review existing domain management policies.

Effective strategies in the past may not be effective when applied to the new gTLDs. The smaller quantity of relevant TLDs (.com, .net, .info and .org) made portfolio management simpler. However, the influx of new gTLD extensions require brands to formulate a new approach in order to monitor, acquire, police and enforce their marks.

2) Prioritize Vulnerable Domain Names and TLD Extensions

Brands need to have a keen understanding and awareness of the new gTLDs. Individually registering variants, typos and trademarks under each extension is no longer a feasible approach and is cost prohibitive.

Instead, brands should identify which gTLDs – in combination with a brand name – is most vulnerable to infringement and squatting. Furthermore, confusing gTLD extensions should be taken into account; these domains include, but are not limited to: .accountant and .accountants, .review and .reviews, .career and .careers, and .deal, .deals and .dealer.

3) Enroll in the Trademark Clearinghouse

ICANN has launched the Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH), a trademark repository managed by Deloitte and IBM. Enrollment into the TMCH is mandatory for brands that wish to defensively register domain names during the Sunrise Period, a priority registration phase for brand owners.

Enrollment into the Trademark Clearinghouse also grants access to other Rights Protection Mechanisms (RPMs) such as the Domains Protected Marks List and Claims Notification.

More information is available at: <https://corporate.webnames.ca/gtld-services/trademark-clearinghouse/>

4) Craft a gTLD Registration Strategy

Once vulnerable domain names have been identified and enrollment into the TMCH has been completed, brands need to consider when to register these domain names. While the Sunrise Period allows TMCH validated brands to register their marks ahead of the general public, typos, misspelled names, and variants of a domain name will need to be acquired separately.

These domains can be acquired during the following phases: **Landrush, Early Access Program** and **General Availability**.

Landrush and Early Access Program (EAP): In most cases, either the Landrush or EAP follow the Sunrise Phase. This period is open to all interested parties and most premium domain names are registered during this period.

General Availability: The final and ongoing phase, registration of domain names under a gTLD is available to the general public.

5) Determine TLD Blocking Policies

To help brand owners defend their rights, various registries have launched the **Domains Protected Marks List (DPML)**. Designed to block registration of domain names that contain or are exact matches of a submitted mark, brand owners gain the ability to defend their mark across hundreds of TLDs for a single fee.

More information is available at: <https://corporate.webnames.ca/gtld-services/domains-protected-marks-list/>

Conclusion

Each brand has unique needs and requirements. With that being said, brands need to implement a framework that allows them to collect and analyze the relevant information to make informed acquisitions. With the growing number of gTLDs, cross-departmental cooperation is required to coordinate the acquisition and management of vulnerable TLDs and domain names.