The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

Fact Sheet: What Is ICANN?

Overview

- ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, is best known for its role as the technical coordinator of the Internet's Domain Name System.
- It was organized under California law in 1998 and originally operated under a Memorandum of Understanding with the US Department of Commerce (DoC).
- The *Affirmation of Commitments*, signed in September 2009 by ICANN and DoC, solidified ICANN's status as a private sector, multi-stakeholder, not-for-profit corporation that manages Internet resources for the public benefit.
- ICANN performs technical and policy coordination of Internet names and numbers (technically, *domain names*, *IP addresses*, and *port and parameter numbers*) under a separate contract with DoC - the *IANA Functions contract*. The central coordination of these functions is a major reason there is one unified global Internet rather than individual national Internets.
- ICANN has about 130 staff members, located in the United States, Europe, Australia and other locations around the world.

How Does ICANN Develop Policy?

- Policy recommendations are formed and refined by the ICANN community through its Supporting Organizations (SOs) and influenced by Advisory Committees (ACs) – all comprised of volunteers from over 130 countries and territories – in a "bottom-up," open and transparent process.
- A sample of ICANN stakeholders includes companies that offer domain names to the public (*registrars*), companies that operate top-level domain registries (*gTLD and ccTLD registries)*, Internet Service Providers, intellectual property interests, business users, non-commercial users (such as academics, non-governmental organizations, non-profits and consumer advocates), individual Internet users and governments.
- Members of any SO or AC as well as the ICANN Board may raise an issue they believe requires policy development.
- Volunteer policy development working groups form around an issue and consider it from all angles, making decisions by consensus wherever possible. These working groups are open to everyone in ICANN's volunteer community.
- All working group discussions are recorded and transcribed so that the public has full access to discussions and debate. Major documents and executive summaries are typically translated into the five United Nations languages to make the content more accessible to non-English speaking communities.
- Public comments are sought at several stages in the policy development process to let interested community members provide their views on policy proposals, and to ensure that policy recommendations reflect the concerns and perspectives of the broader Internet community.
- Decisions or recommendations by Working Groups are considered first by each relevant Supporting Organization and then by the Board of Directors, a globally diverse body of 15 voting and six liaison representatives that has the ultimate authority to approve or reject policy recommendations.
- The diversity of stakeholder views makes the policy development process time-consuming. But it results in recommendations that are fair, effective, and carefully considered, preserving and enhancing the security, stability and resiliency of the Internet.
- Once the Board approves policy recommendations, ICANN's staff is responsible for implementing them.

What Has ICANN Achieved?

- It once cost upwards of $50 per year to register a domain name. Now it costs about $7. Internet users and businesses benefit from this enormous savings because ICANN introduced competition among registrars.
- ICANN has facilitated greater online competition and innovation through the introduction of several new top-level domains (TLDs). While .COM and .NET existed before ICANN was created, ICANN helped usher in .ASIA, .BIZ, .INFO, .MOBI, .POST, and many more.
- ICANN implemented a Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP), which has been used to resolve more than 5,000 disputes over the rights to domain names. The UDRP is designed to be efficient and cost effective.
- ICANN helped coordinate the availability of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs). Until 2009, web addresses required the use of Latin characters. Now people who speak Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian or 18 other languages that use non-ASCII characters can enter a web address using their primary language.
- ICANN has worked with Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) and other stakeholders to promote the future growth of the Internet by encouraging the timely deployment of IPv6, the new generation of Internet addresses.
- ICANN has joined the Department of Commerce and VeriSign to add security to the domain name system. When fully deployed, Domain Name System Security Extensions, or DNSSEC, at the "root" of the Internet will greatly reduce the threat of certain types of cyber attacks. As a *global authentication platform*, or common source of trust in the validity of Internet addresses, DNSSEC represents the biggest structural improvement to the Internet in 20 years.
- In response to a bottom-up policy development process begun in 2005, ICANN is implementing a program to introduce new generic top-level domains, or new gTLDs. Since the Board adopted the policy recommendation to introduce new gTLDs in 2008, the community has carefully refined how the program should be implemented to provide enhanced trademark protections, mitigate the opportunity for malicious conduct and protect community interests.

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