

## ICANN Approves Plans To Launch New Top-Level Domains; Sets January 12, 2012 Start Date

In a long-awaited move with broad implications for brand owners, on Monday, June 20, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) approved plans to launch a potentially unlimited number of new generic top-level domains (gTLDs). ICANN's New gTLD Program will dramatically expand the number of generic top-level domains from the current set of 22 domains (including .com, .org, and .net) to as many as 1,000. For the first time, companies and other organizations will be able to create their own top-level domains featuring their brand names (such as .coke, .apple, or .iphone), industry designations (such as .pharma or .insurance), and other common terms (such as .green or .auction).

"New gTLDs will change the way people find information on the Internet and how businesses plan and structure their online presence," ICANN said in a press release on its website. Expanding the domain name space will offer "organizations around the world the opportunity to market their brand, products, community or cause in new and innovative ways."

ICANN's announcement followed numerous rounds of public comment and seven iterations of the Applicant Guidebook, which sets forth the procedures for applying for a new TLD and explains how ICANN will decide between multiple applicants for the same domain as well as how third parties can object to others' proposed domains. The latest version of the Applicant Guidebook, released on May 30, is expected to undergo some additional revisions before becoming final, but the planning process left many brand owners concerned the application procedures do not adequately protect intellectual property rights.

Interested parties will have a limited window in which to apply for a new TLD: Applications will be accepted from January 12, 2012 through April 12, 2012, with the first TLDs expected to launch in 2013. Initial application costs are set at \$185,000.

We will continue to closely monitor developments regarding the new gTLDs. For more information about the new domains and how they might affect your organization, please contact the Ropes & Gray attorney who normally advises you.

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