

[Music Intro]

Welcome to *ICANN Start*. This is the show about one issue, five questions:

- What is it?
- Why does it matter?
- Who does it affect?
- Who’s going to fix it?
- What can I do about it?

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Scott Pinzon: Thank you for joining us on this special bonus edition of *ICANN Start*. I’m Scott Pinzon. Usually on each episode of *ICANN Start* we say “One issue, five questions,” but in this episode it’s “one person, five questions.”

I’m very pleased to be speaking with the man who became the new Chair of ALAC after the public meeting ICANN held in Cartagena December, 2010. Welcome to *ICANN Start*, Dr. Olivier Crépin-Leblond.

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: Hello, Scott, and thank you for having me here.

Scott Pinzon: Thank you for joining us today, Olivier. Before we get into actually talking about yourself and your involvement with ICANN, we always like to include listeners who are new to ICANN’s world. Can you explain for a moment, What is ALAC?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: Well, ALAC is one of these acronyms that stands for the At-Large Advisory Committee, and that’s the committee that is effectively the voice of the individual Internet user in the community called At-Large. At-Large is really, well, every person that’s out there on the Internet, and with regards to ICANN it deals with the domain name system.

When we look at domain names, many people might think they don’t really get affected by those. But in fact they do, because it is the Internet’s addressing scheme – you know, .com, .net, .org. A

broken domain name system means a broken Internet, and certainly a broken Internet actually affects everyone – every single Internet user out there.

So At-Large really is the constituency of Internet users, individual Internet users and the At-Large Advisory Committee is the voice of the individual Internet user.

Scott Pinzon: So there are many subgroups inside of ICANN. How does At-Large differ from these other groups?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: Right, well At-Large for one is not a group which deals specifically with one issue, say domain names as such. At-Large actually comments on absolutely everything that takes place in ICANN. On one day, At-Large might be requested to comment on ICANN’s strategic plan; on another day, it would need to comment on a specific DNS issue, a technical issue or a non-technical issue. And so it really is the part of ICANN that has to look at both what’s happening inside and what’s happening around ICANN itself.

Scott Pinzon: That sounds like the scope of At-Large is pretty broad. Surely you don’t do this all in one giant mass.

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: You’re right. In fact, At-Large itself is structured into five separate regions, and each region is headed by a Regional At-Large Organization, what we call a RALO. Each RALO – one for North America, one for Latin America and Caribbean, one for Europe, one for Africa and one for Asia-Pacific region – each one of these is the top of a pyramid of At-Large Structures which are individual organizations that take part in the At-Large process.

Scott Pinzon: I think I’m getting the flow here. An issue might start with the At-Large Structures and then they could flow it up to their Regional At-Large Organization, and then that entity might bring it to the At-Large Advisory Committee. Is that how it works?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: That is exactly how it works and that’s what the bottom-up process is.

Scott Pinzon: Well, I'd like to find out how you got involved in all of this. Can you fill us in a little bit on your career background before you came to ICANN and give us a sense of how you first encountered ICANN?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: Well, I'm an engineer by trade. Initially I did a PhD in telecommunications in the UK and then afterwards, awhile later in fact I did a specialized Master's in competitive intelligence and knowledge management in France. I'm French and have lived for a long time in the UK. Internet user since 1988 and of course I've also run my own telecommunication consultancy firm which has been working with Internet service providers since the mid-'90s.

My first encounter with ICANN was probably before ICANN was created. I sort of lived ICANN's growth from the outside, well from sort of the late '90s or so. My first physical encounter with ICANN, in other words being directly involved in the organization, was when I went to the Paris meeting in June, 2008. I went over there, visited the different constituencies and went to several of the meetings, and of course it's all open so I went to all of them.

And I was immediately attracted to At-Large, not only because they were treating a subject that's really dear to my heart – that was IPv6 adoption at the time – but also because I felt it was where I belonged because it dealt with the individual Internet user's point of view. As an Internet user I thought “Well, that's definitely the place where I'll have a voice in the organization.”

Scott Pinzon: So as you take over the leadership of At-Large what are some issues you really hope to see addressed?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: There's a lot of issues at the moment, and of course one has to try and choose what the best ones are or what the ones are that we need to address immediately. I think one of the problems that ICANN in general and At-Large as part of ICANN has had was to be able to address the individual Internet user's needs in a more comprehensive way; in other words, it has not been very accessible to the Internet user.

So one of the big things that I think we're going to work on right now is to make that accessibility of At-Large easier for the Internet

user so as to make the ICANN decision process itself more accessible to the Internet user. That means empowering the edges. If you look at the whole organization, what we’re looking at is to empower the regions, the edges, as we say the “grassroots,” so that you have this stable structure that is currently in place that we mentioned earlier with At-Large Structures and RALOs – use that structure to collect the views of Internet users worldwide.

And so these are the main things I think we’ll be working on. Obviously one of the projects which has started thanks to my predecessor Cheryl Langdon-Orr, who was the previous Chair, was the project of having one At-Large Structure in every country. Now, what does one ALS, as we call it, in every country mean? It doesn’t mean that we’re going to look at every single country that we don’t have an At-Large Structure in and try and pray for one to be created there or for one to join there.

What we’re looking for is to go as far as we can everywhere around the world and have voices coming from all corners of the globe, from countries as far away as Micronesia, Pacific Islands, all the way down to South Africa, all the way up to Canada. I mean many of these countries already have At-Large Structures there and we just need to have more. So a real outreach effort out there, a very, very strong outreach effort.

Scott Pinzon:

We have heard references to a couple of efforts inside of the At-Large community to, I don’t know if this is the right word, perhaps “reform.” I’ve heard talk about something called At-Large Improvements... Is this related to what you just told me about?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond:

To some extent yes. The At-Large Improvement process is actually part of the greater process of ICANN improvements. ICANN has this particular thing in that it continuously is the subject of a process which is there to improve ICANN itself, and that deals with internal and external reviews taking place.

About a year, a year and a half ago, At-Large went through such a cycle of process where an outside consultancy was taken to interview many of the At-Large Structures, find out from the At-Large Advisory Committee at the time what the feeling of the individuals were – what was working, what wasn’t working in At-

Large. That consultancy company was totally independent of ICANN.

What that consultancy company did was to analyze this. They came up with a report that was subjected to public input and the whole process of moving this report back and forth to try and find a solution to what the problems of At-Large were was all designed in that document, which was then presented to the Board. And that was then passed back over to the community with an implementation process.

So At-Large went through a whole cycle of that. And one sometimes speaks of “At-Large 3.0,” and you might think “Well, why is there a 3.0? What is 1 and 2?” When ICANN was originally created in the late ‘90s At-Large was actually a little bit different to what it was these days. The first incarnation of At-Large wasn’t too successful in that it had direct input from Internet users and direct voting into the board for Board directors from Internet users. One weakness of that was that the process was actually capturable, and sure enough at some point it became captured and so a whole reorganization took place in the early 2000’s.

It went into ALAC 2.0, which was the next incarnation. That was a process which resulted in the five regions being created, the RALOs, the At-Large Structures, just like what we mentioned earlier. And Cheryl Langdon-Orr as the last Chair of that 2.0 time brought it to a position where everything is stable and the whole structure now, the process of having that input seems to work quite well.

And so now 3.0 is to bring At-Large to the next level – one ALS in every country, the sort of further integration of At-Large with the current ICANN processes and certainly to get At-Large to have a lot more input going into these ICANN processes that are currently taking place: the launch of the new gTLD, gTLD being the generic top-level domains that will be launched soon; the various other issues that are found in ICANN and which in the past At-Large might have not had the time nor the means to comment on and which now At-Large is able to have a much greater understanding of on one side and greater input on the other side.

Scott Pinzon: I see. I like your example of dealing with new gTLDs, because so far we’ve talked about At-Large as working on itself and improving itself but that’s not its ultimate purpose. It actually tries to represent the individual Internet user in particular issues related to the Internet. So can you tell us one or two of the top issues that At-Large is addressing on that level?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: It’s very funny that you mentioned the fact that so far we’ve only spoken of the internal improvement process. It is true. There is constantly a struggle between the amount of time spent on building the organization and building the structure and the amount of time spent on the actual policy work. Yes, whilst we’ve been building on one side we have done a lot of work on policy. Just to give you an idea, there were several cross-constituency consultations that took place and At-Large had a key part inside.

One of them was the well-known MAPO or MOPO – Morality and Public Order. That’s a recommendation which was asked by the Board and the GAC into finding out whether there was some kind of means to preclude offensive domain names from being created, or offensive new top-level domains from being created.

Scott Pinzon: You used the term GAC, and again, just to include everyone, that stands for the Governmental Advisory Committee.

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: Of course what is offensive for one person might not be offensive for another person, especially if you deal with a global market, and so a cross-constituency group was created that was called the Recommendation 6 Working Group because it’s the sixth recommendation of a long report that was written by the Board. The Recommendation 6 Working Group met both online and during conference calls, and at the same time also met with the Board and with observers from the GAC in the last meeting in Cartagena and came up with a number of answers or recommendations so as to make the whole process palatable to everyone. It’s always the thing – getting consensus.

The other current process that we’re working on quite heavily at the moment is a process called JAS – Joint Applicant Support. And that is a process whereas the new gTLD launch might only be affordable to large organizations or Western organizations that

have a lot of money due to its cost. And so we’re exploring ways of being able to help local communities to be able to take part in this process either without incurring the cost or with some kind of funding or sponsorship from either an external organization or internally. This is all currently worked on and At-Large certainly is pushing for this to happen because we believe that the whole process of launching new gTLDs needs to be international and needs to be all-inclusive.

And these are just things to do with domain names. On the side we also deal with non-domain name related issues. As I said earlier we sometimes in At-Large look at ICANN as a whole, and one of the recent comments we did was, in fact it was actually a statement that was launched and that came from the regions all the way into the At-Large Advisory Committee and onto the public comment, was a comment on the ICANN Strategic Plan.

Within ICANN, At-Large has to deal with so many different issues. Sometimes you have people who are very good on strategy and who are very good on one type of competence who would be involved with one type of commenting, and then we require people with other competencies to deal with other commenting and take part in other working groups. It’s not only all technical, it’s not only lawyer-related; we had something as well, a group which dealt with intellectual property issues. Everyone really needs to pitch in there and sometimes we have to wear more than one hat.

Scott Pinzon:

You used a term in your explanation there of “statement,” and most people think if they hear the word “statement” they know what that means. But that’s actually a term of art within At-Large. Can you explain what a statement is?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond:

It is, yeah. A statement is a document which is written with input from all corners of At-Large, generally coming from the grassroots, so from the At-Large Structures building their own part of the document in their part of the world with the help of their Regional At-Large Organization. And then that input goes over to the At-Large Advisory Committee and that builds a larger document which will then come in response to a call for comments.

Every process in ICANN receives this public commenting period which usually is a number of days after the report has been released. And so At-Large comments on those, and those comments, when they are being voted on by the At-Large Advisory Committee, when the vote is conclusive this becomes a statement that the At-Large makes. And that goes straight to the Board for the Board to be able to read and to take that information and that advice in. Whilst At-Large is able to talk to the other constituencies it also has this ability to go straight to the Board because it is an Advisory Committee.

Scott Pinzon:

So the process you describe means that some individual could be sitting almost anywhere in the world, join an At-Large Structure and weigh in with their views and opinions on issues and it could actually float its way all the way up to the Board of Directors of ICANN and be voted on and possibly approved. Is that correct?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond:

You’re absolutely right, Scott. Of course, one has to look at a safeguard, being that that individual would need to have a view that is shared with other people. If it’s just a view that everyone else opposes then of course there’s very less likelihood that this is going to happen. But in general, if that view has got some worth in it and it is particularly interesting, you will often find that other people share the same view.

And that’s the thing – you might have a strong view about something, you will discuss it in your region and you’ll suddenly find out that other people in the region have got the same view as you. And that starts getting the ball rolling. You will find that ultimately it gets to the right people. It ultimately influences the ICANN process.

We’ve had several instances of that taking place where one individual was unhappy about something, got the ball rolling, opened their mouths, said it in their local meeting – and when I say “local meeting,” these are conference calls that take place by calling up on the phone. It’s a free phone number for most areas around the world. Take part in a conference and from that point onwards the ball is rolling, and it makes it into policy eventually. It takes a while because any consensus takes a while. There’s a lot of discussion. Sometimes you might think “Oh dear, another

conference call, another amount of discussion and we’re going around in circles,” but you know what? Ultimately it works.

Scott Pinzon: So if someone’s listening to this and they think “Well, I like that. I didn’t know I could actually affect how the Internet runs. I want to help,” how can an individual get involved with At-Large?

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: There are a couple of ways. The first way is to join an At-Large Structure, and there’s a list of those on the At-Large website which is on www.atlarge.icann.org, and in there you will find all sorts of information about At-Large Structures. But a faster way in fact is to go and click on “Join.” There is a tab on there, click on “Join” and it will take you to a page where you can take your process further.

Once you’ve joined then you can start taking part into the discussions; in fact, you can even go and listen in to the discussions before even joining. If you look at the schedule of activities that are taking place, unless the meeting is closed – and I think in 99% of the cases all meetings are open – it is interesting to listen in. And if you’re interested in joining then you can make up your mind afterwards.

Scott Pinzon: Olivier, it was a delight to speak with you. Thank you for taking time to share a little about yourself and about At-Large for the *ICANN Start* listeners.

Olivier Crépin-Leblond: Well thank you very much, Scott, and I hope that we will get more enquiries from people who are interested out there. As I said we’re open, we’re ready to listen to the needs of the individual Internet user. Thank you.

Scott Pinzon: Thank you.

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