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**SENT VIA FEDEX AND EMAIL**

John Jeffrey, Esq  
General Counsel and Secretary  
Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers  
12025 Waterfront Drive, Suite 300  
Los Angeles, CA 90094-2536

Re: Delays to Key Milestones in the New gTLD Program

Dear John:

As you know, on January 11, 2013 the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers ("ICANN") announced via webinar that the deadline by which it would post the results of its String Similarity Reviews for new gTLD applications would be delayed until March 1, 2013. This announcement is the most recent in a series of delays to important milestones in the new gTLD program, including failures to meet deadlines in the development, establishment and implementation of the Trademark Clearinghouse and Uniform Rapid Suspension program.

In regard to the String Similarity Review, this latest delay will mark seven months from the original August 2012 deadline set by ICANN for these Reviews to be completed. Moreover, as noted above, completion of the String Similarity Review is but one of several key milestones that ICANN has proven unable to meet and has thus required delay. Specifically, ICANN committed to complete Initial Evaluations of all applications by November 2012. As with the String Similarity review, ICANN has also announced numerous delays to this milestone which is now scheduled to be completed in August 2013, nine months from ICANN's original completion date.

In light of these substantial and continuing delays to important milestones in the new gTLD program, Verisign is concerned that ICANN is failing to concurrently adjust other critical aspects of the overall new gTLD program timeline in a manner that protects the integrity of the application review process as well as the expectations, rights and obligations of the many applicants participating in the program. For example, the deadline by which an objection to an application must be filed is March 13, 2013. This date is now just twelve days after ICANN intends to announce the results of its String Similarity Review. The information provided by the



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String Similarity Review will be for many a critical factor in determining whether to file objections. Despite the great importance the results will play in the objection process, ICANN has left only twelve days for objectors to access and prepare objection submissions. Further, to the extent the String Similarity Review panel will also announce on March 1, 2013 which applications strings are, in the review panel's view, substantially similar to current TLDs, registries such as Verisign will also have a mere twelve days to file objections to applications that are not denied by ICANN due to string similarity. In summary, the March 13 deadline provides little time for an objector to assess its objection options.

Moreover, ICANN's March 13 objection filing deadline is inconsistent with its own requirements set forth in the Application Guidebook ("AGB"). Section 1.1.2.6 of the AGB states:

The objection filing period will close following the end of the Initial Evaluation period...with a two-week window of time between the posting of the Initial Evaluation results and the close of the objection filing period.

The timing set forth in the AGB which provided for the String Similarity Reviews to be completed well before the Initial Evaluations, and the closing of the objection filing period no earlier than two weeks after the posting of the Initial Evaluation results, makes logical sense in that it provided the parties at least a month's time between these events. It ensured a party is not required to expend the resources necessary to prepare and submit an objection to an application that may not survive ICANN scrutiny in the first place. Therefore, consistent with the express terms of the AGB, ICANN must take appropriate steps to ensure the objection filing period remains open until two weeks following the close of the Initial Evaluation Period.

Verisign would also like to express its deep concern regarding certain statements made during the January 11 webinar by ICANN's representative Christine Willet. During the webinar, Ms. Willet stated that ICANN had reservations about the "clarity and consistency of the [String Similarity Review] process" and that current results of the Reviews are ones that Ms. Willet "can't stand behind" and that ICANN "cannot explain."

These revelations portend significant problems for applicants as well as current registry operators and are only exacerbated by a lack of transparency into the process ICANN is employing in its String Similarity and Initial Evaluation assessments. Indeed, absent a full disclosure of the issues ICANN is facing, any future results ICANN may obtain from a revised String Similarity



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assessment process are likely to only raise more questions and lack the necessary credibility required to successfully launch the new gTLD program. Thus, ICANN should disclose the method and manner by which it is performing these String Similarity assessments, including the makeup of the String Similarity Panel, the process by which applications are reviewed by the Panel, the standards and tools used to assess whether an application is “similar” enough to an existing TLD or applied-for-string to create “a probability of user confusion,” and the problems encountered by ICANN that has caused it to reassess the results of these yet-to-be disclosed assessments. Furthermore, ICANN should allow the community to participate in determining ways to remediate the problems that have been encountered in order to ensure the path forward is the right one for all stakeholders.

Verisign looks forward to working with ICANN constructively to resolve these issues.

Sincerely,

**Jonathan Spencer**  
Vice President and Associate General Counsel  
VeriSign, Inc.