

Internationalizing the top-level of the generic domain namespace

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Abstract

The content space of the Internet has long since become a broadly multilingual repository of material vibrantly reflecting the diversity of the cultural and intellectual creativity of the peoples of the world. Although a long distance remains to be covered before this will be truly global, the present state is remarkably similar to the cyberspace envisioned by William Gibson, "experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity ... clusters and constellations of data."

It was recognized somewhat more recently that the identifier space -- despite being immeasurably shallower in semantic potential -- is not devoid of language attribute. The development of IDN was initiated in recognition of the need for the harmonization of the identifier space with the content space to reveal, rather than obscure, the languages of the material being identified. This is an absolute precondition for the growth of the Internet. It is not reasonable to expect the people in any community to perceive the Net as relevant if it does not provide access to meaningful content in languages that they understand. This implies a self-limiting perimeter based on language demarcation. It is therefore not surprising that many people interested in the Internet's growth welcome the strides thus far made with IDN and are eager to see them continue.

This action is, however, also seen from another perspective, with concern about the essential character of the Internet being jeopardized through the proliferation of insular resources maintained by language communities for their own internal benefit.

Whatever the merit of that consideration may be, it can be noted that the top-level domain namespace includes two major categories: national TLDs and generic TLDs (which in the pivotal proposal made by Jon Postel in 1996, in fact, were termed international). As the discussion of the development of IDN is now turning to top-level labels, the globally inclusive purpose of the generic TLDs should be kept clearly in mind.

The clarity with which national domains can be associated with specific languages makes them obviously well suited for the implementation of top-level IDN. It is, however, also here that the effect of forming "clusters and constellations" is greatest. This is to be applauded from the perspectives of the local beneficiary communities and, despite all fears, is quite likely to strengthen the Internet massively. In the doing, however, need for ensuring a similarly robust development of an ever more international single community of Internet users is also highlighted.

This presentation will discuss key considerations in the application of IDN to the top-level of the generic namespace, and demonstrate a practical implementation in the dotMuseum TLD.