

It's not a celebrity nor a world leader -- it's just a four letter acronym. Yet it has earned press coverage from the BBC World Service, Bloomberg, Radio France, Reuters, *The Guardian*, *The Wall Street Journal* and thousands more. What is the big deal about new gTLDs? That's what we explore on this episode of *ICANN Start*.

[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?
- What are the key concepts I must know about it?
- How can I learn more?

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Scott Pinzon: Welcome; I'm Scott Pinzon. We recorded this edition of *Start* at ICANN's Headquarters in Marina Del Rey, California. If you have heard of new gTLDs but you're not quite clear on what they are, why they matter, and what you should do about them, you've got the right podcast. Let's cut right to our interview.

Joining us now is our Manager of New gTLD Communications, Michele Jourdan. Welcome to the show.

Michele Jourdan: Thanks for having me.

Scott Pinzon: Well thanks for taking time to talk with us. Let's start at the start: we keep throwing around acronyms in ICANN. So what is a new gTLD?

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- Michele Jourdan: Well a new gTLD stands for Generic Top Level Domain. You're most likely already familiar with top level domains and in fact if you use the internet you probably use them every day already. Top level domains are internet extensions or strings such as .com, .net or .org. They are at the end of a domain name address and there are roughly two dozen gTLDs in the domain name system right now. But with the new gTLD program there could soon be hundreds of them.
- Scott Pinzon: What makes them generic? It's the "g" I think that throws some people off.
- Michele Jourdan: Right now there are ccTLDs and there are gTLDs. ccTLDs are country code Top Level Domains. Country Code Top Level Domains are, an example would be Brazil is .br. There are always two characters and they represent the country.
- Scott Pinzon: Okay so .uk, .jp, .cn...all those.
- Michele Jourdan: Exactly. Yes.
- Scott Pinzon: But we're not talking about those then. That's what the "g" is for, is to say *not* country code.
- Michele Jourdan: Yes, generic, which means in this program anybody can apply for pretty much any word that they want to.
- Scott Pinzon: On June 20, 2011 at a meeting in Singapore, the ICANN Board approved a process by which any organization can apply for a new gTLD. And the world kind of went nuts. I mean within a week or so there were thousands of articles all over the media including the prime time news, and the front page of the BBC's website and all this stuff. So why do gTLDs seem to matter so much?
- Michele Jourdan: We think new gTLDs really represent the next wave of innovation on the internet. One of ICANN's founding principles is to promote competition and choice in the domain name industry. We think new gTLDs will help support that. It will help create competition at the registry level because when you apply for a gTLD you're in fact applying to become a registry business.
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- Scott Pinzon: That sounds important. So this is not the same as I go get ScottPinzon.com -- I guess that would be a second level name?
- Michele Jourdan: Exactly. It's really important to note that applying for a new gTLD is not the same as registering a second level domain name. You know, right now anyone can go to a registrar and register, you know, MicheleJourdan.com. This program is about if I was to apply for a .michele I would be running the registry that then coordinates and manages all of the potential second level domains in that top level domain.
- Scott Pinzon: I see, so the same way that Verisign runs .com, that's what a registry is. You're becoming the entity that runs that top level extension.
- Michele Jourdan: Exactly.
- Scott Pinzon: That sounds like it might be too expensive for an individual.
- Michele Jourdan: It is too expensive for an individual. This is really for entities and organizations and you cannot be a sole proprietorship but any other established entity can apply.
- Scott Pinzon: Okay, I want to get a little bit more to why do they matter so much. Because when I've tried to talk to people about this, a common reaction is "Oh everybody just uses search engines now, so who cares what those last few characters are in a web domain name?"
- Michele Jourdan: Even search engines right now do take into account the top level domain. If you put in "Texas" into Google, the first instance that the search will return is, texas.gov.
- Scott Pinzon: Ah.
- Michele Jourdan: The Wikipedia.com instance for the search result of Texas is like second or third. I think they matter also because for consumers when you're looking for something on the internet, right now there are sites that look like legitimate sites that may not be legitimate sites. If you're looking for [brand name] shoes and you go to shoes.[brand] you can be pretty sure that those are going to be actual [brand]-branded shoes.
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Scott Pinzon: For some entity that applies to have their own gTLD, and they get approved, I can see why that makes life interesting for them; they're in a new business now. But what about the rest of us? Who do new gTLDs affect?

Michele Jourdan: Well new gTLDs will affect, like you said, the registries by increasing competition among registry businesses. I think new gTLDs will also affect businesses, the entities that could potentially take advantage of this new branding and marketing tool. And ultimately, you know, consumers will be affected by how they either search for information on the internet or find information on the internet.

Scott Pinzon: All right. So you mentioned that companies could apply for their own brand, for example, as a top level domain, but I imagine there are other types of TLDs possible. What would those be?

Michele Jourdan: There are. The different types of TLDs that people can apply for are community-based TLDs. There are geographic names. There are internationalized domain names, which we call IDNs. And then everything else falls under the standard category. Community-based, geographic and IDNs all require an extra level of preparation because they have special rules and added requirements that you will need to fulfill for those.

Community-based TLD is a gTLD operated for the benefit of a clearly delineated community.

And you must also have a written endorsement from that community that you seek to represent, if you want to apply for one of those. Community-based TLDs also require you to operate the TLD within self-specified restrictions described in the registry contract that you sign with ICANN.

Scott Pinzon: I guess an example of that might be .cat which is a TLD dedicated to preserving the Catalan language. Their own documents said that if you're going to register a domain and put something up under the .cat top level domain, it has to be in Catalan.

Michele Jourdan: Yes. That's a perfect example of what a community-based TLD is.

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Geographic TLDs represent a city or a region such as maybe .nyc or .lasvegas. The geographic names must give appropriate consideration to the interest of governments. So regional, sub-regional names, and capital cities require approval from the relevant governments and in some cases, city names may require approval as well. Geographic names are defined by the ISO and UN lists. And also country names are not eligible to be applied for.

Scott Pinzon: So those are not considered *generic* top level domains.

Michele Jourdan: Exactly. IDNs, Internationalized Domain Names, are TLDs that represent local language characters, so they are non-ASCII, which means non-Latin based character sets. We had the IDN fast track process, that's where country code top level domains were able to get their country code in their native language script. Well with the IDNs through the new gTLD program people will be able to apply for any word that they want in their native language script.

So if someone in Dubai wanted to apply for something in Arabic, they would be able to apply for whatever word they wanted in those particular characters.

Scott Pinzon: Well there are more people on the internet not speaking English than speaking English, so that's a big deal. Arabic reads right to left, where so far most domain names are read left to right.

Michele Jourdan: Which makes this all the more cool, because now when someone types in an Internet address they have to type in the majority of it in their native character set, then they have to switch to English. Well with this program now they will be able to type in the address completely in their native language script. So those are the basic types of top level domains that people can apply for through the program.

Scott Pinzon: We've referred to this concept of "applying." What's involved in that? Say that I work for some organization, we thought this through, and we think it would be really wonderful to have our own top level domain; we know exactly the one we want. Now what do we do? Is it real, real simple?

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- Michele Jourdan: No. It's not real, real simple. First of all you need to be sure you're very familiar with the Applicant Guidebook. The Applicant Guidebook is basically your roadmap for everything you need to know to apply for a gTLD. The application fee is \$185,00, so it is a significant commitment and investment.
- \$5,000 of that is due upon registering in the TLD Application System. We also call that TAS. The application window is open from January 12, 2012 and it's open for 90 days. So the application window closes on April 12, 2012 but it is really important that you must register in TAS by March 29, 2012. And that is to ensure that we get the remaining \$180,000 evaluation fee by the 12<sup>th</sup>. If the evaluation fee comes after the 12<sup>th</sup> then the application may not be eligible for review.
- Scott Pinzon: Why so much? Is this a big cash grab by ICANN?
- Michele Jourdan: No, the fee was actually constructed based on three different elements. One is cost recovery. The other is potential litigation. And then also we have a number of external evaluation panels that will be evaluating each application, and part of that fee goes to paying them.
- Scott Pinzon: ICANN is not just taking in all these applications and looking at them, going "I like this one, I don't like this one, oh this is cute."
- Michele Jourdan: No, no.
- Scott Pinzon: Tell me more about this process. I'm assuming TAS - I will find that somewhere at ICANN.org?
- Michele Jourdan: Yes. The TLD Application System will be available on our website once the application window opens.
- Scott Pinzon: Okay.
- Michele Jourdan: You fill out the application through TAS. You have to fill out 50 questions basically and these are all covered in Module 2 of the Applicant Guide Book. The questions cover the applying organization, its background, the mission and the purpose of the TLD, its proposed technical and operational setup and its financial capabilities.
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At the close of the application window there will be an administrative check in order to make sure that all mandatory questions are answered and all required supporting documents are there. At the end of the administrative check, which will be about May 1, is when all of the public portions of the applications and the applied for TLDs will be posted on our website.

Scott Pinzon: I could look on the website and I can see every company or organization that has applied for a TLD, and what character string they've applied for?

Michele Jourdan: Yes, anyone interested in learning who has applied for what -- even if you haven't applied yourself -- you will be able to go to our website and see the status of each application as it works its way through the evaluation process.

Scott Pinzon: I've filled out an application. What happens to it?

Michele Jourdan: It goes to the evaluation panels. There are six different evaluation panels that are going to look at the application. Before that the application has to go through a background check as well. If for some reason an application does not pass any one of the evaluation panels, the application can elect to go into extended evaluation. And that is the evaluation panels taking a closer look at the applications.

Scott Pinzon: This is if they looked at it and for some reason thought something was wrong or incomplete or whatever, they might kick it out so this applicant then has an opportunity to say "Wait, you don't understand; there is more to this," or something.

Michele Jourdan: Exactly, it's an opportunity for clarification.

Scott Pinzon: Okay. What happens if two companies get the same bright idea and they both apply for .doorknobs or something? What happens then?

Michele Jourdan: Which will likely happen! If that happens, then the applicants and the applications go into string contention. String contention is when two or more applicants apply for the same or a confusingly similar string. If that's the case then if one of the applied-for strings is a community-based

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applicant, meaning they have applied saying that they have support from a community to serve that particular community, then they can elect a community priority.

Scott Pinzon: What's the community priority evaluation? That's a mouthful.

Michele Jourdan: It is. By electing community priority in a string contention, that gives that application priority and if that community application passes the community test, then they will win in that string contention set. If none of the applications in that contention set are community then we really encourage the applicants to work out an arrangement amongst themselves. If no agreement can be made then as a last resort it will go to auction.

Scott Pinzon: There is a lot to this. I always wondered why the evaluation process was going to take months, but when you begin to realize, well, they have to do criminal background checks, and so on, I see where it takes a lot of effort.

Michele Jourdan: It's an involved process.

Scott Pinzon: About how long does this whole process take? From when you turn in your application to -- with the hopeful result that it gets delegated into the root zone and becomes a TLD on the internet?

Michele Jourdan: I think best case scenario from the time you apply to the time you could potentially be in the root is nine months. Even though the application period opens mid-January we won't start seeing any of the new TLDs come online until early 2013.

Scott Pinzon: Once you have your TLD, what can you do with it?

Michele Jourdan: Pretty much it's up to you. That's one of the cool things about this, is we're going to start to see a lot of new innovative business models. Having your own TLD means you can make the rules. You set the policies on how you want to use it, who you want to let use it. You can register second level domains. You can keep it for yourself and use it amongst your employees. You can make it as secure as you want. You can sell it for as much or for as little as you want. It's exciting.

Scott Pinzon: Who knows what people will come up with!

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- Michele Jourdan: That's right.
- Scott Pinzon: And especially when you involve all these other languages.
- Michele Jourdan: Yes.
- Scott Pinzon: I have an idea on how I think I can make a lot of money. I'm going to apply for the TLD .[brand] and then just hold out until a certain firm bought it from me. What are my chances?
- Michele Jourdan: If you have \$185,000 that you would like to put up and attempt that scheme, go for it! [Laughs] But odds are that once you applied for it and the strings were posted, then that company would probably notice and then object.
- Scott Pinzon: Okay, I don't like my chances now.
- Michele Jourdan: Yes, in the new gTLD program there are lots of enhanced trademark protections.
- Scott Pinzon: What other kinds of protections would be in place? Perhaps I have a trademark and it's a big deal in Brazil but outside the country other people may not be aware of it. How do these other kinds of trademarks get defended?
- Michele Jourdan: There are other rights protection mechanisms built into the program. There is the Uniform Rapid Suspension System. It provides rapid relief for trademark holders in clear-cut cases of abuse. It really offers cheaper and faster responses than the existing Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy. Then there is the Post Delegation Dispute Resolution Procedure-- There are several mechanisms in place all of which are outlined in great detail in Module 5 of the Applicant Guidebook.
- Scott Pinzon: Thank God, because they don't lend themselves to an audio presentation very well at all! Okay, Module 5 of the Applicant Guidebook for details.
- Michele Jourdan: Yes.
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Scott Pinzon: Well, we are coming to the end of our time together. You've described some pretty complex processes and this is really the tip of the iceberg. If you had to boil this down to just some key principles that our listeners should take away, what would you suggest?

Michele Jourdan: Well I would suggest that you become familiar with the Applicant Guidebook. It's posted on our website which is [www.newgtlds.icann.org](http://www.newgtlds.icann.org). There is a wealth of information. The Applicant Guidebook is always one click away no matter where you go on the site. There are fact sheets available. There is a whole set of FAQs. There is several different educational videos that you can watch to get a good overview of what new gTLDs are.

There is also a series of Ask the Experts videos where we've talked with current registry heads about what it's like running a registry business. If you can't find what you need in any of those resources you can always send us an email to [newgtlds@icann.org](mailto:newgtlds@icann.org).

Also a few key dates for you to remember: January 12, 2012, the application window opens. March 29, 2012 is the last day to register in the TLD application system. April 12, 2012 the application window closes. And on May 1, 2012 all the applied for strings will be posted to our site.

Scott Pinzon: Okay! That gives a roadmap to anyone who thinks they may want to pursue this. Thank you so much for your time today Michele.

Michele Jourdan: Thanks.

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