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Domain names on the horizon:  
.paris, .nyc and .gal?

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Nadal's dominance stirs  
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Rethinking the legacy  
of an eccentric maverick

ALICE RAWSTHORN ON

MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS



Dirk Krischenowski, founder of dot-Berlin, a company that was formed to campaign for a domain and has signed up a raft of corporate sponsors.

Thomas Rosenthal

**In Internet sweepstakes,  
now is the time  
to claim a domain**

**PARIS:** When Internet regulators gathered in the French capital last week for a conference that starts Monday, the marquee event was a quirky catwalk for cities and regions competing for domain names like .berlin, .paris, .quebec and even .cat — for Catalonia.

The mighty dot, New York City boosters said, could transform the metropolis into "the master of its future," with a .nyc label helping to build "trust, justice and civic pride." Berlin supporters insisted that a super-dot would help establish the city's global reputation.

Officials at the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or Iann — the main oversight agency for the underpinnings of the Internet — said they were poised to open domain names to endless variations, one of the most significant changes yet in how the Internet works.

"We're talking about introducing potentially thousands more names," said Paul Levins, executive officer of Iann, the California-based nonprofit company that is the host of the Paris conference, which has drawn more than 1,300 delegates from 130 countries. "The addressing system hasn't fundamentally changed since its invention. These changes have the potential to have a huge impact on the way we express ourselves on the Net."

A "generic top-level domain" is essentially the label for the letters that come after the dot in an Internet name. Dot-com is the most celebrated, but the handful of existing domains range from .asia and .travel to .biz, .info and .mobi.

After debating the system for years, Iann's board is poised to vote on whether to set up the broad criteria for approving new domain names with limitless possibilities. It would allow companies to turn their own brands into domains or to create broad product groups such as .car, .sports or .bank — all candidates for dots. Ebay is already a contender to use its name, according to Levins, who added, "You can imagine the branding opportunities."

If, as expected, the 21-member international board adopts a new system, the vote would set in motion a process that eventually would start to open up the Internet to hundreds of new names by the beginning of next year.

With the current system, some inventive cities and companies have already maneuvered to virtually seize their own domains.

Many Los Angeles companies adopted the .la label for Laos while Bavarian government agencies in Germany

registered .by from Belarus, part of the former Soviet Republic. The tiny nations of Tuvalu (.tv) and the federated states of Micronesia (.fm) have also ceded their domains to media companies, reaping millions of dollars in licensing fees from third-party registrars that are not connected to the countries.

But other cities do not want to borrow from obscure republics. New York has been angling for its own dot since 2001, but most domain candidates agree that Berlin appears to be moving the furthest. A separate company, called .berlin, was formed by Dirk Krischenowski, a former media and pharmaceutical company executive, to campaign for a domain. It has signed up nearly a dozen corporate sponsors,

from the Grand Hyatt hotel to Lotto Berlin.

"We saw there was a growing need in countries like Germany with very dense and complicated names," said Johannes Lenz-Hawliczek, a spokesman for the company, which has three employees. "There is a need for significant and easy-to-remember and intuitive addresses."

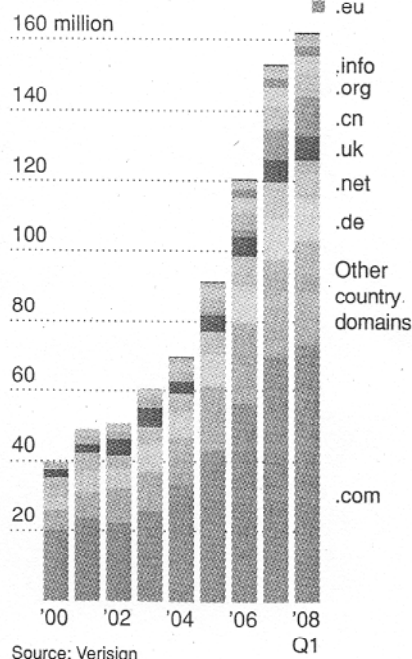
The pressure to open up the system to allow more choices comes at a time when the Internet's addresses are rapidly being depleted with the explosion of computers and devices that connect to it. By last autumn, Iann estimated that only 17 percent of an available pool of 4 billion network addresses remained, and they are expected to run out in the next five years.

While passage of the plan is expected, some opponents say the new system would create bureaucratic headaches for companies fending off people seeking to create new domains that infringe on their trademarks.

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**Domain name registrations**



Source: Verisign

## The race is on to claim a domain

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At its meeting this week, Iann is also promoting an additional, number-based address system, IPv6, which could add trillions of new addresses. But international adoption of the new standards has been slow, in part because of the costs of switching and concerns that the new technical standard will make it easier for governments or companies to track what individuals are doing on the Internet.

In preparation to dazzle Internet regulators, a number of the city and regional candidates for domain names met together on Friday for what was billed as the "2008 Top Level Domain Catwalk" to try to persuade any doubters about the benefits of opening up the naming system.

"It's better to have a community," said Sébastien Bachollet, who is leading the .paris campaign, which started last May.

"If you have a dedicated population for .paris, it will help people to understand what they're using and how to use it."

The Paris project is in its infancy and trying to enlist financial backers, while the Berlin project has raised almost €1 million from sponsors. Many other cities estimate that they will need about that amount to negotiate through the bureaucratic process.

Other organizers in New York and Hamburg have created nonprofit

**The mighty dot  
'could build trust, justice  
and civic pride.'**

groups in a bid to build community support for the names.

The application fee for a domain name under the proposed system has not been set, but candidates estimate that it could range from €25,000 to €250,000, or about \$39,000 to \$390,000. Iann is also prepared to set up an auction system if competing groups bid for the same name. Private companies would reap their profit by selling the

domain names to registrars, which would then sell them to individual customers.

Iann is also setting up standards that would allow the regulator to reject applications from people who try to grab trademarked names or to rebuff proposals on moral grounds or because of community objections.

"They've discussed scenarios where someone wants to have football and how to cope with it if it means soccer or football. And they've also talked about what happens if someone proposes .jihad," said Lenz-Hawliczek, from the Berlin project. "It's a really complex issue, and we've been discussing it for the past three years. It's not easy."

The Berlin company has learned that lesson through hard experience. Last year, some politicians raised questions about protecting their own site, Berlin.de, because they did not want to compete with a .berlin portal. Those are some of the same delicate issues that organizers are facing in other cities when they approach officials for their blessings.



# Internet agency relaxes rules on domain names

By Doreen Carvajal

**PARIS:** The Internet's main oversight agency relaxed rules Thursday to permit the introduction of new Internet domain names to join ".com," making the first sweeping changes in the network's 25-year-old addressing system.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, or Icnann, which presides over the system, voted unanimously here to approve the new guidelines.

The system now consists of more than 20 address extensions that follow the dot. The end of domain names have so far been generally restricted to labels for countries — .it for Italy or .de for Germany, for example — and descriptions for broad categories like .com for commerce and .org for organizations.

But the new system could smooth the way for broader names like .sports — at least three groups are already vying for that name. It also could pave the way for the introduction of a .xxx domain name for adults sites, which backers have lobbied the Icnann board without success for years.

Domain names help computers find Web sites and route e-mail messages. Adding suffixes can make it easier to promote easy-to-remember names.

Several Icnann board members spoke publicly in support of opening up the system, but also expressed reservations.

"How many can we truly support?" asked Dave Wodelet, a board member from Canada, who said the best guess was about 5,000 generic domain suffixes. "But how high can we actually go? We really don't know. There are both technical and administrative limits."

Icnann also voted to open public comment on allowing addresses to be written in non-English characters from Asian and Arabic languages, as well as Cyrillic characters. The Russian president, Dmitri Medvedev, called for the use of Cyrillic this month out of concern that Russian was losing popularity.

Despite the vote, many questions remained unanswered, including how much the application fees would cost. Early estimates range from \$10,000 to \$250,000. The fees would be used to offset costs to implement the system. Icnann executives estimate that they have already spent \$10 million on the project, a budget they said could rise by an additional \$10 million.

Many of those supporting designations for their cities say the total cost of their quests could add up to more than €1 million, or \$1.57 million, with supporters of Berlin being the best financed with contributions from local hotels and the yellow pages publisher.

During a cocktail party at the Paris City Hall before the vote, Jean-Louis Missika, deputy mayor for innovation, announced the city's official support for a .Paris extension.

Under the new guidelines, any string of letters would be eligible for consideration but subject to an independent arbitration process to evaluate objections to proposed labels that could be rebuffed on "morality or public order" grounds, Icnann said.

Susan Crawford, a board member and a law school professor from New York City, said she had mixed feelings about name expansion because of concerns about Icnann playing a role in debates about community standards and morality. She called it a "sea change" in the institution's approach because the plan could "allow for any government to effectively veto a string that makes it uncomfortable."

The details will likely be developed and announced in coming weeks to meet Icnann's deadline of permitting the first new candidates for domain names early in 2009. Under the guidelines, companies with trademarked names would have top claiming rights to their brands, but if there were disputes about generic names — like .sports — conflicts could be settled by auctions with names doled out to the highest bidders.

Thomas Lowenhaupt, founding director of the nonprofit group, Connecting.nyc, which is pressing a campaign to create the domain name .nyc, for New York City, said he was pleased with the board's progress.

But he said that as the new system appeared more imminent, he was getting concerned about the chances for a gold rush mentality to develop.

"My adviser told me that as this thing gets closer you're going to see everyone coming out of the woodwork," said Lowenhaupt, who has been lobbying for the name since 2001 and has been working closely with other cities in Berlin and Paris with similar projects.

Out of his pocket, Lowenhaupt plucked the business card of a rival for the same name. The .nyc name was slashed across the face of the card, and in the corner, the fine print of an address for an office in Key West, Florida.

The other proposal before Icnann would permit addresses entirely in non-English characters for the first time. Specific countries would be put on a fast track to receive the equivalent of their two-letter country code, like Bulgaria's .bg, in a native language, according to The Associated Press. The Icnann board said it would seek public comment on the guidelines before its next major meeting in November, The AP said.