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ICANN Opens the Window for New gTLD Applications: Are You Ready?

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Today marks the opening of the window to apply to become the registry for a new top level domain name. An applicant can apply for any term, subject to certain limited restrictions set forth by ICANN in its Applicant Guidebook. The terms include , and . Where in the past you might find the login page for your bank at www.examplebank.com/accounts, in the next couple of years you might find it at www.accounts.examplebank.

While ICANN, the California based non-profit that runs the domain name system, has come under fire for its plan to expand domain name options, its CEO recently published a blog post indicating that ICANN is prepared to move forward. The window to apply for a new gTLD in Round 1 is currently scheduled to close on April 12, 2012. ICANN anticipates that new gTLDs will be an ongoing process, with a second round opening at some future date. However, ICANN has not put forth a date certain when it will open Round 2 and there is no guarantee that the rules and prices for future rounds will remain the same as they are for Round 1. Even if future rounds do open at some point, the Applicant Guidebook makes it clear that no application will be allowed if a confusingly similar top level domain name has already been granted to another registry applicant. As a result, brand owners must decide now whether or not they wish to apply to become a registry or if they are going to take a “wait and see” approach.

The cost to apply is not insignificant. ICANN’s application fee alone is \$185,000 and it is estimated that the total cost of running a top level domain name over the course of the 10 year Registry Agreement term can easily reach \$2 million or more.

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