

Most Unaware of Coming Web Domain Changes

Paul Sandle and Dan Lalor

LONDON (Reuters) - Two thirds of businesses are unaware they will be able to use their own name in place of domain extensions such as .com, .org, or .net when Internet domains are liberalized next year, according to a survey.

The change would let the likes of Nike or Microsoft control their own domain and better exploit their brands, and also counter cyber-squatters who use variations of brands on the 280 or so existing domain extensions.

"If you have '.nike', for example, you can create real and specific branded Websites, like 'running.nike' or 'runlondon.nike'," Joe White, chief operating officer of domain registrar Gandi.net, told Reuters in an interview.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which oversees domain names, is expected to start taking applications for new top-level domains early next year, said Future Laboratory, which conducted the research.

But the move is not on the radar of a majority of companies, the survey for Gandi.net found.

"(Companies) are generally completely unaware of this change coming down the line," said White. "This change has not yet permeated into the mainstream for businesses or consumers."

"However, those businesses which are aware actually see the prospect as being quite exciting," he said.

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The price of \$185,000 will initially limit applications to the largest corporations and organizations, said Tom Savigar, Strategy and Insight Director at The Future Laboratory.

ICANN is expecting 300-500 applications when it opens its doors in the first quarter of next year, he said.

"You'll see the big global corporations getting there early to own more of their online space," he said.

"(Owning their domain) could secure a higher level of credibility and recognition."

Smaller businesses will be able to use more specific extensions to match their business sector or geography such as ".london" or ".paris," he said.

The Future Laboratory surveyed 100 e-commerce managers; 50 from high-street companies and 50 from small and medium businesses online.

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