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Generic gTLDs preparing to launch: Top considerations for marketers

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When the 1,400-plus new gTLDs begin to launch in the latter part of 2013, a paradigm shift begins that will dramatically affect the way that Internet users search and navigate online.

While many marketers are taking a wait-and-see approach, those interested in proactively capitalizing on opportunities are evaluating the scale and magnitude of the upcoming gTLD impacts including how it will affect search.

On the dot
In terms of scale, half of the world's top brands have applied for a brand gTLD and will launch it in the next 12-18 months.

Large finance, insurance, retailer, media, entertainment and consumer goods organizations will be able to offer more secure services via their brand gTLD than with their .com.

As such, consumers will begin to look for brand gTLDs and further the migration from .com.

At the same time, hundreds of new generic gTLDs will begin to segment the Internet into ZIP codes ranging from .family, .moms and .pizza to .golf, .news and .anything. These generics represent a critical opportunity for digital marketers.

Most notably, Google, with its nearly 100 gTLDs, will entice businesses to migrate from .com into one of their portfolio gTLDs. They will likely sweeten the deal to accelerate this migration with analytics, AdWords and other desirable digital assets and services. Interested in moving your .com to .wow, .inc, .map, .tour, .baby, .show or about a hundred others of Google's options?

What does Google want in running a registry? The data, of course.

Likewise, Amazon will empty its portfolio of 76 generic gTLDs to further segment its already massive distribution portal for anything you want to buy and have delivered in two days to your home.

Amazon's distribution categories include .show, .circle, .buy, .tunes, .app, .talk, smile, .secure, .play and many more.

Specific on generic
As gTLDs begin to launch, the most important questions we hear from marketers are "Where are the data points?" and "How do we know consumer adoption will change?" as well as "How do I know what we're doing will work?"

The answer is that the Internet has never seen such a massive scaled transformation, so we do not have data points to guarantee the outcomes.

But we can make certain assumptions based upon who has applied, for what and how consumer adoption has occurred in other paradigm shifts, such as the rise of social media. And the good news is we have key data today that we did not have when the Internet exploded in the 1990s.

As such, marketers should begin with the end in mind and use current data to drive decision making to achieve goals that we can measure with the data we will have in the future.

Following are some of the most critical tips for executing a sound generic gTLD strategy:

Consider global implications. Companies operating on a global scale will want to pay close attention to the roughly 116 internationalized domain names (IDNs) for various languages that will launch first.

Marketers should evaluate not only where they currently do business, but also check plans for future geographic locations and whether having a local IDN will impact brand trust factors.

Capitalize on generics not in conflict. The generic gTLD applications that are not in conflict will have clearance to launch over the next six months once they pass through contracting and delegation.

From category-based generics such as .families, .wine and .pizza to geographic related domains including .NYC or .Miami, these strings will be available to marketers looking to improve the online customer experience and engagement.

If competitors move forward on leveraging these generics first, then companies could struggle to catch up.

Research gTLD ownership and marketing plans. Marketers who are interested in a specific generic should gather as many details as possible about which entity owns it, their marketing plans and how they will protect brand owners, not to mention whether they have partnerships with any competitors.

When evaluating whether to pursue a generic gTLD, having clarity around the treatment of the gTLD and plans for building marketplace credibility are key.

Know the cost structure. GTLD registry operators retain the right to set their own fees for selling each generic, so marketers will likely see varying pricing models depending on whether they are trying to secure a high-demand generic or a less popular term.

Companies should investigate volume pricing models if they intend to buy multiple generics from the same gTLD owner.

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