

# Applications Open for Top-Level Domain Names: Brands Can Claim Valuable Internet Territory

For the first time in over a decade, businesses now have the opportunity to secure unique generic top-level domains (gTLDs) that can serve to carve out valuable internet territory and distinguish their brand from others. gTLDs are internet domain name extensions that not only include commonplace extensions (e.g., .com or .org), but can also encompass more specific descriptive extensions (e.g., .movie, .wine or .tokyo) or brand-oriented extensions (.bmw or .google). On April 30, 2026, for the first time since 2012/2013, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) reopened the application window for gTLDs for a limited time only—less than four months. This means that brand owners, their licensees or other companies will have the opportunity to register new top-level domain names, including ones specific to their business or industry, which can serve to help differentiate their brands from others and immediately indicate to consumers what type of products or services they offer and/or who they are.

## 1. What Are gTLDs and dotBrands?

Prior to 2012, there were a fixed number of gTLDs, such as .com, .biz, .net, .edu, .info and .gov. Then, for a brief period in 2012/2013, ICANN opened up applications for new gTLDs, and over a thousand new gTLDs were created, including descriptive terms like .music, .bank and .makeup and gTLDs in foreign language scripts like .everyone in Japanese characters and .institution in Chinese characters. gTLDs can also include the owner's trademark, and such brand-specific gTLDs are known as "dotBrands," and are subject to specific rules relating to their usage. For example, a dotBrand must be used exclusively by the brand owner, its affiliates and its authorized licensees. dotBrands help the brand owners immediately convey the nature and/or source of their products and services to consumers, while also distinguishing themselves from other brands with similar names in different industries. For example, if both an airline and an appliances company used "Alpha" branding, the airline could register the domain name alpha.airline to differentiate itself from alpha.com for appliances or could apply for a gTLD matching its brand name (e.g., .alpha).

## 2. Timing, Process and Fees for gTLD Applications

The gTLD application window opened on April 30, 2026, and closes on August 12, 2026. ICANN has published an [Applicant Guide Book](#) with detailed information concerning the process and application requirements, anticipated timelines and responses to [Frequently Asked Questions](#). Key features of the application process include:

- Applications must be filed in the name of an entity (not in the name of individuals or sole proprietorships).
- Applicants are generally required to pay a significant evaluation fee of \$227,000 USD for each application.
- The list of applied-for gTLDs and the applicants for same will then be published.
- If more than one applicant has applied for the same gTLD, then these applicants will have a two-week period to select a replacement gTLD, before the list of applications becomes final.
- The registry service provider will then evaluate the applications to eliminate any that are clearly incomplete or ineligible.
- Of the remaining applications, other parties with standing (e.g., an existing gTLD operator, or an owner or licensee of a registered or unregistered trademark) will have the opportunity to object to such applications and start a contention process. Grounds for objection include confusing similarity in the same language, infringement of the existing legal rights of another party, or violation of generally accepted principles of morality or public order (e.g., wording that incites violence, discrimination, abuse of children, etc.).
- The registry service provider will then complete a full evaluation of the remaining applications, including a background screening, financial evaluation, technical and operational evaluation, registry services evaluation, geographic names review (e.g., for gTLDs claiming a city or county such as .nyc, which are subject to

heightened scrutiny), evaluation of any contention processes brought by third parties, and brand criteria evaluation (if the application is for a dotBrand gTLD that utilizes a brand's trademark as part of the gTLD).

- Applicants have the right to challenge any final decisions concerning their applications and must do so within 14-21 days (depending on the nature of the decisions and challenges).
- ICANN may also issue warnings and concerns relating to a particular application throughout the process, which can serve as an opportunity for the applicant to make amendments to their application or otherwise seek to resolve the concerns.

### 3. What This Means for Your Brand

This brief gTLD application period is an opportunity for businesses to claim valuable internet territory specific to their brand and to immediately signal to consumers through their gTLDs what products and services they offer and who they are. Notably, it is unclear when the next gTLD application window will open after this one, so this may be the only opportunity for at least the immediate foreseeable future to secure a gTLD. While the substantial application filing fees and extensive review processes discussed above may be time-consuming and cost-prohibitive for many businesses, even if you do not elect to apply for a gTLD during this upcoming cycle, it would be prudent to monitor the new gTLDs that are being sought by others to ensure that they do not cause confusion with or otherwise endanger your brand. If you notice any third-party gTLD applications that appear problematic for your brand and meet the grounds for objections noted above, you can commence an objection process and/or establish defensive strategies to try to reduce the risks of cyber-squatters and other infringers.

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## Key Contacts

Morrison Cohen has extensive experience assisting clients with branding strategies and disputes, including with respect to domain names and trademarks. Our Technology, Data & IP team regularly counsels clients on brand protection, including making proactive filings and taking action against potential infringers. If you are considering filing a gTLD application, we can help you understand the process and evaluate whether it makes sense for your business. If filing a gTLD application is not feasible, but you remain concerned about protecting your brand, we can help you develop defensive strategies and take action against operators of gTLDs and domain names that may infringe your trademarks and cause confusion among consumers. Please feel free to contact our attorneys listed below.

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