

COMMENTS ON ICANN AT A CROSSROADS

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Internet Navigation and the Domain Name System
(2001-2004)

The views expressed are my own.

Things in the paper that I agree with

- “ICANN should have a clear mission of encouraging competition...ICANN should adopt a relatively automatic way of introducing new gTLDs....”
- “...ICANN must...strengthen the protections for incumbent domain name holders, so they are not subject to ‘nuisance’ or ‘ransom’ demands from new registries....”

The thing in the paper that I do not agree with

- “ICANN...should be...governed by and directly accountable to its users; the registries and registrars.”
 - “The third kind of change [to the root zone file] is the addition of data about a new TLD....”
[*Signposts in Cyberspace*] Therefore, under the proposal, registries would control access to the root zone file and could use that control to limit the entry of competitors.

A Conclusion of the National Academies Committee on Internet Navigation and the Domain Name System

- “Considering technical and operational performance alone, the addition of tens of gTLDs per year for several years would pose minimal risk to the stability of the root.” [*Signposts in Cyberspace*]
- In other words, there are no technical barriers to adding gTLDs at a rate substantially in excess of the rate at which they have been added in the past.

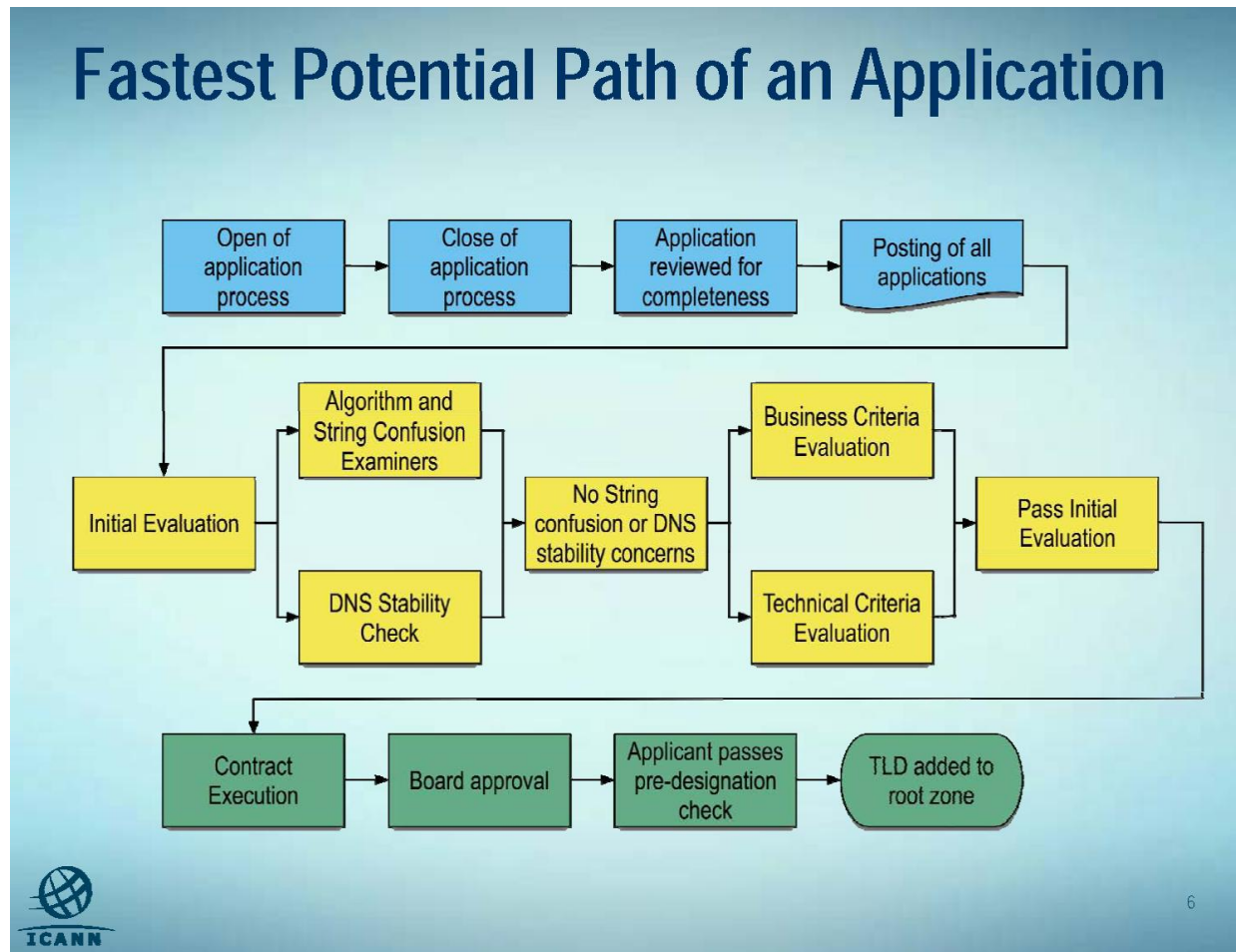
Benefits of Additional gTLD Entry

- Lower retail prices
- Increased non-price competition
- Possibly reduced need to regulate wholesale prices, the prices charged by registries to registrars

New ICANN gTLD Program

- “...one of [ICANN’s] foundational principles has been to promote competition in the domain-name marketplace while ensuring Internet security and stability. The expansion will allow for more innovation, choice and change to the Internet’s addressing system, now constrained by only 21 generic top-level domain names.... diversity, choice and competition are key to the continued success and reach of the global network.” [ICANN]

ICANN Process for Adding gTLDs



Reasons for Some Skepticism About ICANN Process

- It is complicated.
- It appears to have many of the shortcomings of the “comparative hearing” process that the Federal Communications Commission used in the past to allocate spectrum.
- ICANN has not come close to adding gTLDs at the rate of “tens per year” that the National Academies Committee said was technically feasible. [There were 15 gTLDs when *Signposts in Cyberspace* was published in 2005.]

But Could the Proposal Be Worse?

- Proposal is for the registries and registrars to govern ICANN, which would give them control of access to the root zone file.
- But why would the incumbent registries and registrars want to “adopt a relatively automatic way of introducing new gTLDs....”? That is, why would the incumbents want to face additional competition?
- The incumbent registries could limit competition simply by denying new gTLDs access to the root zone file.

Contrast with National Academies Committee Proposal C

- Under this approach, ICANN's governance would be simplified by narrowing its controlling constituencies to *four groups of primary stakeholders*:
 - The gTLD and ccTLD registries that depend on the root to direct potential users to them,
 - The root name server operators that serve the root zone file,
 - The Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and intranets that rely on the root to enable them to do look-ups on the TLDs, and
 - The technical community that defines protocols and standards affecting the root and its operation.