

Neustar[®] Registry Services

.US PREMIUM DOMAIN NAME PROPOSAL

Prepared for:



Submitted by Neustar, Inc.

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usTLD PREMIUM DOMAIN NAME PLAN REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

The usTLD Stakeholder Council (“Council”) and Neustar, Inc. (“Neustar”), the registry operator for the usTLD, is seeking public comment on the Council’s recommendation to Neustar to release one and two character domain names in connection with the usTLD Premium Domain Name (“PDN”) plan. The primary goal of the proposed PDN Plan is to increase the use and awareness of the .US brand in the consumer marketplace. Additionally, the PDN Plan provides the opportunity for Neustar to allocate .US Premium Names to support organizations or activities that will help spread awareness or encourage growth of the .US domain.

BACKGROUND

As part of an overall effort by Neustar, to raise awareness and use of the .US domain, the PDN Plan would make available to the public at a premium price certain high-value, highly-visible, premium .US domain names (“.US Premium Domains”), some of which are currently designated as “reserved” (including one- and two-character .US domain names), and others that would be newly designated as such. Given the level of investment, buyers of high value premium domain names typically put these names to good use – building web properties that are heavily marketed and promoted. This is beneficial to the entire namespace, getting the most coveted names circulated.

While intended to protect existing intellectual property rights and preserve the legacy locality namespace, the release and implementation of a premium name space will foster new growth for the .US domain extension using current best practices and allocation standards. Throughout the plan, all policies and restrictions regarding two-character state and territorial abbreviations or numbered domain names are recommended to still be in effect.

QUESTIONS

The Council is seeking public comments on the following questions:

- Should the usTLD policy be revised to allow the release of 1 and 2 character domains?
- Should the usTLD registry operator include currently unregistered and registered name as premium names? (The premium plan will not affect existing registrants’ domain names, nor will it affect transfers of existing names.)
- What, if any, impact would the introduction of 2 character names at the second level have on the legacy city.state.us registrations in .US? Please explain any concerns you have in detail.

Comments will be published and provided to the usTLD Stakeholder Council and Secretariat for consideration. Comments or questions may be submitted by emailing stakeholdercouncil@neustar.us.

INTRODUCTION

In the past four years, the domain landscape has undergone an epic transformation, with over 1,000 new generic Top-Level Domains (TLDs) entering the market. To survive and thrive in this uber-competitive landscape, TLDs have been forced to rethink and innovate in nearly every aspect of business, including pricing, marketing and distribution strategies. It is in this context that Neustar is presenting this .US Premium Domain Name Plan (“PDN Plan”) for the .US Stakeholder Council.

In an effort to massively ramp up our ability to gain awareness and use of the .US domain, the PDN Plan would make available to the public at a premium price certain high-value, highly-visible, premium .US domain names (“.US Premium Domains”), some of which are currently designated as “reserved” (including one- and two-character .US domain names) – and others that would be newly designated as such¹.

Releasing these .US Premium Domains with premium pricing can have an important impact on the success of the .US name space, as we will describe further below, while at the same time creating exciting new branding opportunities for businesses and organizations in the US private sector.

The primary goal of the proposed PDN Plan is to increase the use and awareness of the .US brand in the consumer marketplace. Additionally, the proposed PDN Plan provides the opportunity for Neustar to allocate .US Premium Names on a non-cash or discounted basis to support organizations or activities that will help spread awareness or encourage growth of the .US domain. Given the level of investment, the buyers of high value premium domain names typically put these names to very good use – building web properties that are heavily marketed and promoted. This is beneficial to the entire namespace, getting the most coveted names circulated and promoted.

This proposal, carefully structured to protect existing intellectual property rights and preserve the legacy locality namespace, will not only raise awareness of the .US TLD, but will also help to make .US more competitive with other leading TLDs. At the same time, it will provide businesses and organizations new premium naming options to brand their online presence with a United States-centric .US domain name.

We believe the PDN Plan will stimulate further growth and promotion of the .US TLD and increase choice and competition in the TLD marketplace. It will also help the .US brand to stay competitive in today’s increasingly complex domain ecosystem, adopting key best practices that have been demonstrated to succeed in other TLDs and applying them to the .US namespace.

¹ *From the Neustar/DOC Contract dated 13 Nov 2013: The Contractor shall implement a policy to manage a list of permanently reserved names not available for registration, and if appropriate, the release of certain names that are currently reserved.*

.US Reserved Name Policy: Names are reserved to protect important local and national naming resources to reserve spaces within .US for future enhancement of the domain and to protect technical Internet interoperability. Policy (name) changes relative to the reserved list are subject to Department of Commerce review and approval prior to implementation.

.US STAKEHOLDER REVIEW & APPROVAL

The .US Stakeholder Council is being asked to deliberate on the .US Premium Proposal from two important standpoints:

1. Releasing 1- and 2-character .US domain names as premium inventory
2. Introducing an expanded .US premium inventory with short, memorable, highly brandable keyword domain names (Expanded Premiums)

Business rules and practices, inclusive of pricing, legal needs or launch schedules are not in the scope of the approval by the .US Stakeholder Council and will be the purview of Neustar in its contract with the Department of Commerce for the management and security of the .US TLD. However, certain business rules may be included as part of this proposal for understanding of the general PDN Plan for policy consideration.

BENEFITS TO THE USTLD

Revenues generated by the releasing of these domain names will be used primarily by Neustar to cover its costs for running the program and to continue to market and promote the .US domain. Neustar will reinvest the revenue generated from the sale of .US premium domain names directly to fund expanded marketing, promotion and community-building campaigns to build and grow the .US brand.

Certain marketing activities may include, but not be limited to, paid advertising, market research and thought leadership content, owned events, such as .US hackathons, webcasts and other newly created events, video creation and contests for awareness building similar to the 2012 Kickstart America campaign. Each campaign will be carefully developed based on fair market value and generated revenue to maximize awareness for .US domain names within all target Nexus audiences, both foreign and domestic.

BACKGROUND & POLICY

Background

Since the introduction of new gTLDs, a variety of new business models, pricing structures and allocation mechanisms have been introduced to the domain industry with varying degrees of success. Through careful analysis, one theme clearly stands out: the most coveted domain names in each namespace are consistently leveraged by TLD registries to generate awareness and engagement with both consumers and the press, while at the same time garnering premium prices.

To date, the .US Registry has not proactively launched any formal premium domain name sales programs. The proposed PDN Plan is an opportunity for the .US Registry to tap into the most innovative trends in domain name sales, marketing and distribution for the release of premium priced domain names – including the release of one and two character domain names.

One and two character domains are already available in many other generic and country code Top Level Domains (gTLDs and ccTLDs), and have been demonstrated to be highly coveted digital assets by

individuals, businesses and organizations. In some TLDs, one and two character domain names have garnered prices in excess of six and seven figures for a single domain name.

In today's age of social and mobile media, where short, meaningful domain names are considered to be the most valuable, the demand for one and two character .US domain names is likely to be extremely high. Historic secondary market sale prices (in marketplaces like NameJet, Sedo and Afternic) have proven that there is a public interest and willingness to pay premium prices for high value .US domain names.

Attached below is a list of the 25 highest publicly-reported .US domain name sales posted on www.NameBio.com - a well-known industry website. There are likely to be countless high value private sales that have not been reported.

Domain	Price	Date	Venue
norm.us	150,000 USD	2015-05-23	Uniregistry
video.us	75,000 USD	2007-03-27	Afternic
sextoys.us	51,100 USD	2006-12-30	Sedo
job.us	35,532 USD	2009-07-25	Rick Latona
taxi.us	35,000 USD	2008-07-23	Sedo
models.us	30,000 USD	2006-07-04	Private
jew.us	29,500 USD	2006-01-17	Sedo
famo.us	25,000 USD	2011-08-10	Afternic
jews.us	25,000 USD	2011-06-21	Sedo
baseball.us	25,000 USD	2008-06-25	name.com
nashville.us	23,000 USD	2007-07-24	T.R.A.F.F.I.C.
band.us	20,200 USD	2013-04-10	Got.us
cash.us	20,100 USD	2016-05-28	GoDaddy
aed.us	20,000 USD	2011-08-03	Sedo
foods.us	20,000 USD	2011-07-22	Sedo
football.us	18,510 USD	2006-03-07	Sedo
video.us	18,500 USD	2008-02-19	Pool
wallet.us	18,250 USD	2016-05-28	GoDaddy
beats.us	18,000 USD	2012-12-31	GoDaddy
bitcoin.us	17,500 USD	2012-12-30	Afternic
computer.us	17,000 USD	2008-05-29	T.R.A.F.F.I.C.

<u>pling.us</u>	16,300 USD	2014-02-12	Sedo
<u>gaming.us</u>	15,000 USD	2016-05-28	<u>GoDaddy</u>
<u>miami.us</u>	15,000 USD	2009-02-05	Sedo
<u>bingo.us</u>	15,000 USD	2008-06-26	Sedo

.US Reserved/Restricted Names Policy

Since its general availability release in the second level in 2002, the .US TLD has been restricted to three or more character domain names. Domain names are reserved to protect important local and national naming resources to reserve spaces for future enhancement of the TLD and to protect technical Internet interoperability. Two letter .US domain names matching official state and territory abbreviations have been reserved for the exclusive use of state and territorial governments whether they are currently in use or not. Five digit domain names, inclusive of all US zip codes are also reserved, while five letter and mixed letter/digit domain names are not.

Current restriction policies for .US state:

Domain name availability is subject to the name reservation policy on numbers as listed below. The following potential domain name-types are unavailable for public registration:

- **Rule 1** - All domains of any length beginning with 18XX or 1-8XX or 8XX where X is any number from 0 to 9 inclusive.
- **Rule 2** - All domains beginning with NXX or 1NXX or 1-NXX followed by exactly seven numbers not including hyphens, where N is any number from 2 to 9 inclusive and X is any number from 0 to 9 inclusive.
- **Rule 3** - All domains beginning with XXXXX where X is any number from 0 to 9 inclusive.

In addition, a list of Reserved Domain Names can be found [here](#).

OBJECTIVES

A high level of deliberation has gone into the design of the PDN Plan.

Our objectives in proposing the PDN Plan are to:

- Increase awareness of the .US brand in the consumer marketplace;
- Protect existing intellectual property rights and preserve the legacy locality namespace;
- Generate greater use of the .US namespace by inspiring high value use cases;
- Give businesses and organizations new, high value .US options for branding their presence;
- Generate revenue from the sale of .US Premium Domains that will be directly used to fund future marketing, promotion and community-building campaigns to build and grow the .US namespace.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

In order to design a fair, equitable and successful PDN Plan, some of the key considerations that were taken into account include:

1. **Trademark Considerations:** Trademark holders were considered for any mechanism implemented for two character domains.
2. **Restricted names:** Current policies to protect important national and local namespaces including Locality (state and territory) names as well and five digit domains will still be reserved. In addition, those names restricted for the interoperability of the Internet for security or stability will remain Restricted.
3. **Pre-release awareness:** Review market viability for interest and desire for a Founder or Usage Program by Request for Proposal.
4. **Release mechanisms:** A review of all best practices for the release and allocation of premium domain names deployed by other ccTLDs and gTLDs were considered, including domain auctions, buy-it now pricing, premium brokerage, and tiered pricing (a/k/a “premium general availability”).

THE .US PREMIUM DOMAIN NAME PLAN – 1- & 2-CHARACTER DOMAIN NAMES

The PDN Plan for 1- and 2-character domains draws upon the experiences and best practices of other ccTLD and gTLDs to maximize the awareness and use of the TLD. This portion of the .US PDN Plan we propose has two distinct phases.

Phase I: Pre-Launch

Phase II: Launch

Phase I: Pre-Launch

The Pre-Launch Phase includes two key recommendations:

1. An Open Solicitation Period and
2. A Pre-Release Awareness Building Program

Open Solicitation Period

Upon review of three recent ccTLD releases of one and two character domain names, Neustar concludes there is no clear current standard or common practice.

The short domain launch of co.uk allowed for early access to trademarks, but only if it was an exact match to a registered mark. The short domain launch for .de was offered as first come, first serve via fax. More recently the .ie Registry offered a 30-day period of open solicitation during which domain names generating interest from multiple parties, including both trademarks and the public, went to auction.

It should be noted that a traditional Sunrise procedure would require significant additional resources, including mechanisms for management of applications, development of, or updating of the existing Sunrise Policy and of a the engagement of a trademark validation agent. Likewise, the names that could correspond to registered marks would generally be acronyms that could apply to a wide range of entities or individuals (if construed as initials), which would deflect criticism over any such marks being released in a phased open solicitation period rather than a specific trademark Sunrise period.

Neustar Recommendation: Neustar recommends following the recent .ie example to hold an open 30-day solicitation period prior to the domain names being available on a first-come, first-served basis. Given the multiplicity of legitimate uses for these domain names (as acronyms for myriad organizations, or initials for individuals, communities or groups) we do not recommend holding an exclusive access period specifically for registered marks. However, .US messaging would highlight the benefit for any company or companies with 1- or 2-character registered marks to acquire these names prior to the general first-come, first-serve launch. The solicitation period would be open to both trademark holders and the public. During this time, requests or applications would be gathered throughout the 30-day window for processing once the period has closed. Any domain name that garners two or more interested parties goes to a closed auction and any domain name with a single applicant is registered at the listed price. We do not recommend any additional application fees or increased registration fees during the Open Solicitation period which have been a standard practice for this type of solicitation period during other registry launches for both ccTLDs and gTLDs.

Pre-Release Awareness Program

Founder programs (or Usage Programs) have helped bring new TLD options to light not only for the latest round of TLD launches but also legacy gTLD and ccTLD launches. .CO, .ASIA, .ME, who have successfully placed short domain names with a number of high profile companies to bring attention to the availability and use of the extension, have had successful and well-noted Founder type programs to generate usage and interest in the domain extensions.

Neustar Recommendation: This is a worthwhile program to raise the awareness for .US domain names across the country. However, prior to a fully developed plan implementation, we should gauge market interest. After Neustar has confirmed the market desire for a program, an implementation strategy will be drafted using best practices from previous TLD Founder models, documents and agreements.

Phase II: Premium Launch

Premium General Availability Program

The basis for allocation of premium names for the .US domain is a Premium General Availability Program (the “PGA Program”), also known in the domain industry as “Tiered Pricing.”

The PGA Program involves the allocation and registration of names through the network of usTLD distribution partners and resellers. Only those partners who support both .US registrations and tiered pricing programs will be eligible to participate. Domains in this program will appear in the search results of a growing list of the world's largest domain name retailers, including GoDaddy, eNom, Google Domains and Name.com, among others. This will put .US premium domain names in front of the widest possible audience 24 hours a day, 7 days a week exactly when and where registrants are searching for a relevant domain name.

A subset of short, high value Reserved domain names will be the initial set of allocated domain names under the Premium General Availability Program (the "PGA Program"). While the reserved domain names will be reviewed for premium viability, we will preserve restriction policies and national or local restricted names, such as 2-character state abbreviations and 5-digit postal codes.

Purchase Process

Buying a domain name from the PGA program is exactly like buying any standard domain name from a domain name registrar or reseller. Simply visit one of a growing list of retailers such as GoDaddy or Name.com, type in the name you're interested in, put it in your cart and pay for it. The only difference is price. Instead of the retailer marking up the \$6.50USD wholesale they will markup from the published premium tier price. This eliminates contracts, waiting periods and cumbersome transfer processes that are often found in current practices for premium domain name sales and allows registrants to put their new domain name to work right away.

Pricing Model – High/Low

Neustar has selected the "high/low" pricing model for .US Premium Domain Names. This means that new registrations carry a premium price in a set pricing tier but renewals, transfers and multi-year terms will remain at the then current standard price (currently US\$6.50). The High/Low model has been selected after careful consideration of the marketplace and the review of options available as weighed against the goals and objectives for releasing .US domain names with premium prices. This pricing model is believed to not only achieve the widest possible distribution but be met with favor among new customers with the sense of ownership that comes with a single large payment upfront versus many slightly smaller, yet still premium payments over time. Research has shown that current domain extensions using the High/Low model have greater registration rates than others using a High/High model.

Pricing Strategy

Each domain name in the PGA Program has been evaluated and priced based on a number of attributes. Each domain name has been assigned a price in one of five premium price tiers, using best practices

currently available in the marketplace. The annual renewal price for a domain name in the PGA Program will match the then current standard wholesale price, which is now \$6.50USD for .US domains.

As with standard (non-premium) domain names, domain retailers (like GoDaddy, Network Solutions, etc.) should be expected to adjust the final sales price according to their individual pricing policies. As such, retail prices will likely vary from retailer to retailer.

A variety of criteria have been considered to identify the appropriate tier for each .US domain name, including the estimated appraisal price for each domain name and key value criteria, like:

1. The length of the domain name (shorter is generally more expensive)
 - Single Letter
 - Single Number
 - Two Letter
 - Three Letter
 - Two Number
 - Three Number
 - Four Letter

2. Rarity of the name
 - How many similar names exist? (ie: 1 character names – this pool is very small)
 - How many alternative TLDs are available?
 - How many alternative words or phrases could be used instead? (taxi, cab, carhire, carservice, etc.)

3. The potential market and number of end users
 - Big market, high priced items (cars, travel, real estate)
 - Small market, high priced items (eg, luxury)
 - Big market, but low cost items (bagels)
 - Brandable domains (extremely common words used for branding)

As with standard wholesale prices, Neustar will continue to monitor the established pricing tiers along with our retail partners, and will continue to adjust domain pricing as part of its contract with the Department of Commerce where necessary to respond to market conditions and to optimize revenue over time.

THE .US PREMIUM DOMAIN NAME PLAN – EXPANSION OF PREMIUM INVENTORY

Expanded Premium General Availability

There is additional opportunity in expanding the pool of Premium General Availability domain names across domains that are currently available as well as domain names that are currently registered, but may become available in the future through attrition. In only a few years, several of the most innovative registry operators have achieved very strong results by expanding their pool of premium domain names

and placing premium markup on the domains. While the .US name space is mature, opportunity still exists.

Pricing for these names would be similar to the existing PGA proposed pricing model and strategy (high/low), but geared more toward the lower existing tiers, and the introduction of three to four additional premium price tiers. Domain names that are identified as premium but are already registered will be tagged as premium. Due to the proposed High/Low pricing model, any currently registered .US domain name tagged for a premium markup as the result of the expanded premium inventory will not affect current registrants or their renewal or transfer costs. Domain names will be charged as premium at the new registration phase of the domain lifecycle. Therefore, currently registered domain names identified as premium will incur a premium fee only if they expire, go through the redemption process and become available for re-registration again by new or different customers.

By placing modest markups on a wider range of select domain names we also open up the opportunity to further test the standard wholesale price point at which we offer general availability domain name registrations. By creating additional tiers, .US can hone in and add increased prices to certain classes of domain names that are most likely to have a higher perceived value.

Neustar proposes creating an expanded pool of premium .US domain names that includes:

- All three letter domain names (17,576)
- All three number domains (1,000), excluding names on the restricted list (i.e. 888.us, 877.us, 866.us, etc)
- All nouns under eight letters, excluding names with negative connotations or on the “7 Dirty Words” restricted list
- All verbs under eight letters, excluding names with negative connotations or on the “7 Dirty Words” restricted list
- Top 10,000 words in the English language, excluding names with negative connotations or on the “7 Dirty Words” restricted list (price varies)

From the review pool of approximately 100,000 domain names, we would eliminate names with negative connotations, racist, sexual and hateful terms as well as names that are on the national and local Locality restricted list. As a result, we anticipate re-allocating between 30-65% of the names with a premium markup and placing them into the (now expanded) Premium General Availability Program.

Neustar Recommendation: The work to identify and review the names that would be eligible to place into expanded tiers is significant. Before we move forward with developing a full-blown plan, we request that the Stakeholder Council take this under consideration now to provide a good faith indication of interest in pursuing this path.

ONGOING PREMIUM DEVELOPMENT & AWARENESS OUTREACH

Public Auctions

Of the existing portfolio of short .US Premium Domain Names, we may select a small number to seed into a variety of auctions. Neustar may conduct an ongoing series of online and offline (live) public auctions to allocate the .US Premium Names. The auctions will be conducted to create press-worthy stories and media buzz that will propel interest and enthusiasm for the entire .US TLD. Each auction may be sorted into themes that relate to trends or holidays such as: (i) relevant events, trends, holidays,; and/or (ii) targeted small business industries (for example, real estate, legal, finance, etc.). For each auction, the Premium Names will be grouped into small batches of approximately five to fifty Premium Names (although the actual amount of Premium Names in a given batch may differ).

Continued Premium Development

In addition to online and live auctions to allocate high value and highly desired “Premium Names” in the .US top-level domain, .US Premium Names may also be allocated on a non-cash or discount-cash basis, to support organizations or activities that will help to spread awareness, growth and use of the .US domain (the “.US Premium Development Program”). The .US Premium Development Program is an exclusive program open to big brands, individuals, commercial or non-commercial businesses and government entities that want to develop digital assets and presence on a .US premium domain name and promote American ingenuity. The program will be used in very rare situations as the bulk of the .US premium inventory is readily available to the public via auctions or Premium General Availability through a distribution partner.

This program might include, for example, allocating a .US Premium Domain Name: (i) as an award in high visibility contests intended to generate broad awareness, media interest and community engagement in the .US name space (e.g., small business marketing campaign contest); (ii) to a business or organization that commits to launch a .US website that will have a widespread positive impact and will generate broad interest and awareness of the .US domain as a result; (iii) to a well-known business or industry leader, celebrity or organization that commits to use, promote and endorse the .US domain extension in a manner that will generate broad interest and awareness of the .US domain as a result.

Upon approval and favorability to launch the .US Premium Development Program, all program documents and policies for allocation will be developed by Neustar with best practices and previous allocation models in mind.

POLICY & LEGAL UPDATES

Policy

Based on preliminary reviews there are no provision within the published policies that would prevent the implementation of the PDN Plan as it is currently envisaged. It should be noted however that updates to existing policy or new policy may be required, in particular when considering auctions and associated policies and rules. Consideration will be given to the process of drafting, review, approval and socialization of such changes or new policy.

Legal

The PDN Plan has a primary dependency on the ability for the Agreement between the United States Department of Commerce and Neustar to be altered to allow for:

- Non uniform pricing; and
- Non 'first-come, first served distribution models, including brokerage and auctions.

The Neustar Registry Legal teams and the contract/relationship managers will need to be engaged to manage this process based upon a favorable view of the PDN Plan. Consideration will be given to potential updates that may be required to the contract and the negotiation process that follows.

Alongside the update to the contract, the Registry-Registrar Agreement will need certain amendments to reflect the desired implementation. Consideration will be given as to those amendments, process by which the amendment is issued and the timelines required for the amendments to be in effect.

For both the updates to the Agreement between the United States Department of Commerce and Neustar and the Registry-Registrar Agreement, time estimates for all updates or changes will be factored into the overall plan.

Appointment of an auction provider and a review of the auction rules and procedures will also be a requirement, should auctions form part of the final plan.



Neustar is a global corporation publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol “NSR”. Headquartered in Sterling, Virginia, we have offices around the world provide services to over 14,000 customers around the globe – including more than half of all Fortune 500 companies.

Neustar has been at the forefront of the Domain Name Industry for over 15 years. As an early industry pioneer, Neustar has played an important role in the growth and evolution of nearly every aspect of the domain name space. Today, many of the world’s leading governments and top brands count on Neustar as a trusted Registry Operator to help them to establish, promote and protect their domains. What started in 2001 with just the .biz top-level domain has now grown to nearly 300 TLDs (both ccTLDs and gTLDs), supporting and running some of the most dynamic domain extensions on the Internet as a partner, provider and teammate.

Beyond world-class Registry Services, Neustar brings with us the strength of over 2,000 employees located in offices across the globe with experience across a broad range of complementary Security Services, Marketing Services, and Data Services. Our portfolio of products and services enables Neustar to radically expand the traditional notion of a ‘Registry Service Provider’ in a way that provides a uniquely powerful solution – and the ability to support the usTLD Registry contract in ways that go far and beyond the capacity of any other registry service provider on the planet.