

Q&A: “How to Get Your Own Top-Level Domain,” a new resource for the entire world

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In April 2026, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, otherwise known as ICANN, is scheduled to open its applications for new top-level domains, or TLDs.

This means new combinations of letters will soon be available after the dot in a web address. The only previous time the international organization opened this process to the public was in 2012.

That TLD program created approximately 1,200 new domain extensions, including generic TLDs such as .xyz; geoTLDs such as .berlin; and brand-focused TLDs such as .BMW. The process for establishing a new TLD is complex and often expensive, plagued with policy and legal demands.

By developing standard dispute resolution processes, ICANN has reduced legal entanglements that would have harmed internet users.

To provide entrepreneurs, lawyers and internet business leaders with guidance to prepare them for this application proceeding, including long-term strategies, domain registry experts Joe Alagna and Andrey Insarov have released a new book, “How to Get Your Own Top-Level Domain: An Insider’s Guide to ICANN’s Application Process.”

The book explains that the business of domain names in general, and TLDs more specifically, is often clouded in mystery and complexities. The authors say they wrote the book to illuminate some of these issues.

Alagna has vast experience in the domain industry; notably, he was a top adviser for the creation of the domain .xyz in 2012. He says the book not only explains how the process works but also sifts through ICANN’s materials to make them simpler and easier for professionals and amateurs alike to digest.

Westlaw Today asked Alagna to provide a glimpse into some of the issues the book covers.

Westlaw Today: You initially released the book in May, but since that time you have been writing a second edition. Why update the original?

Joe Alagna: The window for applications will open for 90 days in April 2026. It’s not a lot of time, so we felt an urgency to release in May to give readers more time to plan. We used the 2012 rules and whatever was public about 2026, but then ICANN released its first draft rules. Some of the rules were too different to ignore, so we thought it prudent to do an update as soon as we could, thus Version II.

WT: You have said that the entire world needs “How to Get Your Own Top-Level Domain.” Given the geographic and topical scope of the internet, it is hard to disagree with your assessment. But the title makes it sound as if the book is for potential buyers of the new TLDs. Can you explain exactly how the book is beneficial to internet professionals around the globe?

JA: It might be more accurate to say, the world needs the internet, and new top-level domains will make it more accessible. New generic TLDs are the way that ICANN answered the demand for newer and more specific domains. Important keywords that were impossible to acquire in .com or .net are now available under new gTLDs. Internationalized domain names (aka IDNs) are other-than-Latin-Language terms can now be registered. This will allow Chinese, Indian, Arabic and Cyrillic communities to access domains in their own character sets. IDNs will make the internet more easily accessible to the next billion internet users in their own languages (and character sets).

WT: Why is ICANN opening up another round of applications for TLDs in 2026? Was the previous round that began in 2012 insufficient?

JA: If I had my way, expanding the domain name space would have been done in a different way, but I’m only one voice in hundreds. I would have preferred them to use the subdomain space to expand in the same way we did at it.com domains. But that might have put too much power in the hands of only a few players. So, I can see the other side. By opening the space to the right of the dot to new entrepreneurs, nonprofits and governments, ICANN is expanding the internet in a way that also expands responsibility and profits among a more diverse set of parties.

WT: A good portion of the book is dedicated to analyzing ICANN and its processes. The book goes so far as to say,

“ICANN is in charge of the global internet.” How so? And what other players play important roles in the creation of TLDs?

JA: There are plenty of other players, including large corporations like Amazon, Google and Facebook, that have cornered markets on shopping, search and social networks, respectively. But even these companies use domain names and IP addresses at the very root of their brands and business processes. ICANN controls that. Other important players include the major network operators like AT&T, NTT and China Mobile. Here again, end users need domains to share their messages and to navigate. IP addresses are illegible to common users and corporations don't want to abdicate control of their messaging to search engines and AIs.

AI will not replace domain names.

WT: You mention the expenses involved in registering a new TLD. Do those involved in the process, particularly major brand holders, have much to lose?

JA: The process is not risk-free. But when you consider the amount of advertising dollars expended promoting business names (that include their .com domains), it's not much. In my 2012 white paper, “How Brands Can Use New TLDs to Stop Cyber Squatting,” I determined that over \$3 trillion was spent on U.S. advertising since the start of the internet, and the .com brand has benefited to the likely tune of over \$300 million because of it. For brands who spend millions on advertising, a dot brand is the way to go. Although .com domains are powerful, it is the advertising dollar of famous brands that paid for that fame and power. Brand ad dollars can now be focused 100% on the brand.

There is more risk for new gTLD operators than there is for brands because they will face competition and possible auctions, whereas brands are most likely to get their brand in a new gTLD for the costs of application.

WT: You mention in the book that some TLDs have been “successful.” How does one measure the success of a TLD?

JA: This is an important question. My answer is simply in terms of, “Have they profited?” or “What was their return on investment?” Many of these companies are private, so I don't have details on all of them. But out of the 60 applications that I was a part of, I don't know one of them that didn't get their money back many times over or that abandoned their gTLD. They either operate them successfully or they have sold them for multiples of what they invested. That said, past successes cannot guarantee success in this round. Some things are different this time around. Many domain investors measure success by the number of domains sold and the aftermarket prices. That's a valid metric by their standards, but I think there is some bias. I simply use the metric of profits or returns to the investors.

WT: You also mention the persistent threat of cybersquatting. How can your book help those involved in fighting cybercrime, including those in the domain conflict-resolution process known as the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy, or UDRP?

JA: Big advertisers spend hundreds of thousands of dollars annually buying up .com domains that are typos and close matches to their brand names. This can include thousands of domain names related to all of their subdivisions, products and services. This huge expense is ongoing and, primarily, is the result of “the .com brand,” which they created with their advertising dollars. In my view, brands should get their own TLD and stop all advertising on any other ending. This doesn't mean they should stop buying their brands under other TLDs, but they certainly should stop advertising them. By advertising only their own brand, they are making an investment that is 100% focused on their brands and products instead of .com. UDRP will still be needed but, over time, brands and consumers will come to see the brand TLD as the authoritative domain for anything within that brand's purview.

WT: A good portion of the book is dedicated to ICANN's part in overseeing the sunrise of the new TLDs. ICANN says in its mission statement that its goal is “to help ensure a stable, secure and unified global internet.” How so? What part does ICANN play in monitoring the atmosphere in which the new TLDs exist?

JA: Great question. ICANN listens to all kinds of stakeholders, including registrants, intellectual property holders, nonprofits and many more. Over the years, by developing standard dispute resolution processes, ICANN has reduced legal entanglements that would have harmed internet users. ICANN regulates domain names across sovereign nations, much of which involved voluntary measures. Country-code operators are not required to follow ICANN's rules, but most of them do because it is in their interest to take advantage of the regulations.

ICANN's most recent challenge has been with Web3 domains, which are registered only on a blockchain network, such as Ethereum or Coinbase.

The biggest obstacle for Web3 practitioners around the world has been a lack of regulation. If 10 parties can apply for a .coin TLD (in Web3), then who really has the right to run it? How will browsers know where to send end user traffic? The answer is that no one is really in charge in a Web3 world, and the browsers can't know where to send that traffic. ICANN created the regulations and the standards and the institution that makes the internet work. ICANN operates what is known as the IANA root zone. There are only 1,591 entries in that root, and the only way for a new one to get in there is by applying for a new TLD. This connects them to the real internet, the global internet.

WT: Artificial intelligence is captivating the world. But you say in your book that “AI will not replace domain names.”

What else does the book say about this subject? How can you be so sure with new technologies evolving every day?

JA: I am very sure that AI will not replace domain names. This is because domain names are virtual addresses that represent individuals, businesses and charities worldwide. The need to own, operate and find these entities will not go away. These entities will not want to abdicate their (virtual) addresses to a search engine or AI. We are competitive by nature, and we will not want to allow others to manage our information. Even in this very connected and sophisticated world, none of us have given up our physical home or business addresses. Domain names are the best and only way to completely control our messaging and what is seen when accessed.

WT: You mention that your book could become less important after the April 2026 application process begins. Why is that? Do you not predict another round of TLDs?

JA: Yes, I wrote this book because I believe that many in the world are not going to know about this process without extraordinary efforts. ICANN is well funded, but its marketing budget has limits. I felt that a book on Amazon might help more people to find and understand this opportunity. I also do believe that it is a unique time in history. It only happened on this scale once (in 2012). Will ICANN make it a standard ongoing process? We may have to wait another 14 years to find out.

About the author



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