

ICANN73 | Prep Week – 10th Anniversary of the New gTLD Program: A Conversation With the Operators
Wednesday, February 23, 2022 – 14:30 to 16:00 AST

SUE SCHULER: Thank you. Alex, please start the recording. Terrific. Please note that there is a Q&A pod if you have anything that you would like to ask. I will be monitoring the chat. And with that, I will hand it over to Martin Sutton.

MARTIN SUTTON: Thank you, Sue, and thank you all for joining us at this ICANN73 session, which is the 10-year anniversary of new gTLDs. For many of us that were involved in this a decade ago, there was fun, there was excitement, there were highs, there were lows, there were challenges. There was all sorts, a real mix. But at the same time, a real buzz.

And what we wanted to do today was to take the opportunity to let you sit back and enjoy some discussions about how it happened for individuals, what was involved, what did they see from their perspective along the path, and what was achieved, because it was a lot of damned hard work to make this a success from what was a very ambitious and changing program that ICANN introduced when it opened up for new gTLDs in 2012.

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So we thought that this milestone of 10 years should be celebrated and really for those that all contributed to the efforts at ICANN and beyond to make this all happen.

So while we reflect back on this decade, it may spark some memories for those that were involved at the time as well because it was many, many of us that were and so it might spark off some memories of your experiences, the unexpected challenges that you had to face, the fun, making new friendships along the way, and all of this would be great to capture as well. So as it sparks off some of those memories and nostalgia, do feel free to share that in the chat and create your own sort of digital footprint of the events that occurred 10 years ago and we'll be able to reflect on those hopefully towards the end of the session.

But without further ado, I do want to hand you over to Jeff who is, as you probably know, highly enthusiastic, energetic, very much the traits needed to drive the challenges and make something successful, just like new gTLDs. So, Jeff, I'll hand over to you to introduce the panel and the session. Thank you.

JEFFREY SASS:

Thank you so much, Martin, and thank you everyone for joining us this afternoon. This should be fun, hopefully not your typical session, in that we want to really share stories and anecdotes. We've got a great group of panelists who were involved in this process from various different angles and we're going to go back into time through our respective viewpoints and experiences but sharing firsthand stories and

anecdotes. The facts, you can look up. You don't need us to tell you the facts of what happened. You can look that up. We're more interested in letting you know what really went on behind the scenes and, in many cases, in front of the scenes, out for everyone to see.

We'll try to take a look at what worked and what didn't work, who won, who lost, the innovation, the inspiration and now, with round two in the proverbial wings, the anticipation.

Everyone's always wondering what's the future of DNS. There's a lot of talk about will Web3 and all these new technologies squash the DNS? Well, I'd say it's doubtful. Let's look at some facts here. Christie's, yeah, they sold Beeple's NFT for \$69 million, but ICANN sold .web for \$135 million, so the DNS wins every time. Most of us on the panel today, we've spent at least \$185,000—and in many cases much more than that—on the opportunity to participate in this historic introduction of creative and often meaningful top-level domains. So we'll talk about the chaos, the camaraderie, the contention, and ultimately the consumers, the registrants, who keep the registries and registrars going.

So we'll start by having our panelists introduce themselves and tell us what was your role 10 years ago and what is your role today, because in many cases that has changed. We'll start with Lorna, Stacey, Matt, Adrian, and then Ray, just going in the order on my screen. Lorna.

LORNA GRADDEN: Hi, I'm Lorna Gradden and I'm the director and co-founder of the Com Laude group and back in 2012 I was leading the team that submitted 120 applications in the process for our clients. And as I said on our run-through, after 10 years of pretty intensive therapy I'm able to re-enter society now pretty much on a daily basis.

JEFFREY SASS: Stacey.

STACEY KING: Hi, I'm Stacey King. 12 years I was working with Richemont, a UK-based luxury goods company. I headed up their digital IP group and we had applied for a number of TLDs and had been involved in developing the application along with many, many others from 2008 on. I then went to Amazon to run the registry for about eight years and I am now at the Alexa Group working on ethics and AI.

JEFFREY SASS: Awesome. Matt.

MATT SERLIN: Thanks, Jeff, yeah. So first of all my memory is certainly foggy from 12-plus years ago but I was actually working in a very similar capacity as I am today. I've always been in the corporate domain space for about the past 20 years. At the time of the application 10 years ago, I was running

client success and operations at MarkMonitor. We worked with top brand applicants. The exact number escapes my memory, I think it was somewhere in the 15 to 20 applications that we did. And similar to what Stacey said, that was really the sort of finite date but we spent years prior, going back to 2008 really, working with folks that wanted to know what a gTLD was and look at applying. I think we participated in probably over 100 calls with corporations looking at the program.

JEFFREY SASS: Adrian.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: Goodness, I thought there was Ray before me. Good morning, evening, afternoon, everybody. Adrian Kinderis is my name. Way back in the time machine I was the CEO of a company called AusRegistry International. We were a registry services provider, providing the technical support that one would require to run their TLD and also help them with applications. Also forked out my own hard-earned cash to apply for a few names myself, so probably put me down as a registry operator as well in that way, and still through today I still own and operate a number of TLDs, including .shabaka which was the very first delegated TLD which happens to be an IDN or an Internationalized Domain Name, so a domain name in a script over than ASCII, and also .film, which seems to be getting a new lease of life with these NFTs that Jeff was talking about. But more about that later. Thanks, guys.

Operators

JEFFREY SASS: Awesome. And Ray.

RAY KING: I got into the ICANN process around 2000 with SnapNames and then I was out of the industry from about 2007 to maybe 2012, doing this other company called AboutUs but I was kind of still connected because of ICANNWiki. I love wikis and had just been kind of doing this ICANN wiki on the side. In 2012, I think in March, at Costa Rica I was just kind of lamenting, “Oh, man, I wish I had paid more attention. I wish I had been in time to apply for a new TLD.” I remember Tim Switzer said to me, “Well, what would you apply for if you had done that?” I’m like, “Well, .wiki, of course.” I guess he was working on DotGreen or something for a while and was really up on the process. I said, “Do you think there’s any chance we can still get an application in in time?” It’s like, three, three and a half weeks, left until I think April 12th was the deadline. He’s like, “That’s crazy but if you want to do it, here’s how you would do it.” And that’s how we ended up applying for .wiki and then I think just a few days before the deadline, having done all the work, we thought why wouldn’t we apply for some more because we had done all this work, we now understand the process. We ended up applying for 10 TLDs and ultimately acquiring four. So that’s how we got involved.

I’m still running Top Level Design, which is the registry for .wiki, .inc, and .gay. You may know we sold .design to GoDaddy last year and we also started a registrar called PorkBun to go along with Top Level

Design and helps us sell new TLDs and stuff, so that's been a lot of fun as well. That's what I'm doing today.

JEFFREY SASS:

Great. Well, thank you, Ray and everyone, and I'm Jeff Sass, as Martin mentioned. I was the co-founder and CMO of .Club Domains pretty much from the beginning. I joined Colin in March of 2012, so the application had already been filed, just for .club. That's the only extension we applied for and then I was with the company every step of the day from Reveal Day to our contention set to winning the auction to launching with 50 Cent and ultimately to selling the company to GoDaddy registry last year, as Ray mentioned. A lot of roads lead to GoDaddy here when I look at our panel. That's interesting in and of itself.

Before we get into questions—and we've got lots of questions and, again, really we want to share a lot of stories, I want to play a little word association game. So I've picked a few words that jumped out at us when we were talking about this 10-year journey and I'm going to give you a word, each of you, and just ask you to say the first couple of things that come to mind when you hear that word. I'm sure we'll talk more about all of these words as the session continues.

But I'll start with Lorna. Lorna, applications.

Operators

LORNA GRADDEN: Oh, waiting for the TAS to load at 2:00 AM. That's an abiding memory that will never leave me.

JEFFREY SASS: Awesome. Ray, auctions.

RAY KING: Peter Cramton and getting a PhD in game theory.

JEFFREY SASS: Matt, collisions.

MATT SERLIN: Scary. Unknown, fear of the unknown.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: COVID. It was COVID-like fear that was spread across the nation.

MATT SERLIN: Yeah.

JEFFREY SASS: The collisions were an interesting roadblock that we all faced unexpectedly.

Adrian, raffles.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Yeah, it was like a Thursday night when I was a kid with my parents watching the lotto. Picture a whole bunch of people traveling to Los Angeles to see the fate of your TLD pulled out by a ticket in big barrel to see when you were going to be delegated. As I said, we got the first one. It was a weird time.

Maybe a little bit of background, I know you want to do word association, mate, but it's probably worth talking about is ICANN couldn't work out a way to delegate the names in an order that would be fair to all and then needed to do something that was ... Well, probably getting into another one, which is Digital Archery which I'll let you talk about. But anyways so they worked out that they had to have a game of skill. The game of skill didn't work out so well and then did a lottery to see how it would happen and so that's what Digital Archery—oops, it's early in the morning.

JEFFREY SASS:

Raffles.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

You're going to have to forgive me. It's early. Thank you.

Operators

JEFFREY SASS: The lottery, yes. No worries.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: A lot of fun, a lot of cheering in the crowd as each one came out. It was rambunctious times.

JEFFREY SASS: Stacey, I've got one for you. Reveal Day.

STACEY KING: Yeah, Reveal Day, it was a mixture of sort of fun and letting the chaos begin. I mean, I was in the audience in London when they were doing the Reveal Day and just the sheer number that was coming up. I think people expected that there would be a lot but I think there were a lot more than was expected. The other thing I would say is just Donuts, right? Reveal Day really, Donuts made its mark.

JEFFREY SASS: Yes, we'll talk more about Donuts, I'm sure, when we get into the applications and stuff and other stories. Adrian, you stole my thunder. I had reserved Digital Archery as the word for me, which is no problem. As Adrian explained, they were trying to figure out a way that we can get our place in line and everyone was trying to game the system and figure out ways they could move their servers closer to the ICANN servers. And at .club we actually spent a significant amount of money, almost as

much as the application fee, on developing a Digital Archery technology that would get us that shot, the closest to the pin, so to speak. After spending that money we decided to turn that into a business, so we went into the Prague meeting with customers lined up, other registries who were prepared to pay us \$20,000 a shot to use our Digital Archery system. And then, of course, the rug got pulled out from under that, so we can just chalk that money up to lost causes. So it was an interesting time for all of us, I'm sure.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Jeff, Adrian here. You wouldn't have won, mate, because I think every one of us had the same bloody technology. I think I remember having a board member proving that this whole thing could be gamed and showing them after there was so much bravado about this new technology they were going to use or the new process they were going to use around Digital Archery. And then once we proved it could easily be gamed. I think that we may well have been responsible for the rug being pulled.

JEFFREY SASS:

That's okay, I'll send you the invoice then for our development costs.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Oh, please, please do. Make it out to Simon Delzoppo, please.

Operators

RAY KING: I think the best were the services that charged upon success and I realized that business plan is so good because basically everyone's got the same chance so it's like, "Hey, if I'm successful for you then I get a fee, if not, I don't." We didn't do that, obviously, but I thought that was a great business model.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: You're on mute, Jeff.

RAY KING: You're muted, Jeff.

JEFFREY SASS: Sorry. I said it was interesting times for sure and then it all went away. We'll talk more about Reveal Day, but before we even get to that, just briefly from each of you, what was the impetus to apply for a TLD and what were you really hoping it would bring to your or your company when you applied for one or more TLDs? We can go around, just chime in if you're ready with your answer or I'll call on you, whatever's easier. Lorna, you want to start?

LORNA GRADDEN: Well, our clients had a lot of different reasons for applying and some of them were very specific, like they wanted a shorter term than their dot com. There were some very, very clear business cases at that time. But

also for a lot of them it was kind of not wanting to miss out on the future, thinking that this was going to be ... Well, they didn't realize it was going to be 10, 15 years until the next opportunity but they saw this as being the future, the evolution of the system and they wanted to be part of it.

JEFFREY SASS: A step into the future. Stacey.

STACEY KING: Yeah, I think that's right. I worked for brands, it was a combination of it's an extension of your trademark, you need to protect it. It also gives you a lot of opportunities to use your brand on the web in a unique way. I think most brands didn't know and perhaps still don't know exactly how to do that. It takes a lot more time than I think most people think. It's not just like buying a domain name, there's a lot that goes into setting it up. But protecting the brand is definitely a big part of it.

I think there were certain things that were seen as maybe we can actually do something very different. This isn't just about domain names. It is about actually creating some new spaces versus a traditional market for just selling domain names or using it for the marketing perspective.

Operators

JEFFREY SASS: And that was one of ICANN’s really intentions behind launching the program was really to spark innovation and opportunities that didn’t exist with the legacy TLDs perhaps and we’ll talk a little bit more about how well that initiative was achieved.

Matt, what are your thoughts on why you got into it?

MATT SERLIN: So I will say, myself—and I’ll give a shout-out to my longtime cohort Elisa Cooper who couldn’t be with us today. But she and I both were pretty agnostic in terms of whether or not a corporation should or shouldn’t apply for a TLD. Like I mentioned at the start, we probably had 100 conversations and I think it got to the point where I could make a strong argument why a company should apply and a just-as-strong argument why they shouldn’t apply, right?

So our approach all along was, “Listen, we’re going to give you all the information that we have, we’re going to give you costs, the process. At the end of the day it has to be a decision that you as the brand holder, as the corporation, has to come to on your own, with your board. This is not a cheap endeavor, it’s a long-term commitment.” So we really spent a lot of time educating folks but, honestly, we would have these calls with clients and then get off them and make the exact opposite argument to each other and say, “Nope, they shouldn’t apply because of A, B, and C,” or, “They should because of this reason.”

So I think it was interesting to see how the dot-brand space played out and how it's continued to play out in the 10 years since.

JEFFREY SASS:

Yeah, it'll be interesting to see how the dot-brands play out in the next round, too. I know when this round closed there were a number of brands, including I remember Twitter, who made a big stink about the fact that they didn't get onboard and wanted the opportunity and then didn't have the opportunity so it'll be interesting to see how it plays out.

Adrian, you talked a little bit about how you got into it but also I'm really interested in how you chose the names you did choose from the registry side as there's ... What a wide range from an IDN to something as globally recognized and known as film.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Yeah, thanks, Jeff. We had spent a lot of time in the Middle East supporting ccTLDs or Country Code Top-Level Domains and running the back ends for those. So I guess I'd been somewhat immersed in the culture.

And there was a couple of events—one, very quickly, in Saudi Arabia. I remember looking up at a billboard and the whole billboard was written in Arabic but then the domain name was written in ASCII, of course. That really struck me at the time and I just thought, "Geez, this is broken. Not the least of which Arabic reads from right to left, the

domain names read from left to right.” And so I thought, “Geez, that must be confusing.” So I had a number of conversations. So that was really the impetus for wanting to apply for a TLD that was in a script other than ASCII or English, if you like.

So we then went about the process of trying to work out which names would be good, which was terribly difficult to do so because there are small nuances in the character set and everything, so it opened up its own can of worms.

And then with .film, I think there’s an overarching thing. We wanted to own a piece of the Internet. We thought that was really cool. This was an industry I’d been working in pretty much the majority of my professional career and to be able to take some ownership of that industry I thought was really fun and inspiring. So that’s what sort of mobilized us ultimately to go and apply for a number of them, knowing that we may not be successful in all. Then clearly, when you shake it all out, .film fell through as did a number of others but we traded and sold out of a number along the way but we still retain .film and it is very, very different to see the two pathways that they have led since their introduction.

But ultimately and fundamentally it was about taking some ownership of the core piece of infrastructure that helps this world go round, that we are more reliant on than ever. And to this day I still think that’s pretty fun. I wish I’d have got .kinderis. To have that and to leave that as a legacy for my kid I think would have been something pretty bloody cool

as well. But I guess I've just given that up for the next round. There'll be 40,000 applications for that and no doubt I'll get it on the aftermarket. Thank you.

JEFFREY SASS: Yeah, there should be a lot of contention for that particular extension in Round 2, I would think.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: I would think not.

JEFFREY SASS: I think, though, what you touched on really I think was the impetus for a lot of people. I know certainly I think Colin, if he were here, would say the same thing about .club. the idea of owning a piece of the Internet, of really taking ownership of a piece of that infrastructure, and something that is lasting. As long as we don't mess up and play by the rules, this is essentially a perpetual license and few business situations create that. So that was really interesting. I think that was an attraction for many.

Ray, how about you?

RAY KING: Well, just following up on Adrian's comments and I'm absolutely sure that Stacey would agree with me, I think .king would have been an

amazing TLD. It's kind of like a joke but it's not a joke because my last name actually is popular as both a last name and has some meaning outside of that. I've just accidentally shared off my secret list of TLDs that I'm going to be applying for in the next round, so let's keep this in the cone of silence, just for everyone in this meeting here. No one else can apply for that.

STACEY KING: I think you already have a contention set going here. Someone in the chat also said it's going to jump in.

RAY KING: Stacey, you and I will work out a deal.

STACEY KING: There's someone else in the chat, too.

RAY KING: You and I are going to work out a deal on that.

STACEY KING: Expanding on it.

Operators

RAY KING: Yeah, but I had spent, I guess, the last five years coming up to 2012 working in the wiki space and just I'm such a love the wiki technology, the collaborative culture and had spawned a lot of wikis on different subjects for friends. "Hey, I'm interested in tennis," go and do the tennis wiki or something else like that.

So this idea that we could open a name space which would be any subject .wiki was really strong in my head and I thought that was just such a great idea, because we all have a passion for something. If you have the passion to get on the Internet, find other people who share that passion and can work together to build something, to me that's just the most beautiful thing in the world. It's kind of why we stuck with ICANNWiki for so long as a project. So that was pretty much my impetus.

And then once we got going, I mentioned that we went from one to 10 TLDs. I think we just got kind of got swept up in it because if wiki works then why wouldn't .blog work because that's a platform, too. And then we loved the arts so we ended up applying for some that were kind of in that same artistic vein but that's how we got swept up in the process and I'm very glad we did.

JEFFREY SASS: Yeah, it's really interesting. I should clarify for the record because there are rumors going around, but there is no relation between Stacey and Ray, correct?

Operators

RAY KING: Not that I'm aware of but maybe we could, I don't know, check our genealogy tree afterwards.

JEFFREY SASS: Okay, just wanted to clear that up.

It's interesting, Ray, you mentioned passion. I think passion was the driver behind us applying for .club, or I should say Colin applying for it, since I came after the application. But really seeing a word that represented community passion and was recognized globally was really our impetus in really trying to take that one word and build it into a global brand.

In retrospect, arguably maybe we should have applied for a lot of others as many of you did, but then also in hindsight I think having just that focus on one extension, just one child, to pay all of our attention to was helpful for us in terms of developing the extension.

RAY KING: Yeah, I want to comment on that as well which is that you mentioned the camaraderie and I felt so much of that in the application process and I remember many people were very secretive about what they were going to apply for but Colin was pretty open. He was like, "Hey, I'm going to apply for .club," and took out a big booth, kind of acted like he owned it already. That was an amazing strategy as well and really, in talking to him, I said, "These guys have so much passion. I like them so

much.” .club was on our list and after thinking about I said, “.club, .team, .group are all pretty similar. I’m just going to apply for .group instead,” because I didn’t want to be kind of overlapped with you guys unnecessarily. And it was such a wide-open market you could apply for anything at that moment.

I think what is so cool about this particular sub industry is that we’re all doing the same thing and yet can operate on different TLDs and in parallel tracks. So except for the kind of initial contention we’re all in the same business and yet not competitive and helping each other. That is just absolutely amazing and what I love about this industry.

LORNA GRADDEN:

Wasn’t that one of the great things about Reveal Day when, if you’d been working in a silo, you were suddenly there and seeing what everybody else had been working on for the last two, three years? That was the thing I loved most about it. And, of course, the wild Donuts effect.

STACEY KING:

I would add to that. It’s interesting, I think there was that camaraderie and when I look at, for example, .club where you were very upfront about what you were applying for. I do wonder if it’s kind of a unique moment, kind of like the reality shows where the very first reality show was kind of interesting but then people figured out how to game it. I do wonder, especially since we’ve seen the various things that have come

into play since Reveal Day auctions and private agreements and all these things, if you would still be able to do that for this next round. It'll be very interesting to see.

JEFFREY SASS:

Yeah, I couldn't agree with you more. What will happen next is going to be very interesting. You also touched on this whole notion of the camaraderie and the uniqueness of the domain space, and part of that is each of us as a registry, we have something that is unique, is proprietary. So on the one hand, we're competing with the other unique extensions.

But at the same time, we're really not competing, because at the end of the day, a customer or registrant is not necessarily choosing dot club versus dot wiki or dot film, they're choosing the domain name that they feel an emotional attachment to, that they feel is the best fit for their business or their online presence or their idea. And we all win when we have a happy registrant. Right? Ultimately, while we all want our own domains to be registered, we also want every potential registrant to be really happy and excited about the domain that they've chosen and use it and promote it. And we all win because of that. I think that's something that's very unique to this industry.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Jeff, if I can just jump in there. There's a couple of things I think of. Number one, the process was very competitive for me as a backend

registry service provider, and really the application process the competitive nature of running the technical component and then putting yourself out to all the applicants, that was really the birth of the large-scale registry service provider. Up until then, it had sort of been done for ccTLDs, but largely every TLD run their own technology by and large.

So that was incredibly competitive for us. What I found interesting was, whilst there was this incredible camaraderie, and always has been with the way we would gather in different places throughout the world through the process, and we'd all be gathered into these new gTLD sessions and pile in there and wait for the next bit of information that would come out about it, taking notes and swapping those notes, ICANN found a way of making us be competitive towards each other at every post, because not only was it competitive with respect to the string that you did, of course, once you got your string, now it was competitive to see when you could be launched, or the auction process by which you would secure from your application.

So there was actually a number of different gateways where it became competitive in order to get through, and Digital Archery, as you said earlier, Jeff, but I don't think it destroyed the fabric of where we were. And I think that open line of communication, that special line of communication that has developed within the ICANN community really helped get through some of the bumps in the process, because there were a hell of a lot of bumps that were still being—or the wrinkles being ironed out after the process.

So I would like to think—and I've been somewhat distant from the ICANN world now—that that camaraderie is still there, and that the problem solving component is still very much active because you're going to need it.

STACEY KING:

To that point, I think there is also a change of culture. Reveal Day was that moment of that change of culture, where you had leading up to Reveal Day, it's basically insider baseball, it's people been in this community for a very long time, for the most part, who have worked together, who have argued and debated and then gone out to dinner with each other.

Reveal Day happened and all of a sudden, new people came in, and one, they didn't know how to work within the ICANN environment, but two, ICANN actually didn't know how to react to a changing culture and really wanted to maintain the way it did business. And I think that the couple of years after Reveal Day really sort of emphasized this this clash of cultures and creating a new one.

JEFFREY SASS:

Yeah, Reveal Day was really interesting and I'd be curious to hear people's thoughts and recollections of Reveal Day because it was—did you think that that's how many extensions would have been applied for, that's how many companies would apply for them? And I just

remember from our perspective, of course, it was important to find out we had two other applicants that we had to be in contention with.

But when everything became public, to your point, Stacey, with it all being behind closed doors at first when everything became public and you could see other people's applications, we were gobsmacked because as an applicant for a single TLD, we spent an inordinate amount of time and money and effort behind our application, we really went all in. And then we looked at some of our co-competitor applications like the Donuts application for dot club. The word dot club never even appears in the application. I mean, they literally cut and paste 300 applications and we were like, oh my gosh, how much time and money did we spend? Did we have to do all that work? What were some other thoughts you all had about Reveal Day?

MATT SERLIN:

I think one of my biggest takeaways was, yes, Donuts coming in with over 300 applications was stunning. But then also, you saw traditional technology players, and I'll call out Google and Stacey's former employer, Amazon, went big, right? I mean, just seeing those large numbers of applications. And we talked about the culture at ICANN, and it was very much insider baseball. Well, that was when ICANN as an industry, I think, to me really elevated its stature, when you had these large technology companies that weren't just applying for dot brands, that were applying for generic terms as well. I think that was probably to me the biggest kind of wow moment that we had on Reveal Day.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: I'd agree with that, too. And Stacey brought back some memories. I remember looking around shortly after Reveal Day at the next ICANN meeting and seeing a whole bunch of new faces and just going, "Wow." It was almost ICANN becoming mainstream a little bit. Up until that, you're right, it was inside baseball. And that was somewhat part of the problem, too, is who knew to apply for a name? What was the global campaign that was done in order to seek applications? And I think that we were very lucky, because had it have been as mainstream as potentially it is now, we wouldn't have been able to secure the names or do so as potentially cheaply that we did. So yeah, that was, I think, a major component that ICANN really had to grow up, was forced to not just listen to—and I'll count myself in this—a couple of cardigan-wearing glass-wearing enthusiasts, it actually had to had to hit mainstream and [inaudible] that forced that upon us.

JEFFREY SASS: Go ahead, Stacey.

STACEY KING: I think it's interesting, because outside of ICANN, I was on the board at the International Trademark Association and I remember going and doing a lot of presentations on new gTLDs. What are they? What should you be doing in this space? Is this important? Even if you don't apply, how do you need to think about it? And towards the end, the last year

before applications, I started doing a presentation which was the stages of grief, just taking the stages of grief you use with death and applying it to what CEOs and CMOS were going through when thinking about whether or not they should do the TLD process, get one.

And then that outcome where you have some who are like, okay, let's do it, I'll just put half a person's time on this because it's going to be super simple. And so I think you did have a lot of mechanisms and outreach going on outside of ICANN. It's just ICANN didn't see that. Because again, very separate worlds, very insider baseball.

RAY KING:

We were blown away by how many applications there were. I guess we had a good sense that there was going to be a lot of applications, but it was still a lot more than we expected. And I think that Google and Amazon jumping in was very validating kind of like, wow, we're playing on the same stage. And I remember doing a lot of work with the ICANN wiki folks trying to just figure out all the different categories, like people were thinking of professions and sports and brands and IDNs and you that type of platforms. So it was just a tremendous moment and a lot of fun as well.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

I still see TLDs pop up and go, "Was that an application?" And I remember that day when [I kept studying it,] obviously, to read them all. And I'm still surprised by the occasional one that will come across

my desk. So yeah, I think we had an understanding of some of the scale, sort of Donuts aside, because of the backend registry service we were providing. I think we did it for 150 applications. And so we were only a small player in that game and the Afiliases and the Neustars and Verisigns would be doing their own technical support of applications. So we knew there'd be a few. But clearly when the big players came out, it changed the game. But yeah, to this day, I wonder how many of us could recite, if we all sat around in a room to write down the ones that actually got through, how well we would do. And maybe that's a function of how successful they've been, if we've seen them. But, yeah, good times.

JEFFREY SASS:

I believe that's a Donuts application question, when you're applying for a job there, you need to rattle off all of their extensions. You heard Google is hard to apply for a job. Donuts is actually harder, because you have to memorize that list. But, Stacey, the grief you mentioned implies that there was also some challenges as we went forth and tried to launch these TLDs. It'd be interesting to hear stories about what were some of the challenges that we all faced post Reveal Day and getting through the contention sets, and then finally launching. Any thoughts?

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Sorry, Jeff. Just before you do, I just saw a note from Jothan Frakes and it's a very good point. Whilst we talk about Reveal Day and the new players that stepped in, I do think that there was a little bit of—when

they walked in, and they went, “Why is everything like this? Why is ICANN so hard?” What they missed was—and I think Jothan refers to them as calloused hands, is that there was a lot of work for many people over many years to get a square peg in a round hole on occasion, and all that sort of thing.

So I think a lot of the newcomers that did turn up to that very first ICANN meeting must have thought they were—what they missed is that there was a lot of work leading up to that, and a lot of compromise that was made, and a lot of understanding of the internal runnings of the core of the Internet. So I don't think we should forget that either, is that when we do reflect and have a bit of nostalgia as we do now, a lot of the people responsible for a hell of a lot of work leading up to Reveal Day. ICANN and community, more over the community. And I think most of us that are on this call certainly had a hand in that. I was on the GNSO Council and we helped write certain parts of the applicant guidebook and comment on that, and so on and so forth.

So many years of work by a lot of people went into that, and I don't think we should forget that. As the new candidates came in, they were pretty much handed, “Here's your application, you go.” Now, that might have been tricky. Yes. It probably wasn't as smooth as what they would have thought. But they certainly would have missed the nuance of the fact that many people did a lot of heavy lifting leading up to that. So Jothan, thanks for that point.

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RAY KING: I'll second that. I just want to say that we've been so frustrated so many times during the process, and it's so easy to be upset with ICANN, etc. But they need to be recognized. The community, of course, and all the work that went into setting up the thing, but ICANN staff as well for all the good work that's done there. That's basically got us through this whole process.

JEFFREY SASS: It's a good point, Adrian and Jothan and Ray. And arguably, yes, there were bumps along the way. But arguably, it worked. Here we are 10 years later, millions and millions of applicants and registrants have used their domains and continue to register interesting new domains every day. So all that hard work is paying off. Stacey, I think you wanted to say something.

STACEY KING: I think Lorna was next, I'll go after Lorna.

LORNA GRADDEN: Thank you, because I was just going to elaborate on something that Adrian said, which is the newcomers to this world came in and they were kind of handed it on a plate. Kind of yes or no. Does anybody else feel or remember that there was also kind of an old guard feeling against some of the newcomers? And there was a lot of disparagement of some of the new business models that people were trying. And yeah,

sure some of them didn't work out as well as they'd expected. But there was definitely a kind of “This is the way that you do things and this is the way we've always done things.”

I think it was quite tricky for some of those newcomers, it wasn't really just handed to them on a plate.

STACEY KING:

Yeah, so I was going to say something very similar as somebody who worked on the process going back some time, but working within companies that were fairly new to the space. I think that when ICANN decided to open this up to not just the people that had been in the space, anybody can apply, I don't know that the community necessarily was prepared to open up to—there are different ways people are going to come into this wanting to do different things and are going to have different ways of doing business.

It moved in a lot of ways more from this sort of multistakeholder policy driven process to we're creating a true industry and this group is going to, in some ways, be regulating this larger industry. For companies that their primary purpose is not to sell domain names, this process is really difficult. And I remember all of the commentary about why aren't these TLDs being launched, why are they trying to do something different? Just sign up with registrars, sell the domain names. That's what you should do, right? Anything different was really pushed against, in many ways.

And I think it isn't just protectionism. There is also a question of where should we be going with these? What can we do and what can't we do? But there was a lot more questioning, I think, of newcomers coming in than necessarily people who had been in the community for a very long time.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Yeah. Stacey, I agree with that. And certainly, I was guilty of eye rolling a number of occasions when someone would get up to the microphone and say this and that. "Geez, don't you know how that works?" Largely because you've been doing it for 10 years prior. So it's just natural.

I do think ICANN struggled to understand that there would be different ways of looking. And when I say ICANN, I mean the community. And I remember vertical integration and a registry being able to register domain names in their own TLD in a closed space, because they want to and shouldn't have to open up for other registrars, I remember that being a point of contention for a long, long time. So if I'm IBM and I'm only ever going to register my names for my TLD for my company, I should be able to do so through my own registrar. Yes, I may still have to have a registrar in place because of—even that should be challenged. Why can't I just add them straight to the zone?

But there was, I think, a real struggle there for a while with the old rules having to be manipulated to support new ideas. And upon reflection, I think that could have been done better. But the good part about Reveal Day was the doors were burst open. This wasn't just a little trickle

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through like we've done with the previous rounds of TLDs. This was bursting through it. And really, there was no choice but to change the way we thought. Now, it caused some pain. But I think largely we got there and those TLDs that wanted to operate in that manner that I described earlier, have been able to do so.

MATT SERLIN:

And we spent years debating what should go into the applications, what the rules should be. We discussed things like how government should approach TLDs and what would and would not be allowed, we discussed things like should closed TLDs be allowed, we just feel like a lot of these things that came up after the fact I actually think in part was a shock reaction from the community, which was, wait a minute, there are all these new players. We don't know what they're going to do. There's a little bit of protectionism there, is it going to change how things operate?

And it actually caused the community to reevaluate all these things that we had discussed before, which it's an interesting process, if you are a new entity coming into this community be like, wait a minute, I had an application. These were the rules. And now you're telling me the rules are changing.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

And Stacey, we still measure the success of TLDs upon the volume, that number of domains under management. We still do that today. And

particularly with dot film, we think we've got a very successful TLD. It does exactly what we want it to do. And we've got 5500 names in the space. It's profitable. It's serving the industry for which it was meant. So I think there are a number of different ways you can define success. And that sort of goes back into that we just still haven't got our heads around the fact that there are different models. And innovation is still pushing the boundaries there.

JEFFREY SASS:

Adrian, I think it's interesting. It's a great point about how do you measure success, and there are different models. And I wonder in retrospect, if part of the pressure to use the number of domains under management as that measure of success was the fact that we had all these names being launched at the same time. So you had registrars having to deal with every what is Wednesdays I think was the day, every Wednesday or every other Wednesday, there was two or three new extensions coming out. And so the extensions had to think, well, how are we going to get the attention of the registrars? And the easiest way to get their attention is through numbers. So I think we're almost forced into this mindset of having to shoot for big numbers to hold our place in this stream of new introductions that seem never ending. Does that make any sense? Matt, go ahead. I know you had something you wanted to say.

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MATT SERLIN: Yeah. It's interesting, Adrian, when you said that the definition of success, I think, very early on, when we had 23 gTLDs in the space, the only way to measure success was volume. And that's all everyone looked at. And then I think with the sponsored round, you had things like jobs and dot mobi, tel I think was in there, Asia, I think it started to change. And people started to realize and recognize that, well, wait a minute, there are other measures of success, not just the size of the zone. And then I think certainly with new gTLDs, then it really became clear that there are all kinds of other ways to look at defining a successful TLD. I always like to look at relevancy, use, right? So if you're a dot photography TLD and you have a certain percentage of photographers that are using that, have live sites, all sorts of different things. So it definitely was the sort of evolution of ICANN and the industry to be able to look at things in a different way than they did 20 years ago.

JEFFREY SASS: Yeah, Matt, dot photography is an interesting example, too. And you reminded me when you mentioned it, the old rule of thumb was always domain names had to be short, you wanted the shortest possible name, the shortest possible extension, and then dot photography came out, and everyone thought, well, that's really long, no one's going to want to use that. And especially because they were competitive, shorter extensions, like dot photo. Yet, professional photographers flocked towards dot photography, because in actuality, it was a name shortener, because most of them were JoeSmithphotography.com and

they could become JoeSmith.photography, which is actually shorter and more direct and more meaningful. So that was an interesting thing I think that surprised a lot of people, myself included. Stacey, go ahead.

STACEY KING:

This may be a bit controversial, and I will be very lawyerly and say this is absolutely personal opinion, nothing related to any of my employers in the past or future. I think one of the problems when you look at alternate uses of TLDs also comes down to the system is structured around the way it worked before TLDs. And a lot of the rules that went back to when you had just Network Solutions. And the question about how do you get some competition with registrars.

I think as you move forward, and you have all these new TLDs and registries are required to use registrars to distribute their domain names, but registrars don't want to sign on to something that won't equate in volume sales and low cost, you're really preventing any alternative uses. There is a clash there because it is limiting. And we know some of the TLDs that tried to do things very differently, and literally could not get a single registrar to sign on. And as long as you have that process, the volume sale of domain names is going to be the [indication] of success because that's how contracts are set up and it's how the entire market is set up.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Thanks Stacey. You said exactly what I was going to say. Along the same lines, at least, in that we still have registrars today that want to charge a minimum fee to us, I'm talking as a registry operator for dot film, because we're not turning over enough volume. And whilst for example, our wholesale rate is significantly more than what a .com would be, they make 10 times as much as they do off a dot film name. And when I brought that up, that hadn't entered the equation for the consideration for what they were doing. So the only metric that they looked at was to say, well, let's go through our registries that we're currently supporting and find out which ones we want to continue to support. They're using the volume as the major metric there. So it's still a legacy thing to this day. But I take your point, they've got businesses to run.

The registrar component here is an important one. And as we look potentially, at the horizon, it is definitely a consideration of somebody that is planning to submit an application in hopes of securing a TLD is your distribution, and how—because it's a very different distribution world now, especially with the consolidation that continues to happen than what it was then. And it will be different again later. So one key takeaway here, I think, would be distribution and the sale of your domain names, depending on your business model, put some really good thought into that.

JEFFREY SASS:

That's a great point, Adrian. I think for new applicants in the coming round or rounds, it's really important to know beforehand how you

intend to measure success for your business and what your objective really is, not just to go out there and enter it.

And Ray, I wanted to ask you, this discussion about registrars, you are a registry who decided to also operate a registrar. Was that to combat some of the issues that Stacey brought up and give yourself more opportunity to innovate?

RAY KING:

I think it might have been a little more mundane than that, which is that when you sell a domain name, there's a registry and a registrar involved. But typically, the end user only interfaces with the registrar. But now if you're running a small niche TLD like we were, dot Wiki, dot inc, dot design, it's actually hard to get the registrars' attention when you want to go to a trade show that has 500 people, and you're like, hey, we could sell 50 names.

You can't get a registrar to say, "Okay, I'll split the cost, we'll do the booth, we'll do the graphics, we'll do a coupon codes for the day of the show." It's a lot of work. And it's also confusing to the customers. Because I know, as I said, Andrew and I were in a lot of trade shows together pitching names. And when you explain the new TLD to them, they're like, they finally get that. And then you're like, oh, but then you have to, "Not us, you've got to go to the registrar to buy it." It's like, "Oh, that's another company. It's just too complicated."

So we said we need our own registrar where we can just pitch. Here's the one concept, new TLD, push one button, put your contact and credit card number in, and boom, it's yours. And that's why we started Porkbun. And then after that, we realized that we had to do other things like email and hosting and just gradually turned into more of an actual registrar. But that's worked well for us.

And we love using Porkbun to help other new TLD registrars market and try and make that process as simple as possible. So set up a coupon code, you're going to a trade show, I need a, you know, 50% off for the next three days, we want to make that all as simple and automated as possible because the back and forth of tracking things manually, sending invoices from registry to registrar is just a nightmare if it's not automated.

JEFFREY SASS:

That also gave you the opportunity to have the direct relationship with the end user, which the current distribution system makes it very difficult as the registry operator. We don't have that access directly to the registrants. They're technically customers of the registrar where they registered the domain. And that's challenging and it's interesting because other industries have faced and are facing that when you look at the music industry and how it's changed because of the record labels and even the content creators now being able to have that direct connection with the end user where for years and years and years, it was a distribution model and the record labels, their customer was the

rack jobbers, the distributors, not the person consuming the music. So maybe there'd be a way for us to have a closer relationship as registries.

RAY KING:

I think you have to when you're running a niche TLD, because you're going to care a lot more about finding that founder who's using your TLD in a way that is fantastic. And it's strange, because the industry was bifurcated into registries and registrars. And now, this has brought that much closer together. That's not to say that all the other registrars haven't played an amazingly great role in helping us market our TLDs as well, I'm just saying that it's sometimes harder when you have smaller events, and you want to be able to act quickly. It's just hard to have two companies working together to then go after one consumer. That doesn't really economically work.

I want to go back, and actually, when you guys were talking about dot photography, I was just like, oh, I have to say something, because we were one of the two applicants for dot photography, and I love photography, which is why we applied for it in the first place. And I was like, oh, man, it's long. Actually, [Cullen] was telling me that it's long, and I don't know. And we were just on the fence. We ended up in the very first private auction, losing that to Donuts. And it was kind of a source of pain, because after, it jumped out and it kind of immediately had some success. I thought it was kind of a milestone for the TLD program, because an 11-letter string, like you said, it just is such a in your face proof of the new gTLD program and how it's supposed to work

for an industry that I love, small professionals, photography practice, I think it's fantastic.

And also, I think pricing is a huge thing as well. And that was something that we struggled with really hard. Because in the past, most names had similar kind of \$10 pricing. And in the new world, you've now got really inexpensive names, and then you've got really expensive names. And like Adrian was saying, what's the definition of success? I think that's really changed the complexion of the industry quite a bit, and probably when I look back at what were the biggest struggles in terms of launching, I think pricing, kind of figuring that out. I'm not even sure we did figure it out. But figuring out and trying to get out of the domainer mindset more into the TLD operator mindset was huge. And then of course marketing, which we just discussed.

JEFFREY SASS:

Great. Stacey.

STACEY KING:

Yeah, the registrar system as is is fantastic for most of the TLDs. It works well. It's a system that's set up and is run very well. But it is that when you get into one of the points of the new TLD program, which is some innovative new TLDs, how are we going to use these in a different way? By maintaining that system, you're kind of limited to innovation but only within that same model and the same way we do things.

And I look at TLDs like dot wed which I was not involved in, but watching them, I thought dot wed, their original idea was fantastic, right? You sell a domain name to a couple getting married. Along with it comes information locally on florists that you can use, bands you can get, venues for your wedding, then after two years, the domain name price skyrockets, in part because they want someone else to be able to get the domain name for their wedding, if that's their name, and you can archive your materials, your albums, all those things.

They really couldn't get off the ground because registrars were just like, "No, we're not going to register a name that, one, requires us to distribute information, and two, we will be priced out of renewals. Like no one will renew this." And that business, there's a variety of reasons why the business may or may not have worked, but they just could not get through all of the bureaucracy and the pushback from the community. So until we deal with some of those issues in a real way, I think you're going to have a very hard time seeing TLDs really attempt to do something different.

MATT SERLIN:

Yeah. It's a great point, Stacey. And I will just say that we could spend 90 minutes alone just talking about pricing and marketing and all of that, because there was so much to be considered as these TLDs were launching, and frankly, as they continue to launch. We are still launching new gTLDs from that round.

But I wanted to go back, not to beat a dead horse, but since we were talking about personal anecdotes, I will say that mattserlin.photography is actually the only new gTLD that I have ever owned. In a previous life, I was actually a professional photojournalist. And when I eventually leave the domain industry and retire on a beach somewhere, I'll have my small business all set up around my photography domain. So there you go.

JEFFREY SASS:

That's awesome, Matt. Carrying through this notion of innovation, even understanding the challenges, Stacey, that you clearly defined, what were some of the innovations that jumped out at you that you all saw and thought were actually successful at innovating in the space, anything come to mind?

RAY KING:

Digital Archery.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

Up until you said successful, I was going to say innovation, one thing we haven't discussed is the introduction of IDNs. This was a significant moment for the global engagement of the Internet with respect to being able to do it in a native script. And a lot of the times that isn't acknowledged with respect to the introduction of new gTLDs.

And I know it's probably not necessarily appropriate for this white Australian English-speaking male to sort of bang on about it. But I think it was something that was rolled out well in principle. I don't know that it's necessarily with respect to operations being accepted, I think if I was being critical of ICANN, maybe more work could have been done around universal awareness, and then universal acceptance. And I know that that's something when we started the domain name association, was something very much the forefront.

So when we talk about innovation, I didn't want to just go too far before we thought, don't forget the most innovative, by definition, I think, part of the new gTLD program was the introduction or the ability to register TLDs in scripts other than ASCII script.

And having had the first delegated name in dot shabaka, which is an Arabic top-level domain, or uses Arabic script, we have not had the success we wanted. We thought being first would give us the big push, would help that the press—it got a lot of press, it should be said, when we were the first delegation into the root zone. But after that, we just haven't seen the take up that we that we would have thought.

And whether that's because those that would use the TLD and register a second level domain are more comfortable or more practiced in using ASCII, maybe others can have opinions here. But yeah, I would say dot shabaka has been a failure of the new gTLD program. We probably haven't been given the push we need to but there are a number of factors fair to say.

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But yeah, so whilst we talk about innovation, IDNs, whether they've been a successful innovation, I would guess to say no.

JEFFREY SASS: Yeah, but you're right to bring up by IDNs as definitely innovative. Thank you for that. Ray, you have your hand up.

RAY KING: I think that one of the things that's neat is that as you launch a new TLD, you get to make the rules, within the guidelines, obviously and with dot gay we did two things which I thought were great. One is we give 20% of new registration revenue to LGBTQ+ causes. And the second is the gay rights protection program where we will take down a site that we feel is harmful in any number of ways to the community, either proactively if it's obvious, or if reported to us, and that allows us to kind of create this new space in a way that we can feel confident that if you're going to a name that ends in dot gay, it's going to be one that is helpful and positive to the community. And you can't go backwards, you only have that opportunity when you launch new TLDs. You can't change the rules afterwards. And I think that's just a really cool opportunity, and one that I'm super excited about.

JEFFREY SASS: Lorna, go ahead.

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LORNA GRADDEN:

Not exactly an innovative use, but a new group of TLDs that came to the market in 2012 that I personally love are the city TLDs. And I think they have been a terrific benefit for people. I know that personally, I love anything with a dot London address, because I know it is going to be absolutely relevant to me. And I know where I'm going to find it. Dot Berlin has been super successful. So it's not innovative, but it wasn't there before. And I think we have benefited from it.

And then other uses that I'm seeing, I know of at least one dot brand that's using its dot brand for all of its kind of internal technical network support. Now, of course, it could do that with a dot com. But I like the idea that they are using their dot brand to do that within their own space. It gives them a feeling of security, and they can churn out new domains for it if they need to, they can do that kind of on the fly for various uses that they have. So those are my couple of kind of favorite innovative uses, I guess.

JEFFREY SASS:

Yeah, Lorna, I'm so glad you brought up the geos, and also the notion of relevance, right? Those geographic extensions add immediate context and relevance to anything that you put to the left of the dots. That's great. Thank you. Stacey.

STACEY KING:

I will disagree with Adrian a little bit that IDNs were innovative but a failure. I actually think IDNs have been a very successful innovation. And

I think a lot of times, it's easy to forget innovation can be a very long road to get to the end point. Universal acceptance is a massive issue with IDs, as with all the TLDs, making sure your TLD is actually recognized through other systems. But definitely with IDNs. So you can get a domain name, you can use it within a region that recognizes that script. But when you try and send an email to another email provider that doesn't recognize that IDN, that's where you start falling into problems, or you try and input it into a bank system as an email address, they don't recognize it.

So this gets back to, for these innovative uses of TLDs, moving beyond that, “Oh, but we're selling domain names and they're being used in these volumes,” by selling IDN domain names and people starting to use them, it's forcing that change across the chain, but it's going to take a very long time.

Dot brands are the same. People think you get a dot brand, you start using it as your main website, your main presence, maybe give it to your distributors. But all of your internal systems have older domain names encoded in them. Partners have—the actual process of trying to move a whole company over to a new TLD is a massive endeavor for a company and sometimes can take five, 10 years if you have had these systems for a long time. So I actually think these are really innovative, it's just going to take a while for that ripple effect to go on.

One of the other TLDs that I will call out as I see it, or at least how it was for me, dot art, which really was like an early NFT. Like let's use a

domain name not necessary for marketing, but as a digital certificate, like this is a certificate behind authenticity of an art piece. And there are also some TLDs that have been expanding and I know some registrars working on this as well, on sort of crypto wallets and those types of things where you're bringing the power of DNS and these unique identifiers to alternate things. It's again, not just about marketing something.

JEFFREY SASS: Thank you, Stacey. Adrian.

ADRIAN KINDERIS: Thanks. So maybe Stacey, my point should have been I don't know that I would want to call an IDM a success story, because I think that sells it short of the work that still needs to be done. And that's where I'm getting. So you know, I want to pat it on the back. They don't have the same opportunities in market. And until they get that parity, I think potentially casting a negative aspersion may help there. But so I certainly take your point.

And then with respect to geos, I find them a really interesting introduction into the namespace, into the community, because they caused a bit of an issue around the policy construct, because up until then, you had ccTLDs, went and sat over in this room and did their meeting and then gTLDs went and sat over in this room and had their meeting.

And then you had these city names that more often than not had been sponsored, or had to be sponsored by either local governments and/or state governments or even federal governments in some occasions. And so they got to suddenly dragged across, are they a cc? Where do they live?

And so I found that was interesting once they started playing it, they played by gTLD rules, but they were supported by governments. And so that was one way that ICANN had to innovate. As I say, having stepped away from the industry for a while, I can't really comment as to how successfully that has happened. But I could see that that was something that was playing out with respect to effectively a new pillar that the geo TLDs had brought up that didn't fit within the mold of the ICANN policy community [inaudible].

MATT SERLIN:

Everyone's made great points. I just wanted to pick up on something that Stacey said relative to dot brand, since it's the sort of space that I've played in. 10 years ago, when we were having these conversations, the conversations literally were, "Okay, so we're going to switch from our corporate name.com to, what, .home.tld.brand, right? And so that was—and you'd get these CTOs that would look at all the infrastructure changes that that required, and it would just, frankly, scare the crap out of them.

And they would apply anyway, just to have it. And then I think over time, what we've seen is so many of the dot brands have come up with so

many other ways to be impactful with their TLDs, whether it's a marketing campaign, a specific show dot brand, all sorts of things. Very few dot brands have really been used to switch over from their core website.

Some of them have, but Stacey's right, that's a 10, 20, if ever, year endeavor. So I think being able to come with new and creative ways to use a dot brand or any TLD like that has been really fun to watch. The other one, just because some people called out specific ones, one that I think is certainly innovative is dot new. So domain name dot new gives you right to some action-oriented use, whether it's a spreadsheet, an account that you're setting up, a service. So that's one where I think, definitely, we've seen some innovation.

JEFFREY SASS:

Yeah, I would agree, Matt, dot new. I'm glad you brought that up, I'd forgotten that. But I've actually used it on numerous occasions to open up a new document or something else. So Google did a good job with that. And that's interesting too, Ray pointed out early on how having the big players, the Amazons and the Googles of the world, step up and really participate in a big way in this program helped validate us when we were talking to people, when we filed the application and said what we were doing, they look like we're crazy, like, what's a top level domain? What are you talking about? When you can turn around and tell them, well, Google applied for this many and Amazon's involved and all of a sudden, they said, "Oh, okay," so they thought we're doing

something worthwhile, finally. So it's nice to see that not only did some of the bigger companies participate, but they also innovated, to your point. So thank you for bringing that up.

So we've got about 10 minutes left before the end of the session. So here's our last chance to share some great stories. As we get closer to the end, it'd be interesting to reflect. Here we are 10 years later. How do you feel about it? How do you feel about how it went, looking back on it, 10 years? And at the same time, if you had to give one bit of advice to someone who's considering applying for the next round, what would that bit of advice be? And if we could just go around and get those questions answered from everyone. We'll probably come right up to the top of the hour. Who would like to go first?

RAY KING:

Actually, I want to start by asking you a question, Jeff. I don't know if this is proper protocol or not. But you've always spoken about the great twerking moment where before, no one knew about gTLDs and then afterwards, everyone knew about it. And it's felt to me like a little more of a slow burn. But I'm wondering if you think that that moment is in the past or coming in the future at this point.

JEFFREY SASS:

Yeah. Thank you, Ray. The twerking moment Ray's pointing out to, at a panel back in 2013, I think it was at the traffic conference. I was on a panel with Rick Schwartz. And I made the comment that the industry

hadn't had its twerking moment yet, meaning that when no one knew what twerking was, and then Miley Cyrus was on one of the late night talk shows and mentioned twerking and the next day, everyone in the country knew what twerking was. So that's what I meant by the twerking moment.

And I'd say, Ray, we haven't had something that would qualify as an industrywide twerking moment. We've had a few little minor twerks along the way. I'd argue that for dot club particularly, when Demi Lovato organically launched Lovato.club, that was a nice twerking moment. Clubhouse early last year was a little bit of a twerking moment for dot club. I think the current situation with crypto adopting many XYZ domains is a bit of a twerking moment for them. So I think there have been little pops that were sparked by culture in a way twerking is a cultural item. But I don't believe there's been that big twerking moment that I had hoped for or anticipated back then. Adrian.

ADRIAN KINDERIS:

I just wanted to sort of pile on top of that. And maybe I should ask my therapist about this. But I just wanted to sort of quiz everybody here. Do you guys still get a little bit of a buzz when you see a TLD in the wild, like I'll be at the movies and something will come up dot movie, or I'll see dot world on the side of a bus or something, I'll literally take a photo of it like a loser, I'll run down the street to take a photo on the bus.

And yeah, it's kind of something that as my professional career has evolved, no one understands around me, why is he getting all giggly

about this particular ...? So yeah, I do look fondly upon the whole process, I look fondly upon the people that I got to interact with, and still do. And this has been an absolute joy, to be able to spend some time with you folks. But the lasting memory for me, or the lasting experience, is still that. I still get excited. No matter what I go on to do from here, when I do see something that's outside of a .com or .au in my world, something that is part of the new gTLD arena, I'll still get excited about it. And I think that's probably a very positive memory to take away. So thank you all for the opportunity.

JEFFREY SASS:

Love that. Thanks, Adrian. Stacey.

STACEY KING:

To your question about, was it access? And then what would we advise people? It's hard for me to say it was or it was not a successful process. But I think looking back on it, I would have to say yes, for that same reason that change is very difficult and it takes a very long time. And this was an incredible process of change that is obviously going to need some iterations and need some work as new players come in and as the existing players stay. So yes, I think overall, it was a successful process. It had a lot of headaches behind it. But I think it is part of a longer process.

In terms of advising, I would advise anyone looking to apply for new TLD to be applying for it because you have a reason to, you have some

purpose for that TLD. Do not apply because you think that you might be able to get into an auction and make some money off of it, because I think that is going to change a little bit, the perception behind those auctions.

And I would also say that having some idea why you want to use it and what it will take to run one is actually going to help move this community forward to that success. It may be we want to get a dot brand. We don't know why we want to protect our brand. And we have some individual uses. But definitely have some sort of thought behind it.

For those of you who want to do something very different, please do. It is a massive headache to try and push things within this community. But it's absolutely necessary. And that is how we're going to see change across the board. Thanks.

LORNA GRADDEN:

Looking back, was it a success? Yes, it was a success sort of in spite of itself. There were so many problems. But we did get through them. And I would say looking to future rounds, don't try and make it perfect. It's never going to be a perfect process. And as we all know, perfect is the enemy of good. And to applicants, building on what Adrian and what Stacey was saying about having your vision, your goal that you're working towards, yes.

And get the right team of people in place, really get your stakeholders engaged. Because for dot brands, sometimes there was one or two lone voices carrying the torch for their dot brand. And if you can get a wider team of stakeholders together, you have more chance of success and longevity.

MATT SERLIN:

Again, everyone's had had great points. And I'll also say that the six of us got to have our faces on this Zoom call, but there were hundreds, if not thousands of others that had very similar experiences. So shout out to everyone in the community that participated in this 10 years ago.

Was it a success? Yes, absolutely. At the end of the day, we didn't break the Internet. And remember there was a whole host of conversations about root zone scaling, and how many TLDs could the root support. We didn't break the Internet. And I think for me, that was the sort of threshold.

To Adrian's point, I was literally driving in my car yesterday, and there was a bumper sticker that had a dot salon name on it. And it just brought a smile to my face. And I thought, what great timing, I don't think I've ever seen the dot salon domain in the wild like that. So that was fantastic. I think we all chuckle and sort of take some pride in that.

And then advice to people in the next round, I think, again, people had great points. My overarching comment would be, be flexible, be very flexible. Whatever timelines you think are your sort of mileposts, just

Operators

understand that those are going to change over time and sort of ebb and flow. But thanks, this has been great.

RAY KING:

To Adrian's point, I spend a fair amount of time in New York and I just love seeing dot NYC names everywhere I go. That to me is such a proof point of new TLDs eventually creeping into use.

And the domain names were, as I recall, put into place so that people didn't have to remember IP addresses. And the fact that we can now use the TLD portion to convey meaning is fantastic. We're a long way there with all the TLDs we have. I assume in the next round, they'll be even more. But that's the purpose of the domain name. And it's such valuable real estate.

So to me, has the program been a success? Absolutely. Because we have really brought so much more meaning to the domain name. And as domain people, the domain name is the one piece of the address that you as a consumer or a small business can control and not have to rely on other platforms. And I think we've given that option to almost to everybody on the Internet. So I think it's an absolutely huge success. This, for me, personally has been an amazing journey. I wouldn't trade it for anything. And I think that bringing something new into the world is really rewarding experience. And my only advice would be, I think Stacey said the same thing. Love your TLD and it won't feel like work.

JEFFREY SASS:

That's great, Ray. thank you so much, everyone. This has been a terrific discussion. And I'll have to say when you talk to a registrant, someone who registered one of these extensions, Matt, if you pulled over that car and asked that person with the bumper sticker, I guarantee they would have told you how thrilled they were to have that dot salon name and how it made them feel special and made their business and their online presence special.

And I think that really speaks to the success of this program in that I think we thought—those of us inside thought that every time someone registered a new TLD, they'd jump and scream from the top of the mountain, "Hey, I just registered a dot club." But that didn't happen because to them, they're just registering the right domain for them. And that's it. They're not registering a new TLD, they're not registering something unusual. They're registering the name that works for them. And they're happy, and if they're happy, we should all be happy.

So this has been a fantastic discussion. As Matt said, thanks to everyone who's here listening in the audience. Thanks to Adrian and Stacey and Lorna and Matt and Ray for spending this hour and a half sharing stories. Everyone here and everyone in the audience has tons of stories. And hopefully we'll get to share them together in person sometime soon.

I want to thank everyone for this. I want to hand it back to Martin to close us out. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to join you for this session.

MARTIN SUTTON:

That's been fantastic. Thank you so much to our panelists. That was enlightening, great insights and a lot of fun too, just reminiscing on some of the things that we've experienced over the last 10 years. It'd be great to have those conversations back in the bars around ICANN meetings at some stage. And I hope that's not too far away.

And congratulations to everybody, everybody on the panel, everybody that's been involved in this journey. It's been phenomenal. And I look forward to the next 10 years of what we can see in the new gTLD world.

So thanks for joining us. It's been wonderful. Thanks very much and enjoy the rest of your day.

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