

Firms missing out on net names boom

Christy Choi , 2:47pm, Dec 07, 2011
South Morning China Post



Local companies could get left behind in a huge expansion of internet domain names to be launched next month, Internet Society of Hong Kong founding chairman Charles Mok warned on Wednesday.

Mok said few local companies seemed to be aware of the expansion of internet domain names – or even interested.

He said more Hong Kong companies should get involved because it was not known when the next big expansion would occur.

This follows a landmark decision by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (Icann), which governs the internet's naming system, and allows applicants to make up their own domain name endings. These are the letters after the last dot: known as generic top level domains (gTLDs).

Icann says the huge increase in the number of endings from the present 21, including .com, .org and .biz to an almost unlimited range will start a new internet age.

But Mok said his dealings with Icann showed few Hong Kong companies were interested – apart from his own and “a couple of others”.

However, mainland and Taiwanese firms were setting up in Hong Kong to take advantage of the city's good regulatory practices, ease of financial transactions and Chinese language-based market.

They were also preparing to register their own names, which can be a company title or any other combination of letters, he said.

“We're going to come to January next year and people are going to read about what's happening with companies like Google, Facebook and the like getting in on the business and think, 'oh that's a good idea', but by that time it'll be too late,” warned Mok.

“We don't know when the second wave of registrations will be after this one. It may take years, so there's a sense of urgency,” he said.

Applications open in January for an initial three months.

Mok said most interest in Hong Kong was coming from intellectual property lawyers.

US-based Icann is charging US\$185,000 for the initial applications, and US\$25,000 a year for maintenance thereafter.

Hirokatsu Ohigashi, executive director of the GMO Registry, a registry services specialist, estimated that one brand probably owned around 2,000 alternative domain names. This is to stop fraudsters trying to take advantage of their brand.

But Charmaine Koo a partner specialising in intellectual property at Deacons law firm, said the cost of maintenance might not make it worthwhile to register for a gTLD.

“It's worth it if you're going to really use it to interact with your community. If you don't have the financial or marketing capabilities to do that, there's no point,” she added.