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Angry Birds backing two Chinese-language gTLDs

Kevin Murphy, September 9, 2013, 15:32:54 (UTC), Domain Registries

The Finnish/Irish new gTLD applicant TLD Registry Ltd has signed two ICANN Registry Agreements, covering the Chinese strings 在线 (.online) and 中文网 (a phrase meaning "Chinese language website").

The deals were signed yesterday, but the news is set to be formally announced in Beijing on Tuesday by the Finnish prime minister, Jyrki Katainen, who's on a state visit to the country.

He'll be joined by Peter Vesterbacka, chief marketing officer of Angry Birds maker Rovio Entertainment, which is supporting TLD Registry as the first announced member of its "founders program".

The two new agreements mean ICANN has now contractual powers over more new gTLDs (19) than legacy ones (18).

TLD Registry CEO Arto Isokoski told DI this morning that 在线 and 中文网 are already extremely well-known and widely-used phrases on the Chinese internet.

"在线" is the direct translation of "online" and "中文网" is what Chinese web users instinctively type when they're searching for the Chinese-language version of a foreign brand's web site, he said.

"It surprises me as well that these were not contested," Isokoski said. "These are the strings that Chinese users type in when they're looking for web sites online."

Both TLDs will be open to registrants anywhere in the world, though 中文网 seems to be particularly suited for brands from the ASCII parts of the world, looking to improve SEO in the country.

Isokoski said that the company hopes to take 在线 and 中文网 to market early next year. If the strings are delegated in early November, then general availability could start in mid-January, he said.

Depending on ICANN delays, the launch schedule may have to be moved back to February or March in order to avoid the "dead period" around Chinese New Year, which starts in late January, he said.

The most directly competitive gTLD would be 网址, an arguably superior string meaning roughly "website", which is now out of contention and likely to sign its own contract soon.

Two other Chinese gTLDs, both owned by Donuts, have ICANN contracts already — 游戏 (games) and 企业 (business).

Isokoski said that TLD Registry hopes to have about 20 members of its founders program (included Rovio, which is Finnish but makes games wildly popular in China) and about 20 launch registrars.

Like other IDN gTLD registries, the company is hoping that its first-to-market advantage will give its marketing a lift due to the extra media interest.

TLD Registry is based in Ireland, near its back-end provider Afilias, but was founded by Finns. Afilias alum Pinky Brand is managing registrar relationships for the company.

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