

# The global race for internet ownership is on

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2 Aug 2012

The internet is no longer just a screen, mouse and keyboard, it's a living organism attached to the hearts and minds of billions while breathing via their wallets. It has become a true example of a "human interface with electro-ergonomics", where human functions are intertwined with circuitry to access information, suck cash and process consumption.

Today's internet connects 2 billion users with a trillion daily views of web pages, videos and emails around the world. As an unstoppable friendly giant, it is also considered a threat by various political ideologies around the world. Their agenda-centric options by heads of states are getting restless; full internet control, possible taxation, making a special tool for 'friendly surveillance', or having a red and shiny internet 'kill switch' button on the desk.

## Who should push the buttons?

The world is increasingly divided; confusion rampant and agendas on the rise. So far the internet authority ICANN, the International Corporation of Assigned Names and Numbers, is fighting for survival to keep its sluggish bottom-up multi-stakeholders model afloat while the politics of Washington would like to see a much tighter grip. The global internet community would like to see a standalone ICANN serving global interests while other countries want to fragment the internet just to move it out of its current state of American domination. This complex tug of war is the new game. ICANN is still the appointed leader under the spotlight, performing at its best and has great challenges ahead.

The current geo-political debate on internet ownership is bifurcated by the population-rich nations against knowledge-rich nations; the developed and knowledge-rich world of the pristine past is pitted against the reality of emerging world of population-rich buzzing economies arising from the shanty towns. Will ICANN prove to be the right body or will it cave in to global tug of wars? Will UN be the right upgrade or the unrecoverable downgrade? Suddenly, the world is forming opinions, sometimes correctly and others half-baked fear mongering. Will the internet itself as a friendly giant has its own voice and power and may refuse to be tamed by anybody? Will the 'Arab Spring fever' theory become a global pandemic of mega proportions? The jury is out.

The fancy big red button internet 'kill switch' on the desk of heads of states may be used for the photo-ops. The fears of algorithmic censorship; selective suppression of items from the search engines, as software programs will hum in the silence of the dark corridors and sniff out, alter, erase or re-fortify desired public opinion from the internet and re-feed the hungry sound bite chat-dependence populace a daily comfort fix. The wait-and-see mode is in.

## Does political savvy rhetoric lack tech-knowledge?

Half knowledge is far more dangerous than full knowledge, especially on this complex and multidirectional new age topic. Global domain name management expansion has a direct impact on global e-commerce and the future of the internet. These serious levels of intricacies are neither on the top conferences' agenda or taught in the world's best B schools. The corporate world has assumed the old knowledge of simple 'web-email-domain feature' internet of the first generation as an acceptable standard. Majorities are out of touch and not prepared to face its hyper-accelerated powers of this entirely different beast.

## Why is the internet a new beast?

Among all the visible benefits of the internet, there are two that stand at the top of the agenda:

- Fast and free information, and...
- An amazing capability to run business.

However, a third new component has been added: the power of social media; a gentle force that started out with innocent pictures and text that combined with massive, earth shattering numbers. The same gentle notions suddenly became the 'day of the locust'. Dark clouds over the landscape devour, bend and twist global public opinions. The internet driven outcry was applied against the powerful US-led SOPA 'Stop Online Piracy Act' movement, and overnight it muted the issue before SOPA could overpower the internet. The internet giant has successfully altered the results of elections and such features may become direct threats to opposing ideologies.

## **Will ICANN tame this giant?**

ICANN is the only organisation of its kind in the world. Like it or hate it, ICANN brought substantial maturity to the internet. It has performed very well but like any other non-profit government style organisation, it becomes entangled with human bondage to greed, insecurities and incompetence. ICANN clearly deserves the credit for keeping the giant in control, and solidly tied down to a post. However, it's the organic growth, maturity of the global ecommerce landscape, multilingualisation, global image shifts and domain name expansion where suddenly, all of the panic buttons were pushed. Despite crushing opposition ICANN delivered the gTLD program and despite all the glitches it has demonstrated its staying power. The world now expects a highly efficient performance from ICANN and the challenge to meet such expectations demands major changes at its core. A distinctively courageous leadership with stature and global vision is mandatory.

## **What are registries, registrars and domainers to do?**

The domain industry is actively engaged in search for the next gTLD to match the 'dotcom' success. This will not happen. New opportunities will arrive bundled with more advanced intricacies of 'open gTLD choices' intertwined with global corporate nomenclature issues.

The models will be developed based on sophisticated 'name usability' and the targeted audience, where a 'dot city' may shine over a 'dot continent', or a 'dot specific genre' will prove to be more profitable over 'dot big category'. Domainers had a good start when there was a first-time frenzy during the dot-boom, but in this prolonged dot-bust the markets are more selective, prices are way down and the value of 'good name alone to guarantee success' has now shifted more to 'sensible ideas to guarantee success'. The post gTLD aftermarket will be far more mature and rewarding while the days of 'cheap hit and run names' are of a bygone era.

## **Why and when will the internet be divided?**

If there are 5 billion online users by 2020 and only 27% of the world speaks English, that means 3.5 billion will be non-English speaking. Would it be safe to assume that mother tongues will divide the global internet and distribute the power of ecommerce? On the contrary, this will make global ecommerce interaction highly colourful and interdependent. Furthermore it fortifies the roles of ICANN as an independent, multi-stakeholder organisation, servicing one internet for one world.

What could possibly divide the internet will be short-sighted, tunnel-vision politicians, scared of foreign influence and cultures and who want to remain within the comfort zone of their nationalistic pride. What would break the credibility of the internet is when countries have their own ICANN type organisations supporting their country-specific agendas. What would diminish the end user's excitement would be when there are constant roadblocks and checkpoints across every major intersection on the super information highways.

For the USA, the biggest challenge lies in bold and open discussions where such topics are candidly discussed thoroughly in simple language in nationwide public forums where the participants, irrespective of their points of view, are not considered anti-American. After all, the greatest gift of the century from America to the world was the internet. But today, it belongs to the people of the world, and the question is: will the supporters of globally free and open internet carry on, or will they have to create their own 'Internet Spring'? Who really owns the internet?

For now it's you. Make sure its stays that way.

**The beneficiaries:** the universal citizens, learners and educators of the free world, innovators and collaborators from all walks of life. The bargain hunters and producers of high value goods and services. The humanists and open-minded folks and the poor around the globe.

**The enemies:** the agenda centric political game players, the power hungry dictatorships and their tax hungry leeches lurking in the e-commerce streams. Overly imposing protectors of local cultural heritage and closed minded groups.

**The adjustments:** study the topic well from its multi-directional approach, like a diamond in the rough polish your skills from all angles, debate hard and ignore big titles and legalese talks and identify rhetoric and half knowledge. Ask bold questions and seek out the real truth about free flow business and free flow business name identities. Seek out forums and debates on this topic around the world. Acquire advance level knowledge on 'name usability' in business and in cyber branding. Build teams with open minded, global thinking trademark lawyers, branding experts, registry-registrars under solid base of global nomenclature knowledge. The global changes to internet, domain name expansion and global cyber branding are inevitable. The game changers and landed and new age internet has arrived.

## ABOUT NASEEM JAVED

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