The three requirements for .Africa domain registrars

Domain Name Registrars (RaRs) hoping to capture a slice of the new ('dotAfrica') .africa gTLD (geographic Top Level Domain) will have to adhere to three requirements before they will be allowed to submit a domain name application during the waning Sunrise Period.

© solarseven via 123RF

Trademark owners have already started applying for .africa domain names matching their protected trademark rights. This is done during the Sunrise Phase, which precedes the public launch of the domain during General Availability (GA) Phase (from 4 July 2017) where domain names are allocated on a "first-come-first-served" basis.

RaRs are the customer-facing entities through which the public typically purchases domain names.

According to Lucky Masilela, CEO of ZA Central Registry NPC (ZACR), the Sunrise Phase is technically different from the General Availability Phase during the launch plan of a new domain name space. "During the Sunrise Phase, domain names are allocated in terms of a limited rights protection process and not on a first-come, first-served basis. This is intended to provide priority protection to established and verifiable brands.

"In order to receive Sunrise Applications from our customer-facing partners, we need to ensure that certain minimum criteria are met."

They are as follows:

- RaRs need to be ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names & Numbers) accredited, i.e., be able to provide the Registry with an official registration number issued by IANA (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority).
- Finally, in order to actually submit a valid Sunrise Application, RaRs will most likely need to engage with the Trademark Clearing House (http://www.trademark-clearinghouse.com/) and/or the Mark Validation System (http://markvalidation.co.za). This is to ensure that Sunrise Applications submitted to the Registry actually correspond to a validated trademark right.
- RaRs have to integrate with the .africa Registry System and this means either completing the onboarding process from scratch or activating your ability to provision .africa domain names within your current account held with the Registry. Part of this process requires ICANN Accredited Registrars to accept the .africa Terms and Conditions applicable to RaRs. More information on the criteria is published on the Registrar Portal http://nic.africa/en/home/.

The aforementioned processes are explained in greater detail on http://nic.africa. RaRs are encouraged to log into their Registrar Portal Account.

.Africa is the new top-level domain for the African continent. "It is an African initiative created by Africans for the international Internet Community. In order to ensure responsible growth, we will place special emphasis on securing the rights of intellectual property owners during the Sunrise Period. Ensuring that RaRs comply with the prescribed requirements is key to a successful Sunrise Period," concluded Masilela.

The three .africa launch phases are as follows:

1. Sunrise Period (4 April 2017 – 2 June 2017) – during the Sunrise Period, trademark owners can secure domain names matching their registered trademarks before .africa is made available to the public. A Trade Mark Clearing House (TMCH) must first validate the registered trademarks. Alternatively, and specifically for the .africa gTLD, a system called Mark Validation System (MVS) will be used to validate trademarks which are not yet registered, company names, trust names and common law trademarks (as well as registered trademarks for trademark proprietors who do not wish to validate through the TMCH).
2. Landrush Period (Phase 1 = 5 June – 9 June; Phase 2 = 12 June – 16 June; Phase 3 = 19 June – 23 June; Phase 4 = 26 June – 30 June) – this registration is open to everyone around the world without any restriction, but the registration is sold at a higher price than the regular price.
3. General Availability (4 July 2017) – registration will open to the general public and works on a "first come, first served" basis.