# Mid-2013 Expansion for Internet Names Targeted

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NEW YORK (AP) — Hundreds of Internet address suffixes to rival ".com" should be available for people and businesses to use by the end of the year, the head of an Internet oversight agency said Monday.

The initial ones, expected in mid-2013, will likely be in Chinese and other languages besides English, said Fadi Chehade, CEO of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers.

That will be followed within weeks by English suffixes that do not have competing bidders. Although the specific names won't be announced until late April, they will come from a pool of single-bidder proposals — among them, ".aetna," ''.cadillac" and other brand names sought by companies, regional monikers such as ".vegas" and ".quebec" and generic suffixes such as ".like" and ".vacation."

Many proposed suffixes, such as ".app," ''.music" and ".tech," will likely take longer, however, because multiple groups have submitted bids to run them and must work out disputes.

ICANN is overseeing the largest expansion of the Internet address system since its creation in the 1980s. Last year, nearly 2,000 businesses and groups submitted bids for about 1,400 different names. Proponents of the new suffixes are hoping the expansion will lead to online neighborhoods of businesses and groups around specific geographic areas or industries. And with easy-to-remember ".com" names long taken, they hope to offer Internet newcomers more choices.

In preparation for that expansion, Chehade said Monday that businesses and other trademark holders will be able to declare names they want protected, starting March 26, for an annual fee of up to $150 per name. IBM Corp. and Deloitte will run that system, known as the Trademark Clearinghouse.

Trademark holders will have a chance to register names ending in one of the new suffixes before registration opens to the general public. If a company chooses not to

register the name right away, the Trademark Clearinghouse will notify the company when someone else tries to do so. The system, however, will not block that name from going through, and parties must work out disputes themselves, such as through arbitration.

Still to be determined is whether the system will cover variations such as misspellings or the use of a trademark as part of a longer suffix, as in "iPhoneCases." In an interview with The Associated Press, Chehade said ICANN did not want to restrict free speech or other legitimate uses.

From a technical standpoint, computers don't really care what the names are, as long as they match to a numeric Internet address that computers need to send email and locate websites.

From a business and cultural standpoint, however, the names have come to mean much more. Names are central to many companies' branding. And the Internet feels less global when Chinese, Arabic and Russian speakers have to use English characters as part of their Internet address.

ICANN received more than 100 proposals for names in other languages, the bulk of them for the Chinese equivalent of words such as "company" and "online." ICANN's board had agreed to review those first.

Proposals for about a thousand English suffixes have only one bidder, so those would be next in line. In making its recommendations, ICANN is considering the bidder's financial and technical capabilities, as well as any objections raised by the public.

Chehade said ICANN's initial recommendations are expected in late April, after which the winning bidders will work out operational and contractual details. The first of the new names are expected to be activated within months, with additional ones coming at a rate of about 20 a week.

For suffixes with multiple bidders, there is no deadline for which parties must reach agreement. ICANN plans to ultimately hold an auction if competing bidders cannot reach a compromise.

Meanwhile, ICANN said Monday that it would spread its operations to three locations around the world to cover all time zones. Headquarters will remain in Los Angeles, with hubs expected in Singapore and Istanbul, Turkey, by mid-2013. In an interview from Singapore, Chehade said the change would help ICANN avoid hiring a U.S.-centric staff as the Internet address system expands to accommodate users worldwide.

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