

# Um.whatever

Prepare for chaos when people can start adding anything they want to a Web address.  
By Taylor Buley



Icann, the obscure group that metes out Internet addresses, has an uncanny ability to stir up controversy. The current plan of the Internet Corp. for Assigned Names & Numbers, approved in June, is to allow custom domain names to anyone who asks for one. Addresses ending in com or org will be passé. By the middle of next year applicants will be able to register everything from ".soup" to ".nuts."

But what is being billed as manifest destiny for Internet commerce is going to cause big headaches all around. A brand name in the address bar would be a lovely calling card for the Web scammers who set up fraudulent sites to trick people into giving up credit card numbers. "It

certainly has the potential to make things more confusing," says Symantec security expert Ben D. Greenbaum.

Brand protection costs will go up. Generic extensions like .cellphone and .beverage will be up for grabs, forcing companies to register every possible relevant variation on their Web brands. Cybersquatters will try to grab these sites first and sell ads on them or try to shake down trademark holders for the site rights. The Coalition Against Domain Name Abuse, a business lobby, estimates that defensive domain name registration will cost businesses upwards of \$1.6 billion.

Under the current system it costs a complainant \$1,300 to file a claim of

trademark infringement with an Icann-approved arbitrator. Rick D. McMurtry, assistant general counsel for Turner Broadcasting, says the number of domain names he will have to oversee will be in the hundreds.

Jason Keenan, an Icann spokesperson, says that the new policy won't reserve trademarks by default, but companies will be

able to claw back a branded site name retroactively. Icann says that it has already spent \$10 million on software that would spot squatters. Icann, a corporate non-profit based in Marina del Rey, Calif., is run by a 21-person board and supported by a governmental advisory committee.

Then again, the whole idea could flop like .info and .biz. The only group Icann has elated are the registrars such as GoDaddy and Network Solutions that sell domain names to the public. "We're fans of letting the free market decide what's successful," says GoDaddy's chief operating officer, Warren Adelman. He's also a fan of the 31% markups that registrars pocket on a name they buy wholesale for \$6.86. **F**