

# Defending Consumers on the Internet

## ***How to Work with ICANN on Pro-Consumer Policies***

Increasingly, organized criminals maliciously use the Internet's underlying structure to profit from spam networks, identity theft, illicit pharmaceuticals, and other scams and cyber-threats. One of the technologies they abuse is the Domain Name System (DNS) - the protocol that enables your computer to identify the Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with a name such as [www.icann.org](http://www.icann.org) - administered by the non-profit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers ([ICANN](http://www.icann.org)). Criminal abuse of the DNS and IP addresses affects consumers every day. That is why consumer groups concerned with the trust and integrity of the Internet should engage with ICANN as part of their advocacy and awareness-raising activities.

## ***Consumers Constituency Allows Consumer Rights Groups to Influence Internet Policies***

The proposed Consumers Constituency will provide an easy and effective way for consumer rights groups to influence Internet policies. The effort to form a Consumers Constituency is being led by Holly Raiche, Executive Director of ISOC-AU and Deputy Chair of the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), a consumer umbrella organization with 33 member organizations; it was initiated by Beau Brendler, founder of ConsumerReports Webwatch and a freelance consumer columnist. A Consumers Constituency is supported by consumer groups worldwide, including ZPS (Slovenia) and TIK (Belgium).

## ***Consumers and ICANN***

ICANN manages the Internet's name and number systems, working to protect their security and stability. ICANN helps battle domain hijackers, spammers, and fraudsters, by providing a venue for those stakeholders participating in ICANN to adopt pro-consumer solutions to cyber-threats. ICANN policies help enable the Internet to be a positive user experience for consumers, but there is no substitute for consumer representation in ensuring the consumer perspective is properly taken into account.

ICANN policies affect every single user of the Internet every day. Consumer organizations not engaged in ICANN's processes are missing out on a key venue where their advocacy efforts can have real, meaningful global impact for the benefit of every Internet user. By participating in ICANN policy development, consumer groups can:

- Work with other members of the ICANN community to enhance the security, stability and resiliency of the Internet;
- Advocate pro-consumer rights, including the right to safety and information, in the development of Internet-related policy;
- Help develop policy that prevents cybercriminals from abusing the DNS;
- Raise awareness among consumers on how to protect against spam, scams, and cyber-threats;
- Educate consumers on how to report incidents to get response and restoration of Internet services disrupted by malicious actors and criminals; and
- Help consumers understand the changes coming to the Internet as it develops.

## ***A Conduit for Consumer Interests in ICANN***

The proposed Consumers Constituency will serve as an important conduit for consumer interests worldwide as they relate to ICANN's role in managing the security, stability and resiliency of the Internet. ICANN policy issues that directly impact consumers include:

- ***The Introduction of new Generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs)***

Familiar top level domains labels (TLDs), include **.COM, .NET, .ORG**. Now ICANN is working to launch new gTLDs based on applications from the global Internet community, bringing rich new potential to how consumers will search the Internet – as well as new challenges. Consumers will need to know how their browsing experience will be affected by new gTLDs, including gaining the most benefits as well as avoiding fraudulent sites. Working with the Consumers Constituency will provide consumer organizations with the tools needed to help their members understand the changes that they will start to see in the Internet. At the same time, consumer organisations will be asked to support various proposed new TLDs. Engagement in ICANN provides the best way for you to evaluate whether or not to support an application.

- ***Internationalized Domain Names - Your Internet, Your language***

There are now more non-English speakers on the Internet than English speakers, yet Internet TLD labels only support Western Latin characters. ICANN recently made the landmark decision to include non-Latin-scripts in the domain name system, so all this will change. In order to gain benefits from websites using internationalized domain names, consumers will need to be able to determine if they are legitimate. The Consumers Constituency will provide consumer organizations with a valuable means to help resolve the issues surrounding the implementation of internationalized domain names and URLs.

- ***WHOIS Data Protects Consumers***

Millions of domain names have been registered with inaccurate and false data. The Consumers Constituency will work to ensure that full and accurate contact information, including e-mail and phone numbers, are collected and maintained by registrars and resellers for all registered domains. This provides consumers with a tool with which to verify the true owner of a site thereby reducing the chances of on-line abuse.

- ***Facilitating a More Trustworthy Internet for Consumers***

ICANN's contracts and corresponding enforcement efforts facilitate a more trustworthy Internet space for all consumers every time they go on-line. Members of the ICANN community are currently drafting a Registrant Rights Charter to strengthen consumers' rights to information, fair treatment, and redress. Consumer organizations have a right - and a responsibility - to provide input into this Charter.

- ***Trademark Issues***

The launch of new gTLDs raises questions regarding potential abuse of trademarked names, and the balance between the rights of trademark holders versus the freedom of expression of the average Internet user. The Consumers Constituency will offer insights and perspectives regarding intellectual property and consumer interests, Internet rights and principles that may be under-represented in policy deliberations today.

## ***Providing Consumer Benefits***

Because consumer organizations have limited staff and limited funding, the Consumers Constituency is being created to provide valuable benefits to consumer groups and their members. The Consumers Constituency will:

- Provide consumer organizations with consumer-accessible Internet-related information;
- Inform ICANN policy developers about the concerns of consumers; and
- Seek policy advice from consumer organizations.

## ***How to Support/Join Us***

To ensure that the Consumers Constituency represents a wide spectrum of consumer organizations, it needs your support and participation. If you would like to work with ICANN to help influence the decisions that shape the Internet, we invite you and your consumer organization to join the Consumers Constituency. For more information about how to protect and educate consumers on Internet-related issues, and how consumers groups can get involved through the Consumers Constituency, please contact Holly Raiche ([h.raiche@internode.on.net](mailto:h.raiche@internode.on.net)), Beau Brendler ([beaubrendler@earthlink.net](mailto:beaubrendler@earthlink.net)) and ICANN Staff ([start@icann.org](mailto:start@icann.org)).