Glossary: A Brief Guide to ICANN Acronyms and Terms

You'll hear a staggering number of acronyms at your first ICANN meeting. Below is a guide to some of the more frequently used, and important to consumer organizations. Most are pronounced by their letters; we've included a pronunciation guide for those that aren't.

ALAC ("al-ack" or sometimes "A-lack") -- The At-Large Advisory Committee. Its members are elected by their various regional organizations (RALOs) or appointed by a nominating committee (NomCom). ALAC's job is to advise the ICANN board and community on issues of importance to Internet users, with a view across the whole organization. The ALAC has no voting authority, though in summer 2009 was granted a seat on the ICANN board it is determining how to fill.

ALS – At-Large Structure. A group or organization, subject to accreditation, that makes up the members of a Regional At-Large Structure, the entities that elect members to the At-Large Advisory Council and help determine policies and priorities for Internet users.

BC – The Business Constituency. Represents business interests in ICANN policy matters, as a stakeholder body in the Generic Names Supporting Organization.

BGC – Board Governance Committee. Currently a six-member group that assists the ICANN board and reviews its performance.

ccNSO – Country Code Names Supporting Organization. The policy development body for issues regarding country-code top level domains (such as .us for the United States, .cn for China, .au for Australia).

ccTLD – Country-Code Top Level Domain. These are generally reserved for countries, and are two letters long (.ar for Argentina, .zw for Zimbabwe).

Domainer – A controversial subgroup of entrepreneurs who make a living buying and selling domain names. This can include practices many consider abusive, such as cybersquatting, typosquatting, and domain confusion fraud, which attempts to imitate trademarked goods and services.

Domain hack – A way of using a domain suffix to create a longer name or reference, often as a form of pun. For instance, perpetrators of the "goatse" incident used the Christmas Island country-code top-level domain .cx to create an infamous "shock" Web site, goatse.cx, that depicted a repulsive picture. Another famous domain hack is del.icio.us

GAC ("gack")—The Government Advisory Committee. Made up of representatives from more than 125 countries' governments. Carries some responsibility and identity for representing the interests of consumers or, more specifically, citizens.

GNSO – The Generic Names Supporting Organization. Deals with policymaking regards generic top-level domains, which include the familiar .com, .net, .biz, .org and .edu. Regarded as the main ICANN policy-

making body, despite its scope. Its voting forum is the GNSO council, or sometimes called just "council," on which the constituencies have voting seats.

gTLD – generic Top-Level Domain. One of the three types of domains, the others being infrastructure top-level domain and country-code top-level domain. There are 21 gTLDs, soon likely to be many more, that include the familiar .com and .org but also .aero, .cat (for Catalan language), and the financially troubled .travel.

ICANN (eye-can), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. A non-profit corporation created Sept. 18, 1998 and headquartered in Marina Del Rey, Calif., with offices in Brussels, Belgium and Sydney, Australia. ICANN is responsible for administering domain names and IP addresses (the numbers that make up a computer or network address, like 204.88.313.155) on the Internet.

IANA (eye-anna), usually heard in conjunction with ("the IANA contract says…) – the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority. Managed by ICANN, IANA allocates names and numbers that make up IP addresses.

NCSG – Non-commercial stakeholders group. A forming entity to represent non-commercial interests in the Generic Names Supporting Organization. One of the two key groups, along with the ALAC, for consumer organizations' participation in ICANN affairs.

NCUC – The Non-Commercial Users Constituency. Under current plans the NCUC, which has three votes on the Generic Names Supporting Organization council, would be reformed into the Non-commercial stakeholders group. NCUC participants include public-interest, advocacy and other kinds of groups, educational institutions and others.

NomCom – Nominating Committee. Members are appointed by users' regions. In turn, the Nominating Committee makes appointments, via applications, to the ALAC and other parts of ICANN.

PDP – Policy Development Process. Can be requested by an ICANN constituency in certain circumstances where policy needs to be created for the administration or solution of a problem.

RALO ("rah-low" or "ray-low") -- Regional At-Large Organization. RALOs are divided geographically: NARALO for North America, LACRALO for Latin America, APRALO for Asia-Pacific, AFRALO for Africa, and EURALO for Europe. Of these, only the NARALO allows individuals as members. RALOs vote for two representatives each to the At-Large Advisory Committee.

RAA – Registrar Accreditation Agreement. A legal contract that binds ICANN and registrars of domains (for instance, GoDaddy and Network Solutions) to a number of provisions. The RAA could be considered one of the most important documents affecting consumers within the ICANN universe.

Root, Root file, root zone – No easy definition, but generally, a reference to the core of the Internet address system and its servers, essential to the function of the Internet.

RyC – The Registry Constituency. Like the Registrar Constituency and Business Constituency, this one represents the interests of registries (such as PIR, the registry for .org) on the Generic Names Supporting Organization council.

SSAC ("ess-sack") -- Safety and Security Advisory Committee. Addresses Internet security concerns, issues and policy from an ICANN perspective. One of the more important and interesting committees for information on issues of consumer interest, such as malware attacks, phishing, and domain system abuse.

TLD – Top-Level Domain. The highest level in the domain-name system (DNS), consisting of generic top-level domains and country-code top-level domains.

WHOIS ("who-is," not actually an acronym) – a way to query databases on a range of information, most important being identity information for Internet addresses. For the purposes of consumer organizations, WHOIS represents information that can be used by consumers and law enforcement agencies to identify who owns and operates a Web site. However, access to that data comes with privacy concerns.