

ICANN and the At-Large Community:

Join Us to Help Protect Consumers on the Internet

Increasingly, criminals maliciously use the Internet's underlying structure to profit from cyber-scams and threats, including spam networks, identity theft, and illicit pharmaceutical sales. Part of the Internet's underlying structure that these criminals abuse is its Domain Name System (DNS), the protocol that enables your computer to identify the Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with any domain name, such as "www.icann.org." The DNS is administered by a nonprofit corporation, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers ([ICANN](http://www.icann.org)).

Criminal abuse of the DNS harms consumers every day. As a result, consumer groups, especially those concerned with the trustworthiness and integrity of the Internet, should work with [ICANN](http://www.icann.org) as part of their advocacy and awareness-raising efforts.

Your consumer group and ICANN

ICANN protects the security and stability of the Internet's DNS by battling domain hijackers, spammers, and fraudsters as well as by advocating for the adoption of pro-consumer solutions to cyber-threats. This work allows the Internet to provide consumers with a positive and safe user experience.

In this way, ICANN's policies affect every Internet user every day and everywhere. [ICANN](http://www.icann.org), [which operates within a bottom up, consensus-based, multi-stakeholder model](http://www.icann.org), needs and welcomes your consumer group's input to:

- Inform consumers how to protect themselves from spam, scams, and cyber-threats;
- Advocate consumer rights related to the Internet, including the right to safety and information;
- Develop policy that prevents cyber-criminals from hiding themselves; and
- Enhance the security, stability, and resiliency of the Internet.

Working with ICANN, your consumer organization can have a real, meaningful, global impact that benefits every Internet user.

ICANN's At-Large community: A home for consumers

Within ICANN, the [At-Large community](http://www.icann.org) is a home for consumers and their concerns. These concerns are represented in the numerous ICANN policies and initiatives that the At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC) and the broader At-Large community have championed including:

- ***New Generic Top Level Domains***

Familiar generic top level domains (gTLDs), such as *.com*, *.net* and *.org*, have served Internet users well. In 2012 ICANN launched a round for [new generic Top Level Domains \(gTLDs\)](#) based on applications received from the global Internet community. These new gTLDs will bring rich new potential to how consumers use and search the Internet – but also new challenges. Consumers will need to know how the new domain names will affect their browsing experience, how to gain the most benefit from this change, and how to avoid the new possibilities for fraud.

Working with the At-Large community, [at the ALAC, RALO and ALS levels](#), consumer groups can learn how to educate their members about the new opportunities and threats presented by these new gTLDs.

- ***Internationalized Domain Names***

Non-English speakers are now the majority on the Internet. However, gTLDs only support Western ASCII letters. In order to safely use Web sites with [internationalized domain names \(IDNs\)](#), consumers will need to know how to determine if they are legitimate.

The At-Large community provides consumer organizations with the means to resolve the questions surrounding the implementation of IDNs names and URL addresses.

- ***WHOIS Data***

WHOIS services provide public access to data on registered domain names, data that currently includes contact information for Registered Name Holders. The extent of registration data collected at the time a domain name is registered, and the ways such data can be accessed, are specified in agreements established by ICANN for domain names registered in generic top-level domains (gTLDs). For example, ICANN requires accredited registrars to collect and provide free public access to: (1) the name of the registered domain name and its name servers and registrar; (2) the date the domain was created and when its registration expires; and (3) the contact information for the Registered Name Holder, including the technical contact, and the registrant's administrative contact.

However, millions of domain names have been registered with inaccurate and false data. The At-Large community works to ensure that full and accurate contact information, including e-mail addresses and phone numbers, is collected and maintained by registrars and resellers of all registered domains. This helps consumers verify the true owners of a site, reducing the chances of on-line abuse.

- ***Consumer Trust, Consumer Choice, and Competition***

Under the Affirmation of Commitments that ICANN signed with the US Department of Commerce in 2009, ICANN is committed to performing a review of the New gTLD Program

after it has been in operation for one year. This review will examine the extent to which the introduction or expansion of gTLDs has promoted competition, consumer trust and consumer choice. As a result, the ICANN Board has requested advice from the ALAC, the Governmental Advisory Committee, the Country Code Names Supporting Organization and the Generic Names Supporting Organization to assist with this review. A Consumer Metrics Working Group will explore how to establish the definition, measures and targets for competition, consumer trust, and consumer choice in the context of the domain name system.

- ***A Trustworthy Internet***

ICANN's contracts and related enforcement efforts, based on ICANN's Registrar Accreditation Agreement (RAA), facilitate a more trustworthy Internet for all. Members of the At-Large community requested the production of a [Non-Lawyers' Guide to the May 2009 Registrar Accreditation Agreement](#) to provide an easy to understand summary of the RAA. The At-Large community works to strengthen consumers' rights to information, fair treatment, and redress.

- ***Trademark Issues***

The launch of the new gTLDs raises questions about the potential abuse of trademarked names and the balance between the rights of trademark holders and the average Internet user's freedom of expression. In the policy deliberations over these matters, the At-Large community offers insight and perspectives regarding intellectual property and consumer interests, Internet rights, and principles that are often under-represented.

How to Join Us

If you would like to work with ICANN to help shape the Internet, keep it safe, and inform and educate consumers, we invite you and your organization to [join the At-Large community](#). For more information about how to get involved, please contact the At-Large Secretariat at: staff@atlarge.icann.org.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why should our consumer group use its limited resources to work with ICANN?

Working with ICANN helps consumer groups extend the reach of the limited resources they do have as well as enables these groups to make a tangible difference worldwide.

In addition, the consumer movement within ICANN is growing. Internet users and consumers within ICANN helped place an At-Large-selected member on the ICANN Board. Additionally, ICANN's main policy-development body, the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO),

is increasing its own Internet user and consumer representation, specifically within the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG).

The voice of the consumer is increasing within ICANN and, therefore, within the Internet.

How does ICANN's mission relate to consumers?

ICANN's mandate is to oversee the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS), specifically the assignment of the Internet's addresses and names. While that mandate may sound narrow, the related policy debates cover the most important Internet issues facing consumers, including privacy, security, free speech, domain-name prices, and the registration of expired domain names. Other compelling issues facing ICANN include intellectual property, diversity, and multicultural and language concerns.

Discussion continues over ICANN's role as an "enforcer" or "regulator" over issues in its mandate. Some believe the less influence ICANN has over the Internet, the better. Others believe it could do more to enforce its registrar accreditation agreement, or RAA. This contract contains many critical provisions affecting consumers. Part of ICANN's mandate also includes the safety, stability and security of the Internet, which includes responding to malware attacks such as the Conficker worm.

What are the Internet's most important consumer issues?

Answers to this question might vary, depending on whom you talk to. In 2009, the introduction of new "top-level domains" (such as .com, .biz, and .net) prompted discussion on intellectual property and copyright issues, as well as concerns about the safety and stability of the DNS, and whether it could absorb potentially hundreds of new domains. Changes to the registrar accreditation agreement, or RAA, also took place, though some of the more consumer-focused members of the ICANN community argued some changes didn't go far enough. The community continues to study WHOIS, the database that underlies all Internet domain registrations with identity information. The state of WHOIS has been debated in the ICANN community to the point of stalemate, with no compromises emerging that all sides can agree on.

The most difficult WHOIS aspect to resolve hinges on privacy – should Internet registration be anonymous, to defend rights of expression who might use it to publicize the actions of an oppressive government? Or does such privacy come at the price of millions of fraudulent registrations used for criminal activity? Consumer organizations themselves are divided on the topic. Law-enforcement organizations and intellectual property attorneys argue for access to data that is accurate and useful for investigating criminal activity and trademark infringement.

Intellectual property also forms the core of a number of issues in the consumer interest, from trademark protection and consumer confusion concerns (particularly important in the marketing and purchasing of pharmaceutical and medical products online). Freedom-of-expression issues also raise some fascinating questions on whether the general public should be prohibited from creating and purchasing potentially offensive domain names and who has the right to own certain domain names such as .God or .Allah.

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A Glossary of ICANN Acronyms and Terms

As in many organizations, you'll hear and see a staggering number of acronyms when you participate in ICANN. 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 are not.

ALAC ("A-lack") -- The At-Large Advisory Committee. The ALAC is the primary organizational home within ICANN for individual Internet users. The role of the ALAC is to consider and provide advice on the activities of ICANN, as they relate to the interests of individual Internet users. This includes policies created through ICANN's Supporting Organizations, as well as the many other issues for which community input and advice is appropriate. The ALAC, which plays an important role in ICANN's accountability mechanisms, also coordinates some of ICANN's outreach to individual Internet users. Two members are elected by each of the five regional organizations (RALOs) while one member from each RALO is appointed by a nominating committee (NomCom). The ALAC has no voting authority. However, it selected a member of the ICANN Board in November 2010.

ALS – At-Large Structure. A group or organization, subject to accreditation by the ALAC, that makes up the members of a Regional At-Large Structure within the At-Large community. The RALOs are the entities that elect members to the At-Large Advisory Committee and help determine policies and priorities for individual Internet users. ALSes are the grass-roots basis of the At-Large community.

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.

Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG) -- One of four main Stakeholder Groups that currently (as of February 2011) comprise the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO). Members of the Commercial Stakeholder Group include businesses, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and others.

The GNSO's four Stakeholder Groups are the Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG), the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG), the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG), and the Registrars Stakeholder Group (RrSG). These Stakeholder Groups are divided into two organizational "houses." The RySG and the RrSG comprise the Contracted Party House. The CSG and the NCSG comprise the Non-Contracted Party House.

Please see ICANN's "GNSO: Council Members" Internet page for a schematic representation of the GNSO structure, along with further information regarding the GNSO houses and stakeholder groups.

Contracted Party House -- One of two organizational "houses" into which the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) is divided. Each of the two houses include two of the four main stakeholder groups that currently (as of February 2011) comprise the GNSO. The Contracted Party House includes the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) and the Registrars Stakeholder Group (RrSG). The other GNSO house is the Non-Contracted Party House, which includes the Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG) and the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG). Please see ICANN's "GNSO: Council Members" Internet page for a schematic representation of the GNSO structure, along with further information regarding the GNSO houses and stakeholder groups.

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

Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) -- The Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) is responsible for developing and recommending to the ICANN Board substantive policies (and potential changes) relating to generic top-level domains (gTLDs) (e.g., .com, .org, .gov).

The GNSO is currently (as of May 2012) comprised of four main groups of stakeholders. These Stakeholder Groups are the Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG), the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG), the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG), and the Registrars Stakeholder Group (RrSG).

The four GNSO Stakeholder Groups occupy two organizational “houses.” The RySG and the RrSG comprise the Contracted Party House. The CSG and the NCSG comprise the Non-Contracted Party House.

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GNSO Council -- The GNSO Council is the body within the GNSO responsible for strategically managing policy development efforts consistent with Annex A of the ICANN Bylaws (see <http://www.icann.org/en/general/bylaws.htm#AnnexA>). The GNSO Stakeholder Groups and other members of the ICANN community contribute to these Policy Development Process (PDP) efforts as set out in Annex A. Please see ICANN's "[GNSO: Council Members](#)" Internet page for a schematic representation of the GNSO structure, including how the GNSO Council and GNSO Stakeholder Groups fit into it.

Generic Top-Level Domain (gTLD) – One of the three types of domains, the others being infrastructure top-level domain and country-code top-level domain. There are currently 21 gTLDs, including the familiar .com and .org but also .aero, .cat (for Catalan language). Soon there are likely to be many more gTLDs.

Government Advisory Committee (GAC; “gack”) -- The Government Advisory Committee. Made up of representatives from more than 125 countries’ governments. The GAC carries some responsibility and identity for representing the interests of consumers or, more specifically, citizens.

ICANN (eye-can), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. A non-profit corporation created Sept. 18, 1998 and headquartered in Playa del Vista, California with offices in Brussels, Belgium, Silicon Valley, USA, Sydney, Australia, and Washington, D.C. USA. 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.

Nominating Committee (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.

Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG) -- One of four main Stakeholder Groups that currently (as of February 2011) comprise the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO). Members of the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group include individual non-commercial Internet users and others. The NCSG Group would be the primary entry point into ICANN for consumer groups; along with the ALAC, it is one of the two key groups allowing consumer organizations to participate in ICANN.

The purpose of the NCSG is to represent, through its Constituencies, non-commercial Internet users of generic top-level domains (gTLDs), including:

- Non-commercial entities such as educational institutions, research organizations, philanthropic organizations, foundations, and non-commercial service providers;
- Registrants of domain names for non-commercial purposes; and
- Entities advocating for non-commercial Internet users.

The GNSO's four Stakeholder Groups are the Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG), the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG), the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG), and the Registrars Stakeholder Group (RrSG). These Stakeholder Groups are divided into two organizational "houses." The RySG and the RrSG comprise the Contracted Party House. The CSG and the NCSG comprise the Non-Contracted Party House.

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Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC) -- The Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC) is one of several organizational Constituencies in the GNSO. The NCUC is a structure in the GNSO's Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group. It represents civil society organizations and individuals in the GNSO by developing and supporting policy positions that favor non-commercial communication and activity on the Internet.

NCUC participants include public-interest groups, advocacy groups and educational institutions.

Non-Contracted Party House -- One of two organizational "houses" into which the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) is divided. Each of the two houses include two of the four main stakeholder groups that currently (as of February 2011) comprise the GNSO. The Non-Contracted Party House includes the Commercial Stakeholder Group (CSG) and the Non-Commercial Stakeholder Group (NCSG). The other GNSO house is the Contracted Party House, which includes the Registries Stakeholder Group (RySG) and the Registrars Stakeholder Group (RrSG). Please see ICANN's ["GNSO: Council Members"](#) Internet page for a schematic representation of the GNSO structure, along with further information regarding the GNSO houses and stakeholder groups.

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 (“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. Within each RALO are a group of At-Large Structures (ALSes), or national end-user organizations. Only NARALO currently allows individuals as members, although other RALOs are working on measures to allow for individual participation. 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. Negotiations to amend the RAA are currently underway with representatives of the Registrar Stakeholder Group. The aim of the negotiation is to produce amendment topics to enhance registrant protection and DNS stability. .

Registrars Stakeholder Group (RySG) -- One of four main Stakeholder Groups that currently (as of February 2011) comprise the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO). Members of the Registrars Stakeholder Group include registrars and others.

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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.

URL – Uniform Resource Locator.

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.