

Tuesday, February 28, 2006

China Top Level Domain news

There has been a remarkable lack of chatter today around domain policy circles, given the rather stunning announcement out of china that starting tomorrow, China will be launching its own Top Level Domain roots for the .COM, .NET TLDs so that "[Chinese] Internet users don't have to surf the Web via the servers under the management of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) of the United States."

Up until now, the underlying premise was that no matter what happened to naming policies, nothing would ever be done to change the tenet that (aside from deliberate design decisions like esoteric routing, geo-targetting, anycasting, etc) any two people typing "example.com" into their application could always expect the same results, forever.

Not so after tomorrow, when according to the one single article at the root of all this, China will be introducing .COM and .NET of their own.

CIRA Board member and internet governance commentator Michael Geist comments on the development here, and another domain insider I'll leave nameless (since it came in a private mail) said "Although innocuous you should mark and remember this day as the day the root was fractured - it is a big deal..."

I'm still trying to verify for myself that this is happening in the way it's been interpreted.

As I write this, it's approximately 2:45am March 1st in China and I'm not seeing any alternative root glue for .com or .net in the .cn root nameservers, which I was expecting to see. (It also begs the question: how will they backport a new root hints file into every single DNS resolver in the country?)

When I started this post, the soa on cn was

```
a.dns.cn. root.cnnic.cn. 2006022806 7200 3600 2419200 21600
```

and since I've been writing it has been changed to

```
a.dns.cn. root.cnnic.cn. 2006030101 7200 3600 2419200 21600
```

And also, since I've started this post, under the new SOA serial there are now these:

```
$ host -t soa com.cn
```

```
com.cn SOA a.dns.cn. root.cnnic.cn. 2006030101 7200 3600 2419200 21600
```

and

```
$ host -t soa net.cn
```

```
net.cn SOA a.dns.cn. root.cnnic.cn. 2006030101 7200 3600 2419200 21600
```

So I'm withholding reaction on this as I begin to suspect a poorly translated article was in reality announcing .com.cn and .net.cn subdomains which are non-events by comparison. Update:

It has become clearer after trading a couple emails around that the news is indeed that China has added com.cn and net.cn as well as their own alternate character set implementations for com and net.

Basically, this comes down to similar efforts over the years to launch competing or expanded root domains. What does make this interesting is that, while typically these enterprises are carried out by net.kooks, this is being done by a government. My guess is they will get some more traction than earlier efforts but what will eventually happen is ICANN (or whoever) will come to the table at some point and a way will be negotiated to maintain visibility and continuity in the root.

But for now, there is no fragmentation and no collision crisis to speak of. Update #2 (7:30pm EST):

Michael Geist just forwarded me this, the salient bit being:

The new domain name system also sets three temporary top-level domain names "China", "Company" and "Network".

This means from now on, the routing of these websites will go directly through the Chinese domestic analysis server instead of the ones used by ICANN. In effect, these three create an intranet within China.

This is tough to assess because I'm still unsure if this applies to the alternate character set com and net TLDs or if we're really talking about alternative com's and net's in China, which is pretty radical. This article re-iterates that the .com and .net TLDs are in the alternative chinese character set.

The excerpt above about the "domestic analysis server" makes me curious. Do they intend to somehow reroute requests inside China for the legacy .com and .net TLDs into the chinese charset ones? That would be extreme.

Another source whom I know likes to stay anonymous just emailed me:

Subject: sigh

I'm so surprised people didn't know China directs almost all root server requests to their own root?

They may not be taking over .com. but they have an alternate root for a while..

Still digging...(jeez, no pun intended)

Blog Export: Exile From the Herd, <http://www.privateworld.com/>

Posted by easyDNS: Domain Industry Watch in via easyDNS blog at 06:32