

The Latest Trend in Online Corporate Branding

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The Internet is evolving fast. More corporations and organisations are seeking business growth through the online rather than the traditional channel. Building a good website is now a basic requirement as well as the first step. But how do you build a good website to strengthen corporate branding? ICANN's new generic Top-level Domain Names (gTLD) program is going to bring significant changes to the Internet. More than 1,000 new gTLDs will soon be launched. How can the companies embrace this major change and see it as an opportunity for brand building?

Principles of good website:

Websites play a pivotal role in contributing to an organisation's online presence. However, operating a website is no longer an easy task. Strategies are not limited to just setting up a corporate website. Rather, many companies are actively establishing an online presence to build corporate branding in the cyberspace and utilise digital media and multiple online channels to reach target audiences. By following the core principles of building effective websites, you will be off to a good start. These are:

1. **Select a good domain name for your corporate website:** A good domain name is an important part of your corporate branding. It should be relevant to your company and its business nature. Good names will be short, memorable and intuitive, so that your website will occupy top spots in search rankings, bringing more traffic to the website. Coming up with a good domain name requires three key factors, namely "reflection of company status", "alignment with marketing strategy" and "short and concise name", as revealed by a joint online survey on "Customer Perception of .hk Domain Names" with Hong Kong Baptist University on 1 August 2013.
2. **Integrate with social media:** Today, social media is an important element of your online business branding. It is no longer enough just to have a sleek website design. Conversing and building effective and sustainable relationships online are crucial. Mastering online brand requires delivering consistent messages through all channels, actively engaging customers by regularly posting updates of their interests and quickly replying to customers posting enquiries. Furthermore, to make a bigger business impact, corporations should integrate their social media presence into their websites. Local companies have successfully enhanced their customer relations via social media by using Facebook and Sina Weibo.

3. **High level of interaction:** Integrating a blog, twitter feed, article, video, graphic or Q&A section with your website are good examples of building a close brand-customer relationship with online audience, allowing them to interact with you almost in real-time. In addition, the website should be available for all, incorporating elements such as innovative and ingenious games that engage users. For example, “.hk buddy Naming Competition” is an interesting game running on HKIRC fan page, which invites the general public to take part. Ultimately, the interactivity of an online game creates a close brand-customer relationship that leads to an overall positive brand experience.
4. **Keep the website up-to-date and easy to use:** No one cares to read outdated information or rewriting of what has already been said. Web content should always be fresh, clear, relevant and viewed on a website with a user-friendly design. A regularly updated website can keep visitors coming back frequently and help promote your corporate image to customers all over the world.

Once you have your website up and running, the bigger challenge is to keep your team members passionate about what they do. Operating a website is a long-term commitment, and it is essential to have a clear goal in mind and a strategy for achieving it. Without a well-thought-out plan and strategy, a company can harm its branding or even the entire business.

New gTLDs make corporate brands take off

Up to now, there are only a small number of generic Top Level Domains (gTLDs) such as .com, .org, .biz, .info and others, and about 260 2-letter country-code Top Level Domains (ccTLDs) such as .hk, .jp, etc. A company cannot have its own Top Level Domain (TLD). You can only put your company name under either a gTLD or a ccTLD. This situation is going to change very soon.

ICANN, which stands for Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, is a global non-profit organisation responsible for administering top level domain names worldwide. ICANN has been promoting new gTLDs since 2011. One of the goals of ICANN, when announcing its plan of new gTLDs, was to enhance competition and consumer choice. It hopes to bring significant benefits to Internet users, including the ability to create new TLDs in languages other than English.

By early 2012, ICANN has received a total of 1,409 new gTLD applications. Some of them are new general gTLDs, such as ‘.shop’, ‘.music’, ‘.food’, ‘.car’, ‘.book’. 84 are

designated as “community-based” such as ‘.arab’ for Arabic speakers. Among all applications, 66 have designated themselves as geographic names such as ‘.swiss’ for the Swiss community, ‘.london’ for London of the UK.

It is worth noting that 643 applications are brand gTLDs. These will be extremely attractive to companies seeking to establish a strong online presence no matter whether they are building a new brand or reinforcing an existing one. According to a research conducted by domain name strategy consultants FairWinds Partners, which looked at how US-based Internet users perceive gTLDs, 70% of respondents would trust brand gTLDs (versus 51% reported that they would trust generic TLDs), and 60% of respondents stated that they would be comfortable opening an email from an address that uses a new gTLD extension.

In this new environment, a sturdy brand is all about trust and relationships. With this goal in mind, companies would follow and create an online brand using a new gTLD. So how can you embrace the change and formulate brand management strategies for your online corporate branding?

1. **Make your brand relevant to your business:** Many of the new gTLDs will be more relevant to your business than in the past, increasing brand presence and creating more opportunities. Search engines are also moving in this direction, delivering more specialised results to their users. With these latest marketing trends, the domain names should become more personalized, localized and targeted, facilitating target marketing to the specific audience, such as a specific TLD (.culture), interest TLD (.music), cause TLD (.green). In addition, using your creativity, a new gTLD can provide a talking point for consumers, like a domain name with suffix such as .rocks.

There are more options for small businesses too. If a new little cake shop is open and the desired domain name has been taken, they can get a .cake instead. With a striking and specific domain name such as .cake, companies can differentiate their brand and stand out from the crowd.

2. **Make your corporate brand compelling:** Establishing an online presence and portraying the desired image is vital for all businesses. The new TLDs will be more memorable and users will be able to type them directly into the URL bar, enabling users to directly locate the target webpages. For example, an airline could offer better channel to loyalty programs (rewards.cathaypacific), high end retailers could create a network of customer pages for consumers with similar interests (ilovebeauty.gucci), an upscale car company could provide customers

with their own domain names (myname.ferrari), and even lawyers could promote their practices to clients via a lawyer.firm domain address.

3. **Promote your brand and act locally:** In non-English-speaking countries, such as those in Asia or the Middle East, multinational companies can create gTLDs in their own native languages and dialects, allowing customers to more easily type in the domain using letters that they are familiar with. For example, a fast-food giant could easily promote their service by advertising with a Chinese tag line for Chinese-speaking communities, such as “24 小時麥麥送.麥當勞”.
4. **Consolidate corporate branding:** Companies can consolidate all products and services, business units, activities and programs under their .brand TLDs. This will increase flexibility and control over their corporate image online and enables companies to gain greater command over their online presence. For example, an international premium smartphone brand could get closer to their customers and staff, and more easily communicate with them across different boundaries (galaxy.samsung), (news.samsung), (jobs.samsung), (employee.samsung), etc. By doing so, the company will be able to validate domain name registrants who have complied with their specific terms and conditions, creating their own community online.
5. **Protect your corporate brand:** Big corporations tend to have complementary TLD names sitting side by side and therefore, can utilise the upcoming developments of new gTLDs to best protect and promote their existing online brands. For example, MTR Corporation, a big Hong Kong based corporation, has already applied for ‘.mtr’, which could quite likely complement their existing ‘.mtr.com.hk’ domain name.

As with your current domain name portfolio, new gTLDs will bring new threats to your online brand, such as disgruntled customers damaging your brand by registering domains such as ‘yourbrand.harm’. Plus, with the addition of over a thousand new gTLDs, there is a greater risk for cybersquatting and phishing attacks as well. For example, ‘yourbrand.secure’ could be bought and used by cyber criminals. So, it is important for companies now more than ever to prepare for monitoring infringement of their online brands.

With nearly a thousand of new gTLDs coming soon, there will be many new opportunities and challenges facing companies. Riding on these developments, it is time for companies to take a new step to managing their online corporate branding. The question is, are you ready?



Mr. Jonathan Shea, CEO of HKIRC announced the survey on “Customer Perception of .hk Domain Names” at 2013 Digital Marketplace Seminar – Online Opportunities for Start-ups.



Please scan to know more about “.hk buddy Naming Competition”.

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