

# Global*by*Design

Web Globalization Intelligence

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**January 2007**

**Making Sense of  
Multilingual Domains**

[www.globalbydesign.com](http://www.globalbydesign.com)

ISSN: 1557-9379

## Web Globalization Intelligence

January 2007

### Did you know...

More than 600,000 internationalized domain names have already been purchased?

IKEA has registered domain names in Russian, Chinese, and Arabic?

### About Us

Every month, *Global by Design* explores the art and science of Web and content globalization. We cover emerging trends, real-world Web sites, the latest technologies, and innovative vendors.

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www.globalbydesign.com

*Global by Design*

ISSN: 1557-9379

Published by:

Byte Level Research LLC

**bytelevel** / research

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## Web Globalization Reaches the Top

*Cisco Selects a Chief Globalization Officer; Others Will Follow*

As early as 2000, people like me have been saying that it would be just a matter of time before corporations added a Chief Globalization Officer to their ranks. It was an easy prediction to make, but the timing was the big question mark.

That time appears to be now. Late last year, Cisco appointed Wim Elfink as the company's (and America's) first CGO. Wim will be based out of India and will manage the company's new Globalization Center East. Wim was previously VP of Customer Advocacy, which is a clear sign that this position is as much about serving customers around the world as it is about development of global products and services.

Growing pains are to be expected, particularly as territory lines are redrawn between the CMO and CIO. But these are details. The big picture has been drawn, and it now includes a CGO.

The CGO is much more than a symbolic gesture. It is a sign of a company that understands that successful globalization begins at the top.

Cisco may be the first to see the importance of a CGO; it certainly will not be the last.

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# Making Sense of Multilingual Domain Names

*Internationalized domain names (IDNs) are coming – what to know before they get here*

The Internet was designed to be global, but it was not designed to be multilingual.

And although you'll find Web browsers and Web pages that support the world's major languages, there is still one major obstacle to creating an Internet that is linguistically global.

The domain name.

The domain name system (DNS) – the Internet plumbing that connects URLs to Web pages – still only supports a limited number of ASCII characters, which, in turn, support only English and Western European languages.

Since 2000, vendors have developed plug-ins that allow browsers to support IDNs – and registrars have been more than happy to register these new IDNs. Last year, China went so far as to develop Chinese-language equivalents to .com and .net, putting pressure on ICANN, the organization that manages the administration of domain names, to come up with an official solution quickly.

ICANN recently announced that it will have a complete IDN solution in place by the end of 2007.

Clearly, there is a need for IDNs to make the Internet accessible to all, regardless of language. This article will focus on the details, explaining what IDNs are, why they are so challenging and fraught with risk, and why companies cannot afford to ignore them. It also includes technical insights from an industry expert and well as insights from a domain name registrar and several executives who have already purchased IDNs.

## **The DNS: Think Beyond the Browser**

Experts have been studying the feasibility of providing support for non-Latin domain names for nearly a decade, but this is a very complicated issue, made more complex by competing national and commercial interests and the looming question: “Are we going to break the Internet?” posed by ICANN chief Paul Twomey just two months ago.

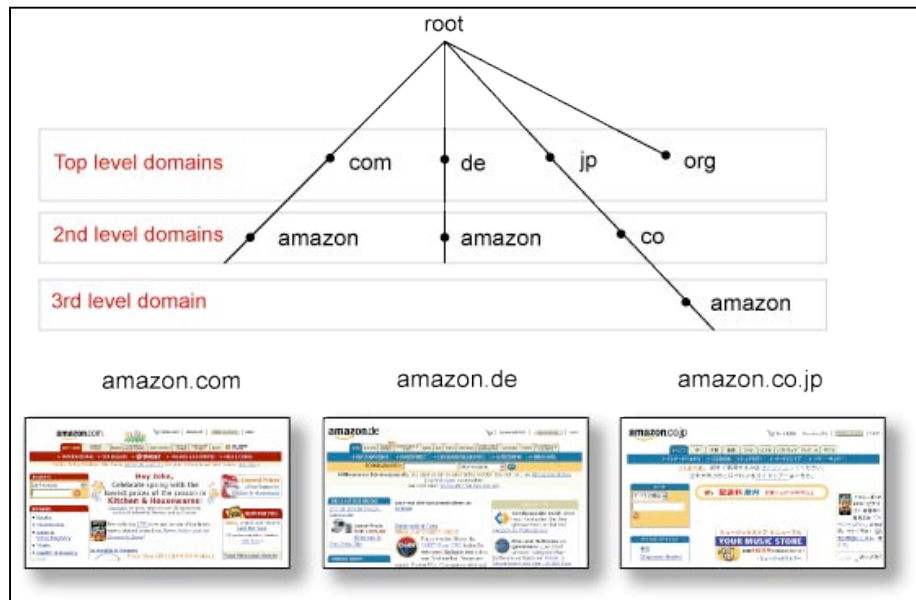
IDNs affect more than just Web browsers. It's natural that users will want to have email addresses in their native scripts as well. Also, URLs that are embedded within Web pages must work as easily as they do within address windows. It is these details that are keeping ICANN busy.

## Understanding Domain Names and IDNs

### Dissecting Domain Names

There are multiple parts, or levels, to a domain. The domain name we most often think of is the name of the company or brand, such as Toyota or Amazon. But there is also a top level domain (TLD), which may either be a *generic TLD (gTLD)*, such as .com, .org, .net, .biz, or *country code TLD (ccTLD)* such as .jp, .kr, .fr, .de.

### DNS Overview



Source: Byte Level Research

There are also sponsored TLDs, like .mobi and .travel, which are a booming industry these days. And there are sponsored geographic TLDs, such as .eu, which launched in 2006, and .asia, which is launching in 2007. The .eu domain has proved very popular, although we have not noticed any trend toward companies creating Web sites specifically for this domain.

Because each country controls how its domain is administered, we have seen variations of domain registration policies evolve over the years. For example, China offers a .com.cn domain for companies that have a physical presence within the country, while also offering .cn for companies that may not have a presence. Many multinationals register both domains to play it safe.

And if having to register two China domains isn't enough, the country now provides 34 more domains for China's municipalities and provinces, such as .gx.cn for Gansu Province.