

Will .mobi Fizzle Out Before It's Approved?

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The [ICANN](#) (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), the corporation which regulates the use and sale of top level domains (TLD's) like ".com", ".net" and ".org", [has recently approved a new TLD, the ".mobi" extension, intended for use exclusively on mobile devices](#). This domain would allow businesses to set up cell phone- and PDA-friendly versions of their websites which would use less bandwidth and load faster than their traditional websites, so that they could be more easily accessed over portable devices.

However, [not all are thrilled](#) about the prospect of a new extension just for mobile devices. The "Father of the Internet", Tim Berners-Lee, has come out against the idea because he believes it goes against the portability the Internet was designed to foster: why create a protocol or domain that limits the hardware that a person can use to access it? The Internet, he argues, was designed to transcend these boundaries.

However, another argument is more prevalent in my mind: the fact that domains as they exist now, are not as regulated as perhaps they should be. When ".org" was first released, it was intended only for non-profit organizations. ".net" also had a specific use, but since domain registrars could make money on any domain that was registered, they decided to cease discouraging customers from registering domains that were not applicable to their site, which inherently encouraged businesses, especially, to register their name (and variations of it) under as many TLD's as possible to secure their name branding and company identification. This excerpt from [domains.dan.info](#) explains the phenomenon:

[N]ow that Network Solutions made money on each domain that was registered, their incentives shifted. Before [...] they encouraged registrants to understand the naming system and register names that made sense within it. They sometimes rejected registrations if they were in the wrong top level domain for the type of organization [...] But now, with more money to be made by unbridled registrations, they stopped trying to control it. .com was the first to go completely uncontrolled, with no attempt to verify that the applicants were actually commercial entities. They tried, for a while, to keep .net and .org under a degree of control, but this fell away after a while, leaving only .edu, .gov, .mil, and .int with restrictions that were actually enforced.

Personally, I see no problem with coalescing companies and types of websites into different TLD's, as long as it serves a specific purpose. A perfect example is the recently approved ".xxx" domain, reserved for sites with adult content. It is speculated that in the future all adult sites will need to be registered under this domain, which will give filtering software a great advantage in disallowing these types of sites. However, if just anyone can register a ".mobi" site and slap a website up on the Net that's not intended for visitors using mobile technology, then the tool is less effective (as non-adult sites using the .xxx extension would lessen its value, as well). As [the article above](#) mentions, it is true that mobile technology will, very soon, be free of the limitations it now faces and lower-bandwidth, limited User Interface (UI) sites might not be needed, but the .mobi extension could still find its uses (having a site exclusively for mobile device content does have pinache, does it not?).

To me, the solution is found in the open source community. Those who use [Linux](#) and software under the GNU License Agreement know that in order to maintain order on the Net, people have to be educated in the Net's protocols, and be willing to follow them. Not everyone will do this with .mobi--there are those who will simply want another iteration of their company name out there for users to type in--but if we keep .mobi mobile, the Net will be more orderly and friendlier for it. Perhaps it needs to be regulated, perhaps not; perhaps .mobi will not even come into existence. But it could be an interesting view into how segmented the growing Internet might need to become, and whether the Internet community is willing to take steps to keep order.

Related Links

http://www.infoworld.com/article/05/07/11/HNmobidomain_1.html

<http://www.infosyncworld.com/news/n/4967.html>

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-07/13/content_3212294.htm