

DOTAFRICA A NEW SYMBOL OF AFRICAN IDENTITY, UNITY AND PRIDE

Expressing identity is one of the ways we reveal who we are to other human beings. Whether it is through our dress code, the way we wear our hair or the way we choose to adorn ourselves with certain objects, sending out signals about our identity is part and parcel of being human.

The reasons for wishing to stand apart from the crowd, or wanting to fit in, are varied. However, national pride is a common reason for wishing to express identity. Historically, one's patriotism is given expression through the flying of national flags or wearing of national colours. From 2013, Africans connected to the world through the medium of the Internet will have a new way to express our growing sense of Afro-optimism.

This growing sense that things on the African continent appear rosier than any of us can remember is because the fundamentals are right. Granted, the occasional *coup d'état* is still staged and a despot or two still reigns, but democracy in 2012 is the rule and not the exception. Economically we're doing pretty well too, with many world-beating GDP growth rates and increasing energy discoveries.

Events such as the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup enabled us to wave a myriad of African national flags at television cameras that beamed images of African pride around the globe. As alluded to above, in 2013 Africans will be able to convey their love of *continent* - as opposed to country - through Internet domains ending in the new .Africa top level domain name extension. The launch of dotAfrica, as the proud new kid on the Internet block will be referred to here, simply means those of us who revel in the idea of being African, will be able to say so to the world.

Already, the more patriotic amongst us have enjoyed supplying our overseas friends with our email and web addresses that end in anything from .co.tz to .co.mz, for example. How wonderful it will be to say "have a look at the products and services we can offer you on: www.OurWebsite.Africa" or "email me at african@my.africa". The dotAfrica domain name extension means we have another potent symbol of African pride and unity that we can plaster all over the Internet.

So when will Africans be able to start registering their Internet domain ending in dotAfrica? Well, ICANN, the international organisation that oversees the administration of all Internet domain names, is currently evaluating bids received from different organisations around the world that wish to administer dotAfrica. Any domain name registry anywhere on the planet can apply to run dotAfrica. Obviously, there are many technical and other requirements to be met but indeed, we run the risk of a foreign registry running dotAfrica.

Fortunately, the African continent has a formidable resource in UniForum SA, trading as the ZA Central Registry (ZACR), which has been selected by the African Union (AU) as the continent's official bidding Registry Operator.

Transparency, reliability, technical ability, financial stability and continental representation were all key considerations when the AU made the decision of which organisation it would endorse for the administration of dotAfrica.

So, where we are in the process is as follows: The ZACR, in consultation with the AU, last month submitted its bid to administer dotAfrica. The bid will be evaluated during 2012 by ICANN which will be processing over five hundred other applications for different domains at the same time. Then, as early as the first quarter of 2013, ICANN will announce which organisation will administer the continent's dotAfrica top level domain.

Following this announcement, the successful applicant will release details on how individuals and organisations can go about registering their own dotAfrica domain name. It is likely that some sort of trademark sunrise process, in which the rights of African trademark holders may be placed higher than those of non-African trademark holders, a short auction period will be held for premium domains will be implemented. After these initial periods have been concluded, registrations will open on a normal, first come, first served basis.

The above notwithstanding, it is certain that everyone securing a desirable dotAfrica domain name will post it with pride on the Internet. Watch this space to ensure your stake in Africa's bright, connected, future.

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