

DotBerlin: a Top Level Domain for Berlin

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<http://weblog.berlecon.de/archives/2005/09/20/dotberlin-eine-eigene-top-level-domain-fur-berlin/#more-119>

Recently, I met with one of the founders of DotBerlin and had the chance to talk about his project. The new enterprise is aimed at introducing and operating the new top-level domain .berlin. Companies, municipal authorities, and individuals with an affinity for Berlin (not only people living in Berlin) will be able to have websites and email addresses ending in .berlin, just like those that currently end in .de, .com, .info.

DotBerlin is the first attempt to initiate regional top-level domains (TLD); the TLDs introduced in the past were all generic. So far, the success of new TLDs has been inconsistent – the shortage of domain names expected during the internet bubble never happened. So why another TLD? Is it really necessary? Is the project a likely success?

Whether the world “needs” regional TLDs is debatable. But then, this isn’t the question that really matters: the world doesn’t “need” iPods either. DotBerlin could pioneer the introduction of more competition and more innovation to the allocation of domains. So far, aspects of marketing and a creative take on domains and on structuring TLDs were hardly relevant. Even the term “allocating” domain names speaks volumes.

The reality of domain name usage has become far more complex than the term “allocation” suggests. Many private and commercial providers of information use domains very flexibly: Simple websites are temporarily set up for special occasions, ranging from congresses, marketing events and concerts to birthdays, weddings and other events. The long-term use of domains as “virtual identities on the web” has come to represent only a fraction of the use of domains. So people are keen to use catchy URLs for short-term occasions.

But catchy domain names, for instance for aliases, could make life much easier for all internet users. www.senat.berlin is certainly easier to remember than the senate’s current URL: www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/rbm/senat.html. In cases like this, additional domains could make navigation easier for users.

The conclusion: If the price is right and the registration process simple enough, there could very well be a demand for domains ending in .berlin.

The question of the project’s likelihood of success remains. Naturally, not everyone can just start their own domain; where would that lead? DotBerlin is facing a very long and expensive application procedure at the ICANN, the organization responsible for approving TLDs. The procedure resembles negotiations and formations of coalitions or the application to host the Olympic Games.

Finding allies and persuading one party after the other will no doubt challenge the founders of DotBerlin before the project will be tested on the market. Whether the persuasion process will succeed remains to be seen.

Despite all the uncertainties regarding the project’s success – DotBerlin certainly is an innovative enterprise in its best sense. They should get the chance to put their idea to the test.