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## Foreigners set for .CN swoop

### Mainland braces for flood of demand when it opens the domain name market in December

CAROLYN ONG

China's Internet development is expected to receive a boost in December when the .CN domain name will be made available to businesses outside China under a new liberalised policy.

A deal between the .US registry NeuStar and the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) will allow businesses outside China to acquire URLs (universal resource locators) with the .CN extension, which is the geographical top-level domain name for China.

CNNIC is responsible for managing China's Internet address space and for developing new Internet standards and technologies for China. Previously, CNNIC allowed only companies with either Chinese ownership or physical business addresses in China to use the .CN domain name. Until recently, personal domain names were not allowed in China.

Neustar and CNNIC plan to accept .CN domain name registrations through accredited registrars outside China beginning in December.

Richard Tindal, vice-president of sales and marketing at Neustar Registry, predicted an avalanche of demand for the .CN extension.

"We expect tens of thousands of companies to apply for the .CN domain. We expect great demand from foreign companies eager to secure a presence in China's Internet space. This is also significant as it is the first time China is opening up to allow for foreign players in the Internet domain-name market."

Mr Tindal said CNNIC would announce over the next few weeks who these accredited registrars would be.

Like Verisign, Neustar is a domain name wholesaler though, unlike Verisign, it does not participate in selling. The company provides localised billing, a technology platform, marketing and public relations through a network of partnering Internet service providers and Web-hosting companies worldwide.

A domain-name registrar is an online service that allows businesses and individuals to log on, search for unused domain names and, if they have not already been registered by others, to register them under their names, usually for one or two years, at a fee.

"With China's entrance into the World Trade Organisation, international trade is also expected to accelerate," Mr Tindal said. "This initiative will enable companies worldwide to participate in China's growing economy via the Internet. We expect businesses in countries with strong trading relations with China, such as Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, the United States and Britain, to want a .CN presence."

Previously, only three internationally accredited companies could register domain names in China - Eastern Communications Co, HiChina Web Solutions and Xin Net Corp.

China's Ministry of Information Industry eased Internet domain-name regulations in September. Applications can now be submitted and approved online in six hours; before that, approvals could take several weeks.

Neustar has put in place a real-time online registration service with CNNIC. The company will also make available second level .CN and Chinese character domain names ending with .CN early next year.

"It's quite important because most Internet users in China do not speak English, and even if they do, the visitors to the Web site may not speak English and may not be able to understand the domain names," Mr Tindal said.

According to the China Daily, there are 130,000 .CN domains registered, but it is estimated that there are about 700,000 domain names in China with the .com or .net suffix.

China is the most populous country in the world and one of the fastest growing Internet markets. According to Netratings, there are already more than 56 million Internet users in China - a number that, by most estimates, is doubling every 12 to 18 months.

Neustar has a network of 100 registrars worldwide for its .biz and .US domains in 34 countries and 850,000 have registered for the .biz domain.