



China Makes Buying Website Names Easier

New rules for .cn designated sites to allow foreign firms to register

HONG KONG (Reuters) - Relaxed rules for registering Web site names in China are likely to spark a surge in applications, including from foreign companies previously barred from using the .cn designation, China Internet watchers said.

New guidelines issued on Monday by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) should help to jump-start registrations of .cn names, which have been relatively anaemic by global standards, experts said.

Since 1997, CNNIC has registered a scant 145,000 domain names ending with .cn—miniscule compared with the 27.3 million .com, .org and .net addresses logged by leading U.S. domain registrar VeriSign.

"They would like to see more registration not only by Chinese companies, but also by foreign companies," said a Beijing-based Internet expert who did not want his name used. "CNNIC also sees a commercial value in this. If the number of registrations increases, they will get more money."

Government-run CNNIC has designated about 24 private companies to act as registrars for Internet domain names ending in the .cn suffix assigned to China. CNNIC previously handled all such registrations itself.

In another key change, foreign companies with no China presence will now be allowed to apply for .cn domains. That move will pave the way for firms like U.S.-based search engine Google to operate China-specific sites with .cn designations even if they have no China offices.

CNNIC will also allow .cn to be used as a "top level" domain, meaning Web sites can use .cn as the sole suffix in their address. Previously, the .cn suffix had to be preceded by another standardized suffix indicating the nature of the site, such as .com for businesses or .org for non-profit organisations. A firm that previously had to use the name Widget.com.cn can now use Widget.cn.

Among the 24 companies that will be allowed to register .cn addresses, only one—[NeuStar](#) of the US—is based outside China. Its selection is designed specifically to draw more foreign companies, China Internet watchers said.

Among the two dozen companies that will be allowed to register .cn addresses, only one, NeuStar of the United States, is based outside China. Its selection is designed specifically to draw more foreign companies, China Internet watchers said.

In its own announcement of the alliance with CNNIC, NeuStar said on its Website it will target small- and medium-sized businesses seeking to establish a presence in the China market.

Among the Chinese companies that will soon accept registrations, U.S.-listed Sohu.com anticipates the business will provide a meaningful new revenue source, said spokeswoman Caroline Straathof.