**dotFM embraces emoji domain names**
**International - Hogan Lovells**

**Internet issues**
**Domain names**

- **dotFM is to make emoji domain names available to register**
- **Pre-launch "expressions of interest" are invited for list of emoji domain names**
- **SSAC had advised against use of emoji in domain names**

dotFM, the registry responsible for the '.fm' top-level domain (TLD), is to join the handful of TLDs that are making emoji domain names available to register. The registry, which is the country-code TLD (ccTLD) for Micronesia but which, in view of its '.fm' extension, has up to now mainly marketed its TLD to radio stations, has released a list of emoji domain names for which it is inviting pre-launch "expressions of interest".

Emoji are pictorial symbols that often lend emotional context or help to liven up otherwise dry, or ambiguously intentioned, text exchanges. Originating in the Japanese mobile network in the late 1990s, they are today widely used in emails, on smartphones and in social media all over the world. In spite of their popular appeal (and hence a certain level of demand for their availability as domain names), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)'s Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC) advised against their suitability as domain names in a report released in 2015, leading ICANN to ban their use in gTLDs.

The SSAC's report stated that the ambiguity in the use of emoji constituted the major obstacle to the adoption of emoji domain names. It underlined that many emoji are visually similar and can be difficult to distinguish, especially when displayed in small dimensions or by different applications, as no standard specifies as to exactly how they should be displayed. As a result, a user is less likely to reach the intended resource and may instead be tricked by a phishing site or other intentional misrepresentation.

Another concern raised by emoji domain names is that they will exacerbate the problem of homonym and homographic ('script spoofing') attacks in the domain name space. This is the practice of registering a domain name that looks similar or identical to another domain name by substituting certain of its characters for others that resemble them. This ranges from substituting two letter 'V's to make something that looks like a 'W' ('VV') to more sophisticated ruses, such as substituting the Latin character 'O' for the Cyrillic internationalised domain name (IDN) character 'O'.

Like IDNs, emoji use the international programming standard Unicode. Via a process called Punycode, this Unicode is translated into an American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) domain name. Up until 2010, ASCII was the only code that could be used to register domain names.

At the current time, only a few other TLDs offer emoji domain names. '.ws', the ccTLD for Western Samoa, is the best known of these, but they are also available via the '.tk', '.ml', '.ga', '.cf' and '.gq' TLDs run by Freenom.

Although the SSAC concluded that emoji should not be used in domain names processed in the Domain Name System as it is an exact-match lookup service and they could not be accepted or processed consistently, it did not rule out their use in other ways, such as via clickable HTML anchor text or search terms typed into web search engines.

Indeed, this is how most emoji domain names are accessed. By way of an example, clicking on HTML anchor text 'i  .ws' leads one to a website that displays in many (although not all) browser windows as the rather less exciting Punycode domain name https://xn--i-7iq.ws/.

Among the emoji domain names being offered by the '.fm registry are the ubiquitous smiley face emoji ('□.fm'), those catering to particular markets (eg, the wedding business: '□.fm') and other more 'iconic' ones, such as '□.fm'.

No prices or launch date are being specified by the '.fm registry for these domain names as yet, but interested parties are required to specify a budget (ranging from $1,000 to $95,000) and provide a brief project description.

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