

World Trademark Review *Daily*

AFNIC to allow registration of IDNs
France - Hogan Lovells International LLP

Domain names

March 09 2012

AFNIC, the registry for '.fr' domain names, has announced that it will soon allow the registration of internationalised domain names (IDNs). IDNs are domain names that contain characters with diacritics, such as accents (eg, 'é'), cedillas (eg, 'ç') and ogoneks (eg, 'ą'). IDNs are already available under a growing number of top-level domains, such as '.com', '.de' (Germany), '.es' (Spain), '.eu' (European Union) and '.co' (Colombia); '.ca' (Canada) will follow shortly.

AFNIC will introduce the following 30 additional characters, which will bring the total number of characters available to 67:

- à, á, â, ã, ä, å and æ;
- ç;
- è, é, ê and ë;
- ì, í, î and ï;
- ñ;
- ò, ó, ô, õ, ö and ø;
- ù, ú, û and ü;
- ý and ÿ; and
- ß.

This list is not simply restricted to characters used in the French language, as it includes, for example, the German 'ß' (which is not available under '.eu', despite the numerous IDN characters allowed under this extension) and the Spanish 'ñ'. However, characters from other alphabets, such as the Cyrillic and Greek alphabets, will not be allowed.

The introduction of IDNs will not only concern the '.fr' extension, but also the other five extensions managed by AFNIC: '.re' (Reunion), '.tf' (French Southern Territories), '.wf' (Wallis and Futuna), '.pm' (St Pierre and Miquelon) and '.yt' (Mayotte). It will follow a two-phased schedule:

- From May 3 to July 3 2012 - a grandfathering period will enable registrants of existing domain names to register corresponding IDNs in the same extension (eg, the registrant of 'cafe.fr' will be able to register 'café.fr', but not 'café.re'). If the same domain name can have various corresponding IDNs, the registrant will be able to register any of the possible IDNs. For example, the registrant of a domain name such as 'peche.fr' will be able to register IDNs such as 'pêche.fr' (meaning either 'peach' or 'fishing' in French), 'pêché.fr' (meaning 'fished'), 'péch .fr' (meaning 'sin') or any other variation. Similarly, the registrant of a domain name such as 'muller-strasse.fr' will be able to register the IDNs 'm ller-str sse.fr', 'muller-str sse.fr' and 'm ller-strasse.fr'.
- From July 3 2012 onwards - a general opening will begin on a first-come, first-served basis. Registrants of existing domain names who did not secure the IDNs they were entitled to during the grandfathering period will lose their right to the IDNs concerned and anybody will be able to register them, provided that they fulfil the new AFNIC requirement (ie, that they are based in the European Union). Interestingly, this is not what is being mooted by CIRA, the Canadian registry, which is considering 'bundling' all variants of one domain name together so that the registrant of 'peche.ca' will effectively be able to block all other variations and may choose to register them or not.

David Taylor, La titia Arrault and Jane Seager, Hogan Lovells LLP, Paris

World Trademark Review (www.worldtrademarkreview.com) is a subscription-based, practitioner-led, bi-monthly publication and daily email service which focuses on the issues that matter to trademark professionals the world over. Each issue of the magazine provides in-depth coverage of emerging national and regional trends, analysis of important markets and interviews with high-profile trademark personalities, as well as columns on trademark management, online issues and counterfeiting.