

World Trademark Review Daily

NTIA suspends '.kids.us' extension
United States - Hogan Lovells International LLP

Domain names

September 10 2012

The [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#) (NTIA) of the US government suspended the domain name extension '.kids.us' on July 27 2012, almost 10 years after its creation in 2003. The reason given was that "the 'kids.us' domain is not serving its intended purpose".

The '.kids.us' extension was mandated by the US Congress in the [Dot Kids Implementation and Efficiency Act of 2002](#) (Public Law 107-317). Its purpose was to:

"serve as a haven for material that promotes positive experience for children and families using the internet, provides a safe environment for children and helps to prevent children from being exposed to harmful material on the internet".

Child protection on the internet has always been a general concern, although not just in the United States. The '.us' registry, [Neustar](#), which also operates the '.biz' top-level domain, stressed in its ['.kids.us' Content Policy](#) that "90% of the children in America between the ages of 5 and 17 now use computers".

To ensure that the '.kids.us' domain name space was safe for children, Neustar reviewed and monitored all '.kids.us' websites to ensure that their content was suitable for children. Specific content guidelines were put in place, such as:

- compliance with existing rules and regulations regarding indecency on the airwaves;
- compliance with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act requirements; and
- a commitment to offer some educational and informational content.

In addition, there were restrictions on website content - for example, pornography, violence, drugs, alcohol, tobacco and weapons were not permitted. Finally, there were also technology restrictions - for example, interactive services, such as email or instant messaging and hyperlinks taking users outside of the '.kids.us' domain name space, were also prohibited.

Unfortunately, the '.kids.us' extension failed to attract the public interest, most probably due to the many restrictions put in place, although these were in fact what was necessary to make '.kids.us' the safe online space for children that it was intended to be. Despite Neustar's efforts to make the extension more attractive (eg, by considerably reducing its prices in 2007 and by expanding its marketing efforts in 2010, by way of contests with cash prizes for new '.kids.us' websites or by providing financial help to content providers supplying quality '.kids.us' websites), the number of domain name registrations remained fairly low and the use of the extension was rather limited.

In addition, there are now numerous websites with high-quality content aimed at children and numerous tools available to create a safe internet space for children, such as software applications, web browsers and parental control. NTIA thus considered that there was no longer a need for a specific 'child-friendly' extension within the '.us' TLD. As per the statement posted on the [www.kids.us](#) website, this decision was taken "as a result of the changed landscape of the internet and the many other tools that parents now have available to them to protect their children's online experience".

Neustar announced that existing '.kids.us' domain names would not be renewed and that they would all be deleted by July 27 2013. Until then, Neustar is continuing to monitor the content of existing live '.kids.us' websites, although it is encouraging '.kids.us' domain name holders to suspend use of their domain names. It is no longer accepting applications for content review and, therefore, holders of existing domain names cannot put any new content on their websites.

Neustar also indicated that, should the extension be re-established in the future, present holders of '.kids.us' domain names would be given priority to re-register their domain names. However, with the launch of new generic top-level domains (gTLDs) coming up, it seems unlikely that the re-establishment of the '.kids.us' extension will ever be considered. There have been two new gTLD applications for '.kids' and one application for '.kid', which may eventually serve to fill the new gap in relation to a 'child-specific' domain name space.

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World Trademark Review *Daily*

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