

World Trademark Review *Daily*

'be' registry to allow IDNs
Belgium - Hogan Lovells LLP

Domain names

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The Belgian registry, [DNS.BE](#), has announced that it will allow the registration of internationalised domain names (IDNs) under '.be' in June.

IDNs are domain names that contain characters with diacritics, such as accents (eg, 'é'), cedillas (eg, 'ç') and ogoneks (eg, 'ą'). IDN registrations are being made available by more and more registries, for example under '.com', '.eu' (European Union), '.de' (Germany), '.es' (Spain), '.it' (Italy), '.fr' (France), '.co' (Colombia), and more recently '.ca' (Canada).

The launch of IDNs under '.be' will take place on June 11 2013. The following 33 characters will be allowed:

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

These characters include all accented letters used in Dutch, French and German (the three official languages of Belgium), as well as accented letters from other European languages such as Swedish, Danish, Finnish and Spanish.

It should be noted that there will not be a sunrise period to enable trademark holders to protect their IP rights in priority, nor will there be a grandfathering period to enable registrants of existing '.be' domain names to register the corresponding IDNs, as was the case for example for French IDNs. The [recent example of Canada](#) (the 'bundling' system), under which the registrant of a particular domain name has the exclusive right to register all the potential IDN variants (which also means that all domain names in a 'bundle' need to be managed by the same registrar and held by the same registrant), will not be followed either.

Priority will therefore not be given to anyone and holders of trademarks or existing '.be' domain names wishing to obtain the corresponding IDNs under '.be' will need to submit their domain name applications in the usual way. IDNs will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Interested companies or individuals should therefore make their applications as promptly as possible using an experienced service provider with the most up-to-date technology to give them the best chance of securing their chosen IDNs. This is true in particular for registrants holding existing '.be' domain names that are usually written using diacritics but were not registered as such due to the previous unavailability of such characters, for example 'café.be'. Clearly failure to obtain the corresponding IDN could result in diversion of traffic and corresponding loss of business, and recuperation may be very difficult unless the term in question is an extremely well-known distinctive brand rather than a term that could be said to be descriptive.

The '.be' top-level domain has been growing steadily, with an average annual growth rate of approximately 10% over the past few years, reaching over 1.36 million registered domain names at the time of writing. With the forthcoming introduction of IDNs, this number is likely to increase this summer.

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