

New Domain Names Registration in the PRC:- English letters and/or Arabic Numerals. "中國" (. China) domain names now available for registration

The China Internet Network Information Centre ("CNNIC"), which is the state network centre of the People's Republic of China ("PRC"), under the auspices of the Ministry of Information and Industry Technology, has recently announced that, starting from 29th October 2012, the Chinese top level domain ".中國" (i.e. ".cn" in Chinese characters – with the suffix being "China" in Chinese characters) will be open for public registration with English letters and/or Arabic numerals. ".中國" is the Chinese character most representative of China (PRC) on the global internet.

Currently, only "Chinese characters.中國" can be registered with CNNIC. However, starting from the above-mentioned date, ".中國" domain names can comprise English letters, Arabic numerals, a combination of the two and/or include a hyphen if necessary.

Sunrise Period for registration of English letters/numerals.中國 domain names

CNNIC has provided a timeline to allow for priority registration, which is available to trade mark owners and existing .cn domain name owners. The timeline for applications is as follows:-

Key issues

- CNNIC to launch a new "English/Numerals.中國" domain name on 29 October 2012 to supplement the existing "English.cn" domain names
- The priority registration "sunrise period" has now started for trade mark owners
- CNNIC is also set to implement separate registrations for .cn and .中國 domain extensions on 29 October 2012.

Time period	Who can register?
From now up to <u>14th Oct 2012</u>	Existing trade mark registrants can apply for domain names using their registered trademarks. Both trade mark registrations obtained in China and elsewhere can be relied on.
<u>15th – 23rd Oct 2012</u>	Existing .cn domain name holders can apply for .中國 domains based on their .cn domain registrations.
<u>25th – 28th October 2012</u>	CNNIC will announce the outcome of registrations applied for in the above periods.
<u>29th October 2012 onwards</u>	Applications for .中國 domain names will be open to the public. Registrations will be granted on a first-come-first-served basis.

With a view to preventing domain names from being obtained by squatters in the PRC, it is advisable to make use of the sunrise period to apply for .中國 domain name registrations as soon as possible before 29th October 2012.

Separate Registrations for Chinese characters. cn and corresponding Chinese characters. 中國 domains

As from 29th October 2012, "Chinese characters.cn" and their corresponding. 中國 domain names will need to be registered separately. Previously a "Chinese characters .cn" registration would have automatically entitled the registrant to a corresponding domain name with .中國, which is the Chinese language equivalent of ".cn" (i.e. when applying for XX.cn domains, XX.中國 domains (with the same Chinese prefix XX) will also be provided for the same fee). However, from 29th October 2012 onwards, registrants need to file two separate applications to register the same Chinese characters for a ".cn" and a ".中國" domain name. Two sets of fees will be required.

Chinese .cn and .中國 domains registered prior to 29th October 2012 will also be subject to separate renewal fees when they come up for renewal after this date. Hence, it will be preferable to:-

- i. apply for Chinese.cn registrations before 29th October 2012 so as to enjoy entitlement to .中國 domain names without additional fees; or
- ii. renew any existing .cn domain names together with their existing .中國 equivalents before 29th October 2012, so as to avoid incurring separate fees for each renewal. Renewals can be filed now even before the domain names have expired. The effect is to extend the validity of the existing .cn and .中國 domain names to a maximum validity period. Currently, such domain names can be renewed for a period up to the year 2022.

Costs

The costs for new registrations under this announcement will be:-

- i. For domain name registrations to be filed under Parts A and B above, the cost will be HK\$4400 for 10 years' validity and HK\$ 2600 for 5 years' validity.
- ii. For renewals of existing .cn domain names together with their 中國 equivalents, the cost will be HK\$ 440 for each renewed year. Each domain name can only be renewed from its current year of expiry up to the year 2022. Thus, for example, an existing domain name currently set to expire in 2014 will only incur renewal fees for 8 renewed years.

Conclusion

Chinese character domain names are becoming more popular as the PRC Chinese Internet community grows substantially in size each year. Trade mark owners should take advantage of the priority registration period to register domain names that incorporate their marks. Failure to do so may leave the way open for registration by squatters, which, unfortunately, is still a serious problem in the PRC. It is always more efficient and less costly to register a domain name at the outset rather than recovering it at a later stage.

CNNIC: <http://www1.cnnic.cn/en/index/index.htm>

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