

Search Service Proposed for '.travel'

Operators of '.travel' Propose Search Service Seen As Similar to Controversial Site Finder

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NEW YORK Sep 19, 2006 (AP)— Operators of the ".travel" domain name are proposing a new search service to help guide people who mistype Web addresses or seek nonexistent ones, reviving a debate over how much control such organizations should have in directing Internet traffic.

One review panel already has recommended that the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers reject Tralliance Corp.'s proposal for "search.travel," saying it appears no different from the Site Finder service that VeriSign Inc. had introduced for ".com" and ".net" and withdrew under pressure.

But unlike Site Finder, which also drew complaints that a company was trying to profit off the popularity of ".com," the concerns with ".travel" are strictly technical.

Tralliance argues that there are far fewer ".travel" sites about 20,000 compared with some 56 million for ".com" and thus they are less central to the Internet's infrastructure.

The ".travel" domain opened for business last year for airlines, theme parks, restaurants and others in travel and tourism, joining more than 250 Internet suffixes, known as top-level domains.

ICANN, the organization that oversees domain name policies, is particularly concerned about new services at the top level because any problems can potentially affect millions of users who depend on working directories behind the scenes to find Web sites and send e-mail.

As proposed by Tralliance in late August, users who type a ".travel" name that does not exist would get a Web page inviting them to register for the name, provided their company or organization belongs to one of the eligible travel industry sectors, such as hotels. Tralliance would make money on each new registration.

Users also would get a search box, possibly with what they are looking for already filled in. Tralliance President Ron Andruff said Tuesday that ".travel" sites would get higher rankings in results and that the company would share revenue for ads delivered by IAC/InterActiveCorp.'s Ask.com search engine, but he said the amount would be minuscule.

The service, he said, is primarily a benefit for consumers by referring them to more travel resources online rather than simply an error page.

"Going to a broken link serves no one," Andruff said.

ICANN raised no competitive objections but referred the matter to its Security and Stability Advisory Committee, which found that the technical mechanism proposed was never meant for large-scale use and thus recommended its rejection.

ICANN, which will make the final determination, opened the proposal for public comment this week and said it was seeking guidance from a second review panel under procedures implemented last month in the wake of Site Finder. A recommendation is due in early November.

Andruff said the service should be permitted because some domains, including ".museum," already have a similar mechanism and his is closer to ".museum" than ".com" in scope.

VeriSign had introduced Site Finder three years ago for the ".com" and ".net" domains it runs, drawing complaints that the service interfered with spam filters and other key Internet tools while giving the company an unfair competitive advantage in search.

Under pressure from ICANN, VeriSign suspended the service and subsequently sued the organization. In a settlement reached earlier this year, ICANN agreed to create procedures and deadlines to more quickly review any new services VeriSign might introduce. ICANN later adopted them for operators of other domains.