

Dotafrica Trademark Protection Measures

The Mark Validation System of the ZA Central Registry was the subject of a great deal of interest from African, Middle Eastern and South Asian trade marks and intellectual property law firms who were participating in the recent Dubai gathering of the International Trademark Association.

INTA usually hosts an annual conference for trademark holders and brand owners. However, the Dubai conference was the first installment to focus on trademarks issues in Africa, Middle East and South East Asia.

The ZACR's MVS is designed to protect African brands in the run-up to, and following, the imminent commercial launch of the new dotAfrica generic Top Level Domain.

According to dotAfrica Steering Committee chair, Mohamed El Bashir: "The MVS is essentially a database of trademarks and other proprietary names that African organisations and individuals have lodged with the ZACR in order to mitigate against their abuse during, and participate in, the dotAfrica Sunrise process starting in early 2014.

"The INTA delegates were especially interested to learn that African brand owners now have an affordable alternative brand protection mechanism to the global Trademark Clearing House." Mr El Bashir explained to the assembled delegates at the Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel that until the latter half of 2013, the number of registered 'marks' with TMCH is still low. Middle East and African brands are a tiny minority of current 20 000 TMCH registered trademarks.

"While the TMCH has been developed as the global de facto repository for trademark data, African mark holders - especially smaller companies - may find it difficult to look beyond this continent's borders for intellectual property protection when it comes to the dotAfrica gTLD," said Mr El Bashir. "With MVS we have a more practical solution, creating a complementary local database designed with African trademark holders in mind while still offering heavyweight international credibility, validation and protection," he explained.

Mr El Bashir added that the expansion of Internet access and online participation on the continent was a founding principle of the African Union Commission -led and ZACR-managed dotAfrica initiative. In this regard, the initiative has specifically provided for the establishment of a dotAfrica

Foundation to support of the regional aim of Internet-enabled socioeconomic growth and development for Africa.

Investing significant resources in the creation of a world-leading African trademark data repository is another tangible way dotAfrica is fulfilling its capacity-building mandate.

Mr El Bashir served as a panelist during an INTA Dubai session on the new Generic Top Level Domains “gTLDs” managed by ICANN (Internet Corporate for Assigned Names and Numbers) which include dotAfrica. "Delegates wanted to learn about mechanisms such as the MVS that will protect their brands once dotAfrica launches commercially. They wanted to know what dotAfrica meant for brands that are currently operating on the continent, and we were able to outline to their satisfaction mechanisms for reporting domains that violate trademarks," he concluded. For further information on dotAfrica, please visit: www.africainonespace.org.

Mark Validation system is available at :
www.MarkValidation.co.za