

South Africa On Track For One Million Domain Names

There are currently 969 190 registered domain names ending in .za, South Africa's designation in cyberspace, and the country is set to reach the one million mark in the first quarter of 2015.

That's according to Lucky Masilela, CEO of the ZA Central Registry (ZACR), who was speaking at the iWeek annual Internet industry conference taking place this week in Fourways, Johannesburg.

"A growing stock of registered geographic Top Level Domain (geoTLD) names is of crucial importance to modern states because of the role the Internet can play in boosting economic growth. A nation's combined Intellectual Property (IP), particularly that relating to the web, is every bit as important as its bricks and mortar infrastructure," said Mr Masilela.

The number of registered .za domains is particularly impressive if one considers that there are currently just over 60 000 registered .ng (Nigeria) domains. "Nigeria has three times the population of South Africa but less than one tenth of the number of domain names. We see that as a tremendous opportunity," Mr Masilela said, alluding to ZACR's expansion strategy of becoming a fully-fledged international Central Registry with administered domains beyond just .za.

Highlighting Africa's impressive - and growing - tally of 240.1 million Internet users, Mr Masilela said there is a huge market in Africa for ZACR's Central Registry expertise and expressed the importance of ZACR jointly tackling African markets with the registrars of .za domains.

ZACR currently administers co.za, org.za, web.za and net.za while the ZADotCities domains of .joburg (dotJoburg), .capetown

(dotCapeTown) and .durban (dotDurban) are set to enter the General Availability phase in November when domains ending in those geoTLDs can be registered on a first come, first served basis. ZACR is also set to administer the planned .africa (dotAfrica) geoTLD once Internet regulator ICANN (the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) overcomes certain regulatory challenges.

Helping to boost the number of .za registered domain names are more than 400 registrars in South Africa and abroad who register domains on behalf of individual Internet users as well as organisations around the world. Mr Masilela revealed that 15.8% of registrars registering .za domains were located outside of South Africa (about 62 registrars are foreign) which hinted at a healthy international interest in .za. Foreign registrars account for 6.8% of co.za domain name registrations (some 57 000 domain names).

He said that 34 registrars were in Europe and 16 in North America. When it came to the geographic spread within South Africa, there were 166 registrars in Gauteng, 106 in the Western Cape and 39 in KwaZulu-Natal. "We'd like to see many more .za registrars located in some of the smaller towns and cities across South Africa. We will be actively embarking on a number of roadshows aimed at meeting registrars in smaller metropolitan areas over the coming months. By encouraging them to grow their domain name registration businesses, we'll help grow our central registry business," explained Mr Masilela.

Of the 969 190 .za domains, co.za accounted for 942 755 of them, while web.za, net.za, and org.za accounted for the rest. The total .za tally is likely to be lifted once ZADotCity names begin to be registered during the General Available phase which starts in November, following the conclusion of the sunrise and landrush phases which end in September and October, respectively.