Dr. Steve Crocker
Chairman, Board of Directors
ICANN

February 9, 2015

Subj: Call to ICANN Community to form the Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG)

Dear Dr. Crocker:

The issue of Universal Acceptance is critical to ensuring widespread adoption of TLDs, improving market confidence of operators, and enhancing consumer trust in the DNS. Many Internet systems are unprepared for the growth of TLDs, internationalized email or other technology advances. A community effort is necessary to ensure widespread acceptance and adoption of all valid TLDs and associated technologies in Internet systems.

The introduction of Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) brings the issue of Universal Acceptance into sharp focus. Internationalized Domain Names represent characters on the Domain Name System in non-ASCII character sets. The existence of IDNs has the potential to make it far easier for much of the world to interact online in their own languages and alphabets. This creates new opportunities to bring the power of the Internet to more of the world. The quicker that outreach and problem solving can be done and educational materials disseminated the better it will be for achieving that vision.

The global multistakeholder community needs to coordinate efforts that will bring about outreach, best practices and knowledge repositories that will be disseminated in an attempt to speed mass acceptance of all TLDs in key systems Internet-wide. ICANN is an ideal candidate to play this coordinating role.

A small group of community members interested in Universal Acceptance convened at a workshop on Thursday 22 January 2015. The group discussed who should work on this issue, and how it should be dealt with. The workshop attendees engaged in conversations and ultimately formed sub-groups to discuss recommendations in advance of a public meeting at ICANN52 in Singapore.

The workshop participants make the following recommendations:

1) The ICANN community should support the creation of a Steering Group to guide the identification of topline issues and proposed solutions, as well as the creation and dissemination of best practices and general outreach information about Universal Acceptance.

As this is a project that will take years to make progress on, the Steering Group should be a standing group whose membership may fluctuate over the years. ICANN should be prepared for the Steering Group to drive action over the course of the next 10 years, though group leadership terms and structure should be re-evaluated every two years.

2) ICANN staff should be the key coordinator in a formalized community effort on Universal Acceptance, and provide resources to the community in order to address this important issue.

3) While the workshop that led to these initial recommendations was small and effective, we recognize that it is critical to embrace the wider community and to invite and involve other active, interested parties and perspectives.

A call for general membership to the Steering Group was announced at the ICANN Universal Acceptance meeting at ICANN52 in Singapore, and there was affirmative community acceptance of these recommendations. In short order following this meeting, calls for Steering Group Chairs or Co-Chairs will be made. The leadership chosen will be tasked to drive a further process to invite volunteers to join the group.

Role of Community:
The Universal Acceptance Steering Group (UASG) should be made up of ICANN community members as well as non-ICANN community experts. The UASG will provide guidance to the ICANN team and work alongside ICANN staff throughout the project. Active volunteer participation is expected from the community.

The UASG intends participation as a multistakeholder group. The UASG and the Universal Acceptance Initiative is envisioned to be an advocacy group rather than a policy oriented group. As a result, weighted representation is not expected and participation from various stakeholder groups is expected to change over time and depending on the activities and priorities appropriate at various stages of the project.

Role of ICANN Staff:
ICANN staff role is that of coordinator, catalyst, supporter, advocate and manager of the work streams. Staff should project manage and publish outcomes, and provide budget as appropriate to support the initiative. They should also act as a Secretariat for the UA Initiative. Though travel support to meetings should not be required for Steering Group members, future research and outreach efforts may require financial support.

The Steering Group's work should be focused on two or more work streams. Two work streams have been identified so far: High-priority issues and Communications. Each work stream may choose a lead.

This coordination effort comes at a critical time in the evolution of the TLD namespace; not having this coordination risks significant duplication of effort from disperse interested parties. With this coordinated effort we can move towards a set of shared principles, and coordinated messaging that will guide community action on this important subject.

We call on ICANN to initiate these recommendations on behalf of the ICANN community.

Universal Access Workshop Team:
- Jordyn Buchanan (Google)
- Edmon Chung (DotAsia Organisation)

- Chris Cowherd (Donuts)
- Christian Dawson (I2C)
- Jothan Frakes (Mozilla/Public Suffix List)
- Tony Harris (ISPCP)
- Don Hollander (I2)
- Andrei Kolesnikov (.RU ccTLD)
- Esteban Lescano (LAC-IX)
- Phil Lodico (Fairwinds Partners)
- Brent London (Google)
- Richard Merdinger (GoDaddy)
- Paul Mitchell (Microsoft)
- Ram Mohan (Afilias/ICANN Board member)
- Jan Nelson (Microsoft)
- Kurt Pritz (DNA)
- Elaine Pruis (Donuts)
- Alireza Saleh
- Mike Silber
- M3 Sweatt (Microsoft)
- Mark Svancarek (Microsoft)

Anyone may sign up for the UA Initiative at https://mm.icann.org/mailman/listinfo/ua-discuss