

Are New gTLD Domains An Opportunity for Law Firms?

Steve Matthews | March 2014

With so many new gTLDs [<http://newgtlds.icann.org/en/>](“generic Top Level Domains”) coming online this year, I thought it might be worth exploring their value and potential use in law firm marketing.

The simplest example of a gTLD, of course, is .COM, which makes up about 50% of all domains registered. In the past, most prospective owners found themselves wishing for a .COM, and given a lack of options, were willing to settle for a .ORG or .NET. In Canada, we might also take the alternative of our country code domain (.CA), if it was applicable to restrict or focus our desired audience. I’m going to skip over .INFO and .BIZ. (Just as most consumers have.)

The challenge has always been to find a short memorable .COM domain name. Resorting to any other gTLD has always felt like a “second choice” move.

2014 gTLDs

Fast-forward to 2014 and an influx of new domains coming online [<http://www.godaddy.com/tlds/gtld.aspx>]. Here are some worthy examples we may soon be considering in the legal market:

- .LLP
- .ASSOCIATES
- .ATTORNEY
- .ESQ
- .LAW
- .TIPS
- .LLC
- .LAWYER
- .CENTER
- .HELP

Should you go in this direction for your gTLD, and if so, “how valuable will it be?” Should you register a .LLP rather than a .COM for a brand new law firm? What if the new gTLD domain you want was already registered as a .COM? Potential conflicts abound.

Or what if you intend to create a topical microsite for an independent subject? The .LLP wouldn’t be

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suitable, but perhaps you can acquire a short memorable .LAW or .HELP domain for that new property.

Here are my own thoughts on this decision:

.COM likely remains a trump card. If the introduction of .INFO and .BIZ domains are any indication, the dominant days of the .COM won't be over anytime soon. Registering a new gTLD that simply matches an existing .COM should prove a wasteful strategy for most law firm websites.

Shorter domains are preferable. Can you get a descriptive two-term phrase that exactly matches your law firm's market or describes its services? If you're willing to invest the time required to market an original website concept on that domain, you might have a future winner on your hands.

Google will still be kingmaker. If Google allows each gTLD to mean something — to become definitive for a “type of business” — it will make **all** the difference for the potential usability of these new gTLDs. For example, if .LLP became the defacto choice for “law firm websites”, and these sites were given a small edge for relevant searches within Google, then that would be a viable reason to choose a .LLP over a .COM.

.gTLDs aren't for cheap speculation. At \$40 a year for each domain registered, grabbing a bunch of new domains won't be an inexpensive proposition. My rule of thumb is to not buy domains unless you're prepared to build a website on them. The new gTLDs will be no different.

The new gTLDs will eventually be picked over the same way .COM is, at least for the “good” domains. But selecting a new domain will always be easier when there are options available. And in that respect, the new gTLDs are a potential win for both consumers and law firms. We might still sort through “the leftover bin” of available .COMs before choosing a .LLP, but when the term or phrase we want isn't available, we won't be forced to rethink our entire project plan.

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