

Internet registry changes hands

Better Internet governance and long term plans



The newly-formed Lebanese Internet Center, 'LINC' is now in charge of registering '.lb' domain names. The center's objectives include boosting the business use of the Net, training entrepreneurs, and getting international recognition for local-domain registered companies and commercial endeavors.

NEW INTERNET REGISTRY

The Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET) announced last month the creation of the LINC. The center's role consists of organizing and registering '.lb' domain names along with Internet governance. Previously, '.lb' domain registration was managed by *Nabil Bukhalid* who had served since 1993 as the '.lb' administrator and registrar at the American University of Beirut (AUB). Bukhalid is a biomedical engineer, and a director of computing and networking services at the AUB. Bukhalid said that he had been designated for introducing the Internet to Lebanon, after

attending a workshop held in Stanford University in 1993. The AUB provided Bukhalid with the essential infrastructure and resources during this past phase. Bukhalid and his team offered these domain registration services pro bono. "It was about time to hand these services to a dedicated body allowing the industry to grow further," said *Nabil Fahed*, Vice Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. According to Bukhalid, launching LINC will provide the government, businesses, and citizens more direct access and understanding of the Internet registration of local domains names.

PIONEERS IN THIS FIELD

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a US-based international nonprofit organization which coordinates the Internet's global domain name system, had already advised about the necessity of establishing this center,

said *Linda Kassem*, Senior Legal Trade Specialist at MoET. According to *Salam Yamout*, National ICT Strategy Coordinator, launching this center is a major step for the local Internet community. "The only country that preceded us in this direction with multi-partners center was Brazil, 20 years ago," she said. The National ICT Committee had also advised about the importance of a similar center while studying the ICT field and the to-do tasks. "This is a step upward for Internet governance on a national level that will help the country to be better empowered and represented in the global multi-stakeholder organizations," said *Imad Hoballah*, the acting chairman of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA).

DOMAIN REGISTRATION

'.lb' is the Internet country code top-level domain for Lebanon. The registration rules say that it is necessary to have a Lebanese trademark certificate for the name being

registered, and the trademark owner must be a Lebanese entity. Registrants in each of the sub-domains (.com.lb, .edu.lb, .org.lb, etc.) are expected to show proof that they are entitled to register in that sub-domain. Registered names were required to be unique within the entire '.lb' domain. For instance, example.com.lb and example.org.lb cannot be both registered. According to statistics published by the AUB, domain registration in the local market reached 3,413 in 2012. They are estimated at 4,000 this year. On an international scale, there are different domain registration websites, with different cost levels depending on the package and the domain name itself.

JOINT INITIATIVE

Along with MoET, the initiative was jointly founded by the Ministry of Telecommunication (MoT), the TRA, the Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Industry (FCCIA), and Agriculture, the Internet Society of Lebanon (ISOC), the Lebanese Internet Technology Association (LITA), Women in IT, along with the Bar Association and Berytech Foundation. The board has three permanent members representing the MoET, the MoT, and the TRA. It also has eight elected members representing the private sector, including universities, syndicates, organizations, and associations. Nabil Fahed, representing the FCCIA was elected Chairperson. Other board members include *Salam Yamout*, from Women in IT (Vice Chair), TRA's *Imad Hoballah* (Secretary).

Bassam Jaber from the Lebanese Association of Telecom (DSPs and ISPs) was elected Treasurer, and *Nicolas Rouhana*, General Director of Berytech represents his institution. Bukhalid was elected as CEO and the representative of the board

before public authorities. The remaining positions and the technical team have still to be elected. The board formed five committees to deal with human resources, budget, membership, re-delegation, and infrastructure. The board sits for two year, and the board members' services are offered pro bono. Yamout said that the center has an open membership. "Our aim is to grow our members further to reach the largest scope of stakeholders," she said. LINC will be located at the CCIA-BML.

Registering domain names will not be free of charge anymore

RE-DELEGATING AND FUNDING

Fahed said that the old registration team started handing over the entire data base to LINC board. The board will set regulations and future sources of funding. "The old team used to register domain names free of charge, but the new team will start charging this service similar to all other countries," Fahed said. Fees

will be moderate and prices will vary depending on the domain itself, whether it is an open registration, or a restricted one which entail high security procedures. According to Kassem, LINC was established with no initial investment, but founders are currently searching for funding. "It

is still too early to identify the exact amount of funding required for the center," Rouhana said. The fees paid by registrants will constitute a source of income to the center. Fahed said that ICANN might also support the activities of the center.

OBJECTIVES

Other important objectives of LINC will be developing the local Internet society. According to Yamout, "our goal is to multiply the number of websites following



an organized schedule." The center will provide training programs in new Internet technologies, along with other e-services. Beside handling the '.lb' registration, LINC will launch a new domain name in Arabic 'لبنان'. Kassem said that the aim is to motivate SMEs to develop e-commerce activities using Arabic content. For the long term, LINC will have more strategic goals and roles, including fighting cyber crimes. "Lobbying to fight for Internet causes in the local market, will also be one of our future concerns," Bukhalid said. The latest ICANN meeting, held in London last month, acknowledged the creation of LINC. "Announcing the formation of the center by the ICANN granted it international recognition," said Yamout.

Reported by Rana Freifer

ON OUR WEBSITE

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- ▶ **L0714-147** LB Domain registration 93-2012
- ▶ **L0714-148** Beginners' guide to Internet Protocol
- ▶ **L0714-149** ICANN and Internet governance
- ▶ **L0714-150** Internet domain names background and policy issues
- ▶ **L0714-151** LB domain registry
- ▶ **L0714-152** Contact information

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