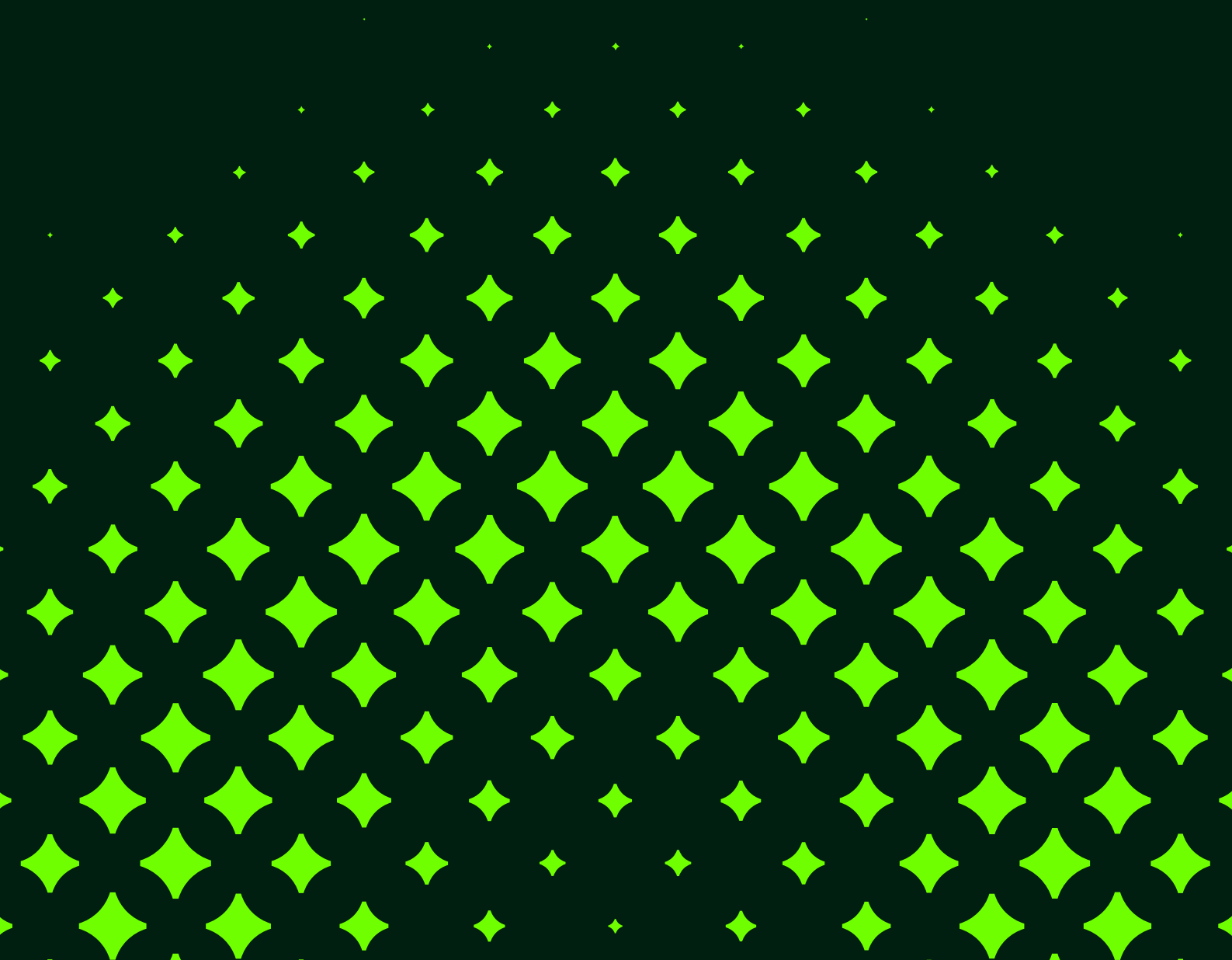


abion

dotBrand gTLDs: The Future of Brand Identity Online

Why Now Is the Critical Time to Act





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What Is a dotBrand Domain and Why Should You Care in 2025?

Future-Proofing Your Digital Identity with brand gTLDs

The internet has become an increasingly complex and competitive space for brand owners. As cyber threats multiply and brand impersonation tactics grow more advanced, organisations must evolve their digital strategies to maintain customer trust and safeguard their identities. dotBrand generic top-level domains (gTLDs) (also known as BRAND TLD's or custom TLD) offer a transformative opportunity for brand owners to take control of their online presence. By operating a proprietary domain extension such as ".yourbrand," businesses can significantly increase their digital security, brand recognition, and user experience.

This whitepaper explores what a dotBrand domain is, its history, structure, and benefits. It draws on key insights shared by domain industry leaders Jesper Knudsen (Global Managing Partner), Haydn Simpson (Head of dotBrands) and David Costa (Domain & Web Security Operations Specialist) at Abion during a recent [webinar](#). With decades of combined experience in domain strategy, trademark management, and cybersecurity, they present a compelling case for why dotBrand is a strategic imperative for forward-thinking brands. As ICANN prepares to open its second round of gTLD applications in 2026, the first in over a decade and possibly the last for many years, now is the time to prepare.

83% of users instantly recognised the brand behind a dotBrand gTLD. More trust, more clicks, better results.

— Afnic, 2024





INTRODUCTION

A Changing Landscape for Brands Online

Generic top-level domains (gTLDs), such as .com or .org, have historically formed the foundation of digital identity. However, with domain saturation and an increasingly hostile cyber environment, traditional gTLDs no longer offer sufficient protection or differentiation. Cybercriminals are exploiting lookalike domains and internationalised characters to deceive users, while brands remain vulnerable to spoofing, impersonation, and data compromise.

A dotBrand gTLD is more than a technical asset, it's a business-critical platform that gives you real control over your digital future.

— Jesper Knudsen

Against this backdrop, dotBrand gTLDs have emerged as a secure and flexible alternative. Unlike generic domains open to public registration, dotBrands are exclusive to a single organisation, where only the owner can register and enable domains, how they are used, and the data infrastructure supporting them. This represents a critical shift from renting space on the internet to owning a digital platform.



THE PROBLEM

An Online Ecosystem Plagued by Risk

The current domain landscape poses significant risks to brand owners. Fraud, impersonation, and phishing are widespread, and even savvy internet users are frequently fooled by sophisticated schemes. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a staggering 63% increase in online fraud, underlining the urgent need for more secure domain environments.

Moreover, companies are increasingly dependent on third-party registrars and platforms for their digital operations. This reliance introduces exposure to geopolitical risks, as seen in the example of U.S.-based registrars being subject to data access laws that can compromise European privacy standards. In an era where control over digital assets is synonymous with control over reputation and security, brands can no longer afford to be passive.

Jesper Knudsen emphasised this urgency:



This is a unique opportunity to own your own distribution and platform online.



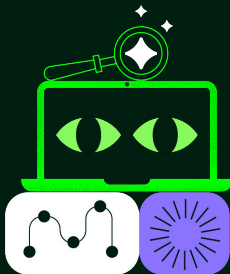
What Is a dotBrand Domain?

Why It's a Strategic Asset in 2025 & Beyond

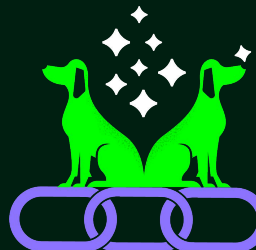
A dotBrand domain is a top-level domain exclusive to a single brand or trademark holder. Rather than operating under a public domain like ".com," a company can operate under its own extension, think music.apple or cars.audi. It gives the brand owner complete authority over:



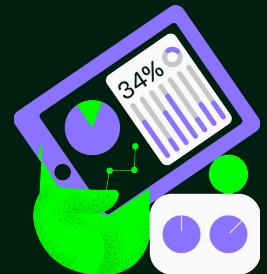
Domain name
creation and use



Technical
infrastructure



Security
protocols



Registry
operations

Brands effectively become their own registry operator, gaining a new layer of digital independence and authenticity.

This opportunity is incredibly rare. The first round of dotBrand applications occurred in 2012. Of the nearly 2,000 applications received, over 600 were for brand-specific gTLDs. Notable adopters included Apple, BMW, and CERN, each leveraging their TLDs in unique ways to streamline user navigation, establish trust, and unify their digital ecosystems. Now, ICANN is preparing for the second round of applications, will open in April 2026.





Key Benefits of dotBrand gTLDs

1

Enhanced Brand Trust and Recognition

dotBrand domains inherently signal authenticity and trust. Customers are more likely to engage with, spend on, and return to websites they instantly recognise as legitimate, such as “support.yourbrand” or “store.yourbrand”. This increased confidence reduces hesitation at critical digital touchpoints, optimising conversions and customer retention. By eliminating risks from fake or lookalike domains, brands not only protect their users but also strengthen loyalty and drive more value through their digital channels. As Haydn Simpson (Head of dotBrand at Abion) noted:

“

A dotBrand gives you a private digital ecosystem as the ultimate tool for consumer engagement, securely providing a more trusted environment that optimises the digital channel.



2

Superior Cybersecurity and Control

A dotBrand gTLD minimises attack surfaces:



No one outside the organisation can register under .yourbrand.



It allows for HSTS preload enforcement, forcing HTTPS across all domains.



Internal email systems and applications under the dotBrand are less vulnerable to spoofing.

Essentially, a dotBrand functions as its own registry, overseen by ICANN and operated solely by the brand. This eliminates the risk of third-party domain registrations and offers a security layer far above traditional gTLDs. Fraudsters are unlikely to go through the complex and costly process of establishing their own gTLD, making dotBrand domains a strong deterrent to phishing and impersonation.



An attacker could easily mimic a domain using a letter like “i” with an accent (“í”), for example, but they will no longer be able to do this under a dotBrand domain.



Offer location-specific subdomains (e.g., tokyo.yourbrand)

3

Full Control and Platform Independence

With a dotBrand gTLD, your organisation becomes the registry operator, giving you complete control over your domain space. This offers:



Greater control over how domains are created, used, and secured.



No dependencies on third-party platforms.



Full control over your data, DNS configurations, and policies.

It's a powerful step toward owning your digital presence and ensuring long-term stability, flexibility, and data control, ensuring full GDPR compliance and protection over sensitive information.



4

Strategic Flexibility and Business Innovation

With a dotBrand, companies can:



Empower partners with co-branded URLs



Run marketing campaigns (e.g., `experience.yourbrand`)



Monetise reseller domains under their registry



Create sense of belonging to fans or followers by offering the possibility of using a domain in their `name.yourbrand`

It's a powerful step toward owning your digital presence and ensuring long-term stability, flexibility, and data control, ensuring full GDPR compliance and protection over sensitive information.





5

Improved User Experience

dotBrand domains simplify navigation. URLs like `visit.cern` or `music.apple` are short, intuitive, and align with modern digital expectations. This also improves SEO consistency and boosts email open rates, as seen with verified VMC badges, which can lead to a 39% increase in open rates due to increased trust.

“If you’re serious about protecting your brand online in the next decade, owning your own gTLD is not just an option, it’s a necessity.”

— David Costa



DATA PROTECTION AND COMPLIANCE

Why the Location of your Registry Matters

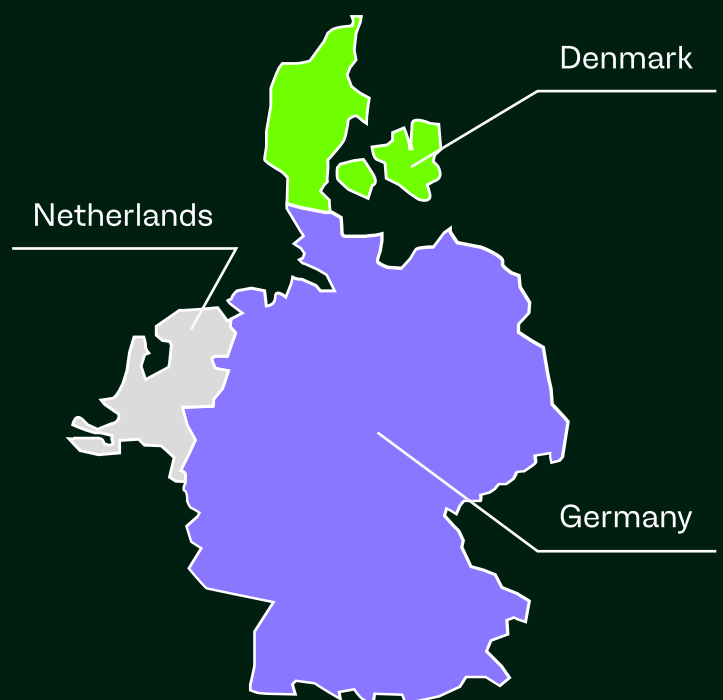
When you apply for a dotBrand gTLD, you become a registry operator, responsible not just for domain names, but for the infrastructure and data behind them. That includes hosting servers, managing DNS, and handling potentially sensitive information.

If your backend provider is based in the U.S., your data could fall under laws like the **U.S. CLOUD Act**, which allows U.S. authorities to access data on U.S.-controlled infrastructure, even if that data is hosted in Europe. This can create serious conflicts with **GDPR** and other European data protection regulations.

Choosing a **European-based registry provider** helps ensure that your domain operations stay within EU legal frameworks, reducing the risk of non-compliance and protecting your business and customers. As data privacy concerns grow worldwide, selecting a provider subject to EU laws is a prudent and future-proof choice.

Case in Point

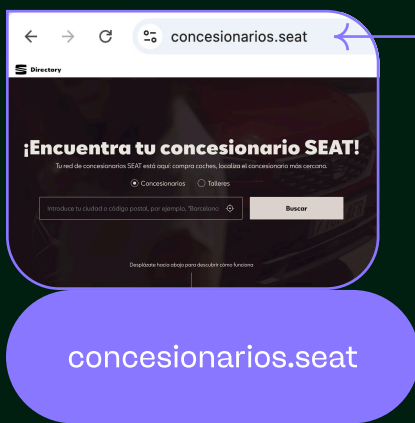
In Denmark, Germany and Netherlands, several government agencies recently discontinued the use of U.S.-based cloud platforms due to unresolved data privacy concerns, illustrating how seriously public and private institutions take the risk of non-EU data exposure.





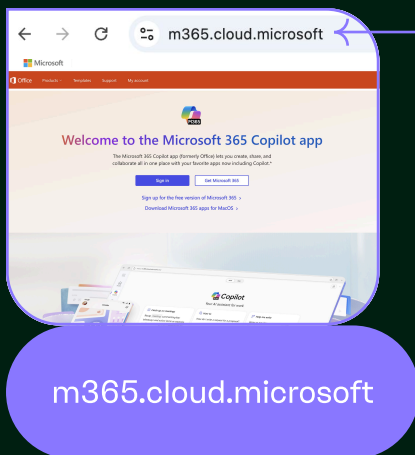
Top Companies Already Using dotBrand Domains (and What You Can Learn)

These dotBrand examples from leading companies demonstrate the versatility of owning a brand top-level domain:



SEAT

- Third-party dealers stay on brand with .seat extensions
- Controls its global dealer network by creating localised mini-sites for retailers and garages
- Enhances regional consistency and brand recognition with a unified .seat domain structure



Microsoft

- Enhances security and simplifies user experience with .microsoft
- Unifying user-facing Microsoft 365 apps and services to .cloud.microsoft
- Reduces domain fragmentation by consolidating hundreds of legacy domains into a unified, secure namespace



French Bank BNP Paribas

- Easy-to-remember for customers: mabanque.bnpparibas ("my bank".bnpparibas)
- Enhances security and reliability in a trust-driven industry
- Improves online security for their customers



ELIGIBILITY AND CONSIDERATIONS

Who Should Apply? 10 Clear Signs a dotBrand gTLD Is Right for Your Business

Applying for a dotBrand gTLD requires a strategic vision, internal resources, and a commitment to long-term brand infrastructure. With total entry costs typically starting around 300.000€ (including ICANN fees, technical setup, and initial operation), it is best suited for businesses that meet specific strategic and operational criteria. However, when annualised over the minimum 12-year usage span, the investment becomes comparable to other long-term brand protection or cybersecurity initiatives.

If your organisation meets several of the following conditions, a “.yourbrand” gTLD could be a high-value asset for your company:

**1****You own a well-established, registered trademark**

ICANN requires rights validation via the Trademark Clearinghouse. Your mark should be active, enforceable, and not subject to dispute.

2**Your brand operates internationally or across multiple markets**

A dotBrand provides a scalable way to manage digital presence across languages, regions, and markets (e.g., fr.yourbrand, apac.yourbrand).

3**You manage a large domain portfolio or multiple web properties**

Consolidate fragmented URLs into a single, unified namespace (e.g., support.yourbrand, shop.yourbrand, careers.yourbrand), reducing costs and complexity.



4

You have an extensive partner, franchise, or distributor network

Create co-branded or delegated domains for partners, resellers, or stores (e.g., dealername.yourbrand), with full control and brand consistency.

5

Cybersecurity and fraud prevention are strategic concerns

A dotBrand limits external registration, helping prevent phishing, spoofing, impersonation, and DNS hijacking under your brand.

6

You're investing in digital transformation and platform control

dotBrands enable you to own and operate your registry, aligning with broader goals around digital sovereignty, data protection, and IT infrastructure.

7

You regularly launch marketing campaigns or microsites

Instead of purchasing new .com or ccTLD domains for each initiative, spin up custom, branded URLs instantly (e.g., summer.yourbrand, productlaunch.yourbrand).

8

You spend heavily on defensive domain registrations

With a dotBrand, you no longer need to register variations across hundreds of TLDs. This reduces ongoing costs and simplifies portfolio management.

9

You have a long-term domain or platform strategy and internal capacity

dotBrand operation requires cross-functional alignment (IT, legal, marketing) and a plan to activate and use the TLD meaningfully post-launch.

10

You're looking for a competitive digital differentiator

In a saturated digital landscape, a .yourbrand domain signals trust, innovation, and authenticity - key for B2B, finance, pharma, and global enterprises.



Who Should Potentially Wait?

- Companies planning a rebrand
- Firms lacking internal coordination across legal, IT, and marketing
- Firms that do not have the financial resources to set up and maintain a dotBrand domain registry

As David Costa noted during Abion's recent [webinar](#),

A Spanish bank that secured .lacaixa rebranded to "CaixaBank" in the same year, undermining the long-term value of their investment.

Overall Considerations for Businesses

Now is the time

The application process, set to begin in Q2 2026, is complex. Ideally, companies should make a decision no later than Q4 2025 in order to have adequate time to prepare the required documentation. See the timeline on page 18.

Long-Term Strategy Alignment:

Aligning the decision to apply for a dotBrand domain with a company's long-term strategy ensures that the investment supports overall business goals.

Financial and Technical Considerations:

The complexity of the TLD application process requires strong preparation and financial readiness. Focusing on the strategic utility of a TLD is paramount.



DOTBRAND VS .COM

Which One Offers More Trust, Control, and Value?

One of the most common questions companies ask is whether to continue using a traditional .com domain or transition to a dotBrand gTLD. Both have their strengths. A well-managed .com, like abion.com, can certainly build authenticity, especially when used consistently across channels. Subdomains (e.g., support.abion.com) also allow for some level of structure and branding continuity.

However, a dotBrand gTLD offers a different level of control and security, especially for larger organisations managing multiple digital assets, teams, or regions. The key distinctions lie in what you can prevent, protect, and manage at the root level:



Prevents external registrations

Only your company can create domains under your “yourbrand”, eliminating risks like cybersquatting and unauthorised variations.



Eliminates typosquatting and spoofing

You no longer need to defensively register dozens of lookalike domains (e.g., ab1on.com, abïon.com)- a major vulnerability with .com.





Built-in trust and clarity

Domains like login.yourbrand or pay.yourbrand are clearly owned by you, helping users trust what they're clicking—critical in phishing-prone sectors.



Simplifies structure and scales branding

dotBrands support clean, flexible architecture (e.g., store.yourbrand, careers.yourbrand), reinforcing your name at the top level.



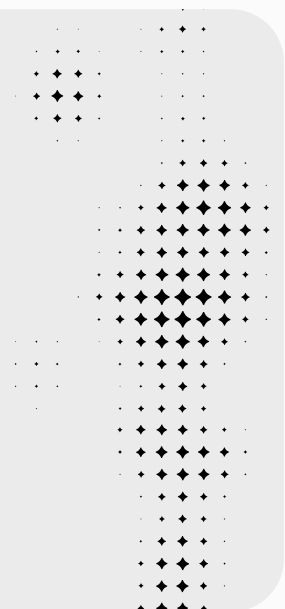
Reduces long-term domain costs

By consolidating digital assets, dotBrands cut defensive registration spend and simplify domain management.



So, which is better?

If you operate a single website with minimal digital complexity, .com may be sufficient. But if you manage multiple products, teams, or threat vectors, and want to future-proof your digital identity, a dotBrand offers a much higher level of control, clarity, and protection. It's not just about branding; it's about operational efficiency, risk mitigation, and long-term economic value.





HOW TO APPLY FOR A GTLD

Step-by-Step ICANN Application Guide for Brands

Timeline and Application Process

Don't Miss the Window

The dotBrand application process is complex and takes time. With the window opening in April 2026, we recommend making a final decision by Q4 2025 to ensure enough time for preparation and documentation.

Q4 2025

Decision to apply

Q1/Q2 2026

Application preparation

Q2/Q3 2026

Application submission period opens

Q4 2027 / Q1 2028

Beginning of first TLD Delegation processes



The ICANN gTLD application process opens in 2026. Brands that want to register a dotBrand must be prepared to complete a detailed domain registry application, including trademark verification and technical readiness.

Q2 2026

Application
window opens

Q3 2026

Window closes
(12-15 weeks
duration)

2026-2027

Evaluation,
delegation, and
implementation

Applicants must pass

- Legal rights verification (via Trademark Clearinghouse)
- Financial stability checks
- Technical capability assessments

The evaluation process includes rigorous checks on trademark ownership, financial stability, and technical capacity. Brands must be able to demonstrate a long-term plan to manage and maintain their gTLD.



For eligible nonprofits, small businesses, or organisations in developing countries, ICANN has also introduced the Application Support Program (ASP) to provide financial and operational assistance. The timeline and application process for the ASP is:

- Q4 2024: Application window opened
- Q4 2025: Application window closes

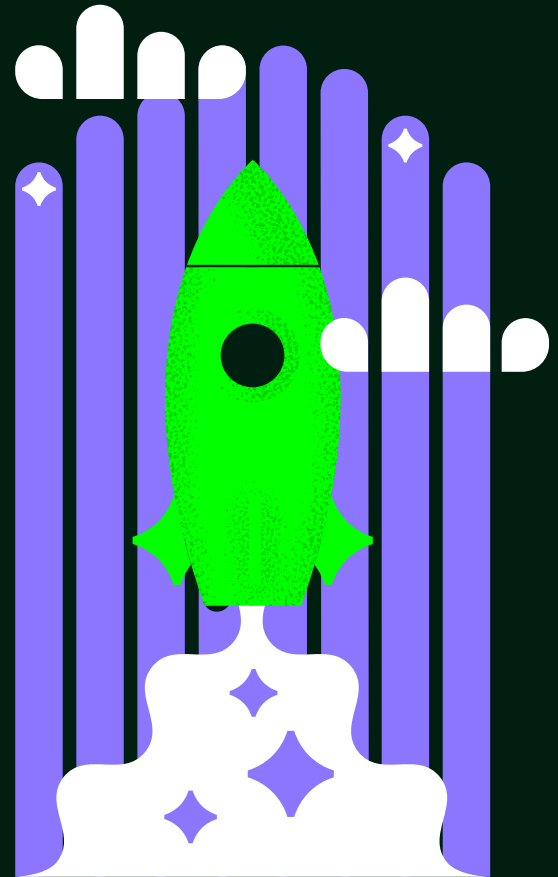


THE COST OF A DOTBRAND DOMAIN

Beyond the Application Fee

Wondering how much a dotBrand costs? Beyond the ~\$227,000 ICANN application, brands should budget for:

- Registry costs and infrastructure
- Ongoing support and compliance
- Strategic ROI from reduced cyber threats and streamlined brand management



Total Overview

Cost Item	Estimated Amount
ICANN Application Fee	~\$227,000 (one-time)
Annual Registry Fee to ICANN	~\$26,000/year
Application Support	Varies by provider
Registry Backend Infrastructure & Testing	Varies by provider
Operational, Compliance, Support & Testing	Based on usage model

While costs can vary based on the scope of use, the investment pays dividends in cybersecurity savings, reducing defensive registrations, consolidating brand architecture digital marketing ROI, and consumer trust.



Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Abion experts identified several common mistakes:



Lack of internal alignment

Successful dotBrand initiatives require buy-in from legal, IT, and marketing teams.



No clear implementation strategy

Domains must be used strategically post-delegation to deliver ROI.



Trademark or IP issues

Applications without proper rights documentation are often rejected.



Poor timing

Applying just before a major rebrand or company restructure can render the investment obsolete.

To avoid these pitfalls, Abion offers comprehensive project management, ensuring alignment with business goals, technical readiness, and post-launch success.





CONCLUSION

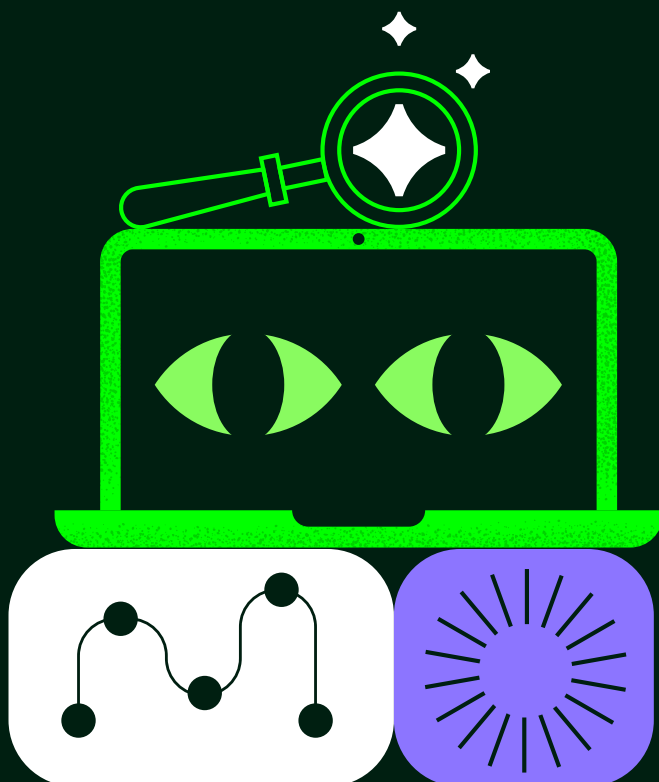
The Time to Act Is Now

dotBrand gTLDs have proven to be a valuable strategic tool for digital brand management. By offering a secure, owned, and flexible domain infrastructure, they enable organisations to take greater control of their online presence, strengthen trust, and protect against evolving digital threats, making them increasingly relevant in today's complex digital environment.

Key Takeaways

- dotBrand gTLDs offer unmatched digital control, security, and brand trust.
- The next ICANN application window opens in 2026 and may not return for another decade or more.
- It can take up to 6 months to align all documentation. Successful applicants must begin preparation well in advance to ensure compliance and strategic alignment.





Get started →

This is a unique opportunity and there's no guarantee another round will come. Let's make sure your brand doesn't miss it.

— Jesper Knudsen





Why use Abion?

Abion helps brands work faster, smarter and better. We bring deep domain name expertise worldwide and decades of experience to guide your dotBrand journey. With fully automated tools and seamless IP management, we turn global digital strategies into reality.

Get in touch with Abion today and start your seamless dotBrand journey with confidence.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. Why should trademarks consider applying for a dotBrand?

dotBrand gTLDs offer exclusive domain control, greater security, improved branding, reduced fraud risk, and streamlined operations. It's an investment in trust and long-term digital sovereignty.

2. What is a dotBrand new gTLD?

It's a proprietary top-level domain (e.g., .yourbrand) owned and operated by a company. Unlike .com, it's not open to the public and provides unparalleled security and branding opportunities.

3. How old must a trademark be to apply?

There is no minimum age, but the trademark must be fully registered and "in force" (not pending or under dispute) before the ICANN application deadline. It must also be validated through the Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH).



4. Will the ICANN annual fee still apply for dotBrands in 2026?

Yes. The recurring fee of approximately \$26,000 USD per year applies to dotBrand gTLDs once operational, in addition to the one-time application fee.

5. How long does the application process take?

The process involves ICANN approvals and technical setup, which can take several months. Planning early with Abion's strategic guidance ensures a smooth and efficient application.

6. Who can apply for a dotBrand domain?

Only registered trade mark owners with verified rights are eligible to apply, as per ICANN requirements.

7. Are “.yourbrand domain” and “dotBrand domain” the same thing?

Yes, they are just two different ways of referring to the same concept, a generic top-level domain (gTLD) that features your brand name to the right of the dot, such as “.yourbrand”.

8. How will a dotBrand domain affect my existing domain names?

Your existing domain names remain unchanged. A dotBrand gTLD can complement or, if needed, replace your current domain strategy, offering greater flexibility, brand consistency, and security.

9. How does a dotBrand domain improve security?

A dotBrand domain ensures that only verified entities can register domain names under your TLD, eliminating risks from fraud, phishing, and impersonation. It also enhances internal security, ensuring employees can trust communications and platforms within your DotBrand ecosystem.



10. Is a dotBrand domain right for my company?

Companies should evaluate the opportunity for their organisation, not just in terms of where it would add value but also what is involved in running a dotBrand domain.

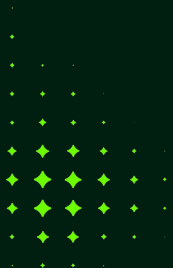
Operating a dotBrand is very different to a standard domain name, bringing with it advantages but also additional obligations. Companies that apply will be committing to invest in a long-term asset for their organisation.

Therefore, it's advisable to assess how you might use your dotBrand domain, which should involve consultation with all potential stakeholders in the business.

An experienced ICANN accredited registrar, like Abion, can guide you through this process, helping you evaluate the benefits, responsibilities, and strategic potential of your dotBrand.

11. Do I need technical expertise to manage a dotBrand domain?

No, an experienced registrar, like Abion, can provide end-to-end management, from application and setup to ongoing strategy and security compliance, ensuring a seamless transition for your team.



abion



Ready to explore the potential of a
dotBrand TLD for your business?

Let's talk!

Haydn Simpson
Head of dotBrand
haydn.simpson@abion.com