

WHITE PAPER



Custom internet TLDs

An opportunity to promote your brand via a controlled, innovative online presence

Afnic (the French acronym for "Association Française pour le Nommage Internet en Coopération" i.e. the French Network Information Centre), is a non-profit association created in 1997. Appointed by the French government to manage domain names under the .fr TLD¹, it promotes use of the namespace by entrepreneurs and individuals.

As the incumbent manager of the .fr TLD with more than 4.2 million domain names in the .fr namespace to date, Afnic is also positioned as a supplier of back-end and registry services: it currently manages 12 new gTLDs, including .paris, .bzh, .leclerc and .sncf.

Afnic is based in Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, where its staff of 90 work for the common good that is the French Internet.

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brand TLDs represent a major development for businesses seeking to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive environment subject to ever-more cyber threats. They offer a high level of trust and transparency on the Internet, while at the same time helping to strengthen memorability and brand loyalty.

This emerged clearly from the survey we conducted in 2024 among French Internet users, who said they saw these custom TLDs as a token of authenticity (73%), security (76%) and trust (80%).²

What is a .brand?

A .brand is an Internet TLD corresponding to a brand name (.leclerc, .mma, .orange).

It's your own digital territory that you can use to highlight all your digital services (website, e-commerce site, Intranet, email addresses, etc.).

As the owner of this TLD, you alone define the rules of use to fit with your requirements and your project.



The advantages of a .brand TLD and our advice

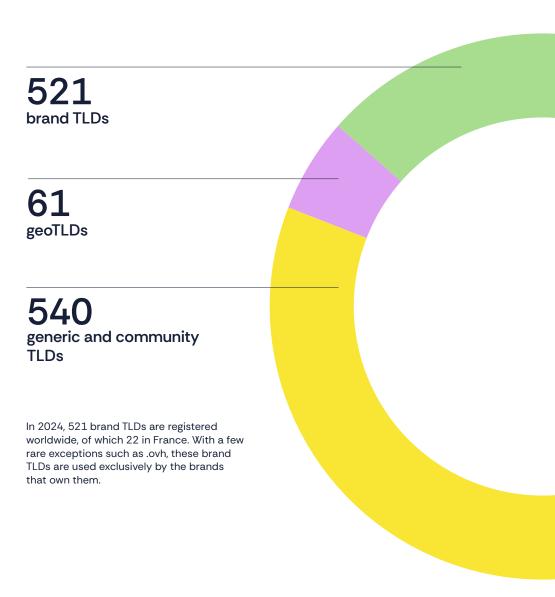
Brand TLDs (.brand) provide multiple levers for rethinking your company's digital strategy. At Afnic, we've had the pleasure to support some fifteen clients in deploying a number of ambitious projects. This supervisory role has allowed us to identify the many opportunities that a custom TLD can create for a brand and to understand the issues facing the organisations embarking on this adventure.

With the next call for applications organised by ICANN³ just around the corner, in spring 2026, the purpose of this white paper is to show the many advantages of .brand TLDs and to give you advice and concrete information based on our experience to give you food for thought.



Overview of .brand TLDs in 2024: **Evolving uses** and increasing numbers of ambassadors

In 2012, against a background of liberalisation of the domain name market, ICANN authorised the creation of new custom TLDs. The call for applications helped launch three types of TLD:



How the TLDs are used?

A defensive approach at first...

When the market was opened up to new TLDs in 2012, many companies favoured defensive practices. Their first concern was to prevent third parties from registering the TLD in their place.

In addition, rethinking a digital strategy to include a custom TLD is a mediumterm project, which takes time and involves numerous stakeholders within an organisation.

As a result, brand TLDs were less visible than other TLDs at first, but this situation has since changed.

...then later, remodelled digital strategies

Although still emerging, .brand TLDs are becoming increasingly popular and increasingly visible in companies' digital strategies, regardless of the sector of activity.

The BNP Paribas group, the E.Leclerc retail chain and the MMA insurance network, to name but a few, have all chosen to structure their online presence and communicate via their own brand TLD.











These custom TLDs are used by pioneers with advanced digital maturity positioned among the leaders in their market sector. These inspiring ambassadors will be the driving force behind the shift in .brand TLD perception from "nice to have" to "must have".



We are now part of creating the new Internet

Bertrand Realini

Domain Name Manager .bnpparibas - BNP Paribas group







• Your brand is a valuable asset, an essential lever in your marketing and sales strategy. It has been built up over time and enriched with features that have built its DNA. This solid foundation is the cornerstone of your relationship with your customers and prospects. The online experience you offer must draw on and strengthen that DNA, in order to increase the effectiveness of your actions and bring greater value to your targets. A .brand TLD is a vital ally in achieving this goal thanks to the many benefits it brings to your business.

4 areas of the customer experience





Area 1: Area 1. Greater homogeneity



Area 2: Greater authenticity



Area 3: Greater proximity



Area 4: Greater security





Area 1: Greater homogeneity

83% of French people say a .brand TLD provides better brand identification.

A coherent and homogeneous digital offering

With your partners

You decide who can use domain names under your TLD. This is particularly useful for groups with business models based on partner networks (resellers, agents, franchisees, etc.) The network is only authorised to use domain names under your .brand TLD. Not only are all the addresses in the same format, but most importantly you control their creation and deletion.

For your products and services

Launching a new product or service?

A .brand TLD frees you from any concerns as to the availability of the domain names for your future products under this or that TLD. Being able to create all the addresses of your choice with your own TLD saves you a lot of trouble and high buying costs.

Case study

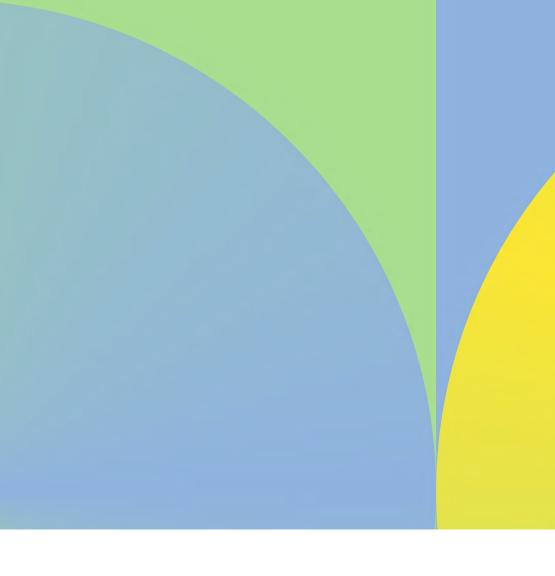
.MMA, A DEDICATED ADDRESS FOR THE WHOLE NETWORK

MMA (Covéa group) is one of the leading insurance networks in France with more than 1,600 agencies spread throughout the country. Each agency has its own Internet address under the .mma namespace with a web page dedicated to the agency, bringing it closer to its customers.

In addition, the Zerotracas road risk prevention sites (www.zerotracas.mma) and the MMA Entrepreneurs of the Future Foundation website (www.fondation-entrepreneurs.mma) are now under the .mma brand TLD.









73% of French people consider that a .brand website guarantees authentic, verified content, and 80% consider that it inspires greater trust.

A unique and authentic digital namespace

Your TLD allows you to apply your brand strategy effectively on the Internet (product brand, umbrella brand, etc.)

Your brand capital will increase over time around your TLD by creating a unique and infinitely expandable namespace in line with the needs of your business.

The exclusivity of your .brand TLD guarantees the authenticity of your online products and services for your customers and prospects.

Case study

THE .LECLERC TLD: CONNECTING THE IN-STORE AND ONLINE EXPERIENCE

In the large-scale retail sector, E.Leclerc uses its own-name brand TLD to enhance its product and service offering while showcasing the trade name.

The group's flagship para-pharmaceutical business line has a dedicated e-commerce site (www.parapharmacie.leclerc), as do its click and collect (www.drive.leclerc and www.chezmoi.leclerc) and car rental services (www.location.leclerc).

Finally, the group has switched its "Qui est le moins cher" price comparison service from a .com to a .leclerc brand TLD (www.quiestlemoinscher.leclerc), thus promoting the brand behind this highly popular tool.

Promotional campaigns are also relayed online using a .leclerc brand TLD.









71% of French people consider a .brand address innovative.

A springboard for innovation and customer proximity

A .brand TLD provides an opportunity to enhance your products and services by adapting to new uses and offering an online experience better tailored to the behaviour patterns of your target audiences:

- · Virtually systematic use of search engines;
- Browsing on mobile devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.);
- Community development via social networks;
- Secure online purchases.

Case study

.GOOGLE: A TLD AT THE FOREFRONT OF INNOVATION

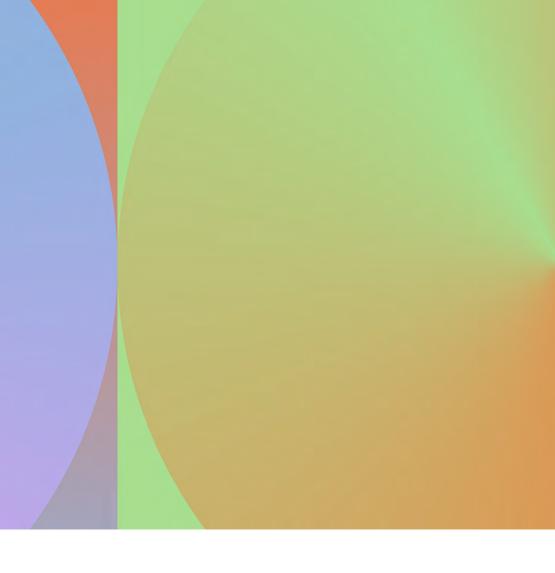
With nearly 200 million names registered in 2024, Google uses its .google TLD strategically to strengthen its brand image and showcase its efforts in the field of innovation.

Its TLD is used to allow simple, direct and easy-to-remember access to the products, services and initiatives within the Google ecosystem. Websites such as families. google, blog.google, chromeenterprise.google, lens.google and pixel.google, for example, embody this strategy while allowing users to easily explore the extensive brand universe.

The .google TLD is also a communication lever for the Group's flagship initiatives, strengthening the essential messages linked to its brand identity.

For example, doodles.google celebrates the creative heritage of the famous search engine animations, while sustainability.google highlights the group's commitments to a more sustainable future.

However, it is in the field of innovation that Google fully exploits the reach of its custom TLD. Thanks to websites such as ai.google, deepmind.google, quantumai. google and labs.google, Google showcases its cutting-edge work on artificial intelligence, in quantum research and in its innovation laboratories, illustrating its role as a world leader in the creation of the technologies of tomorrow. These dedicated platforms allow it to present its technological advances and to make its future projects more accessible and visible both to the public at large and to professionals.





Area 4: Greater security

77% of French people agree that a brand TLD offers greater security in online transactions and in the receipt of emails.

Enhanced security for your users

Phishing, parking, damage to brand image, sale of counterfeit products... there are many types of malicious acts and they are becoming increasingly professional.

Even major groups are not immune to cybersquatting⁴ or typosquatting⁵.

Having a .brand TLD and using it for official communication allows your customers and prospects to identify and trust your digital namespace.

Case study

.BNPPARIBAS: A TLD AT THE SERVICE OF ITS CLIENTS AND OF THE GROUP'S BUSINESS LINES

BNP Paribas has redesigned its digital offering based on its custom TLD, in particular to offer its various audiences greater trust and security. Whether the Internet addresses for the Group's corporate website, the websites for its products and services, and those for its internal and external communication needs, over 250 addresses now end in .bnpparibas.

The bank thus adapts its online services to its different targets:

- www.mabanque.bnpparibas for private individuals in France;
- www.mabanqueprivee.bnpparibas, www.mabanquepro.bnpparibas or www.banqueprivee.bnpparibas dedicated to professionals.

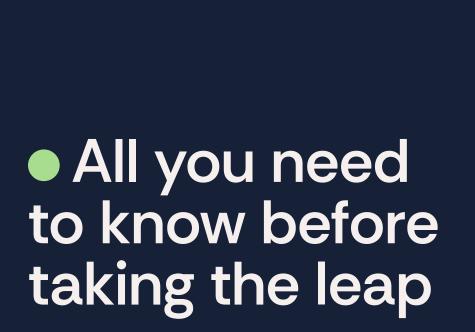
The .bnpparibas URL serves to focus on a target while also providing a guarantee of trust and authenticity, essential in this sector of activity. The group's corporate website www.group. bnpparibas now uses the brand TLD, as do others of the bank's internal and external communication sites:

- www.histoire.bnpparibas is an information centre on the history of the bank;
- www.ourcommunity.bnpparibas is the collaborative platform for services among group employees;
- www.welovecinema.bnpparibas is aimed at cinema aficionados to offer them advantages via a dedicated programme.

On the product and service front, the bank has also launched numerous websites under its TLD to improve brand identification, including www.leasingsolutions.bnpparibas.fr and www.logement.bnpparibas.fr.







Applicants eligible for a .brand TLD

Any company possessing one or more brands may apply for one or several .brand TLDs corresponding to their portfolio. ICANN requires applicants to provide proof of their rights to the brand(s) in question.

In addition, ICANN favours applications from candidates that can demonstrate the solidity and the sustainability of their activity.

What becoming the registry of a .brand TLD involves

Once a company has its own TLD, it becomes the latter's manager, known as a registry. This status confers new responsibilities to be implemented within your organisation:

- Choosing a registry operator to provide the back-end management of your TLD infrastructure;
- Backing up your data with an operator known as an "ICANN approved Registry Data Escrow Agent";
- · Setting the rules of use of your TLD.



The stakeholders involved.



ICANN



TLD REGISTRY⁵



REGISTRY OPERATOR



REGISTRAR

An international organisation whose main task is to regulate IP addresses and the domain names used on the Internet

As the holder entity, it sets out the rules and practices for its TLD

Your campany

Operational manager of the TLD, guaranteeing its performance and security

Afnic

Registration and configuration of domain names

REGISTRY OPERATOR

The back-end management of a TLD is a specific business that requires a strong infrastructure to ensure a secure and uninterrupted service. Working with a trusted registry operator makes your application more trustworthy and guarantees compliance with the day-to-day service levels required by ICANN.

We advise you to choose a reputable back-end operator consistent with your data protection and hosting policy. The back-end operator can also handle the qualitative monitoring of the uses of your domain names, which is requested by ICANN.

Afnic has unique expertise in France in managing registries. As the manager of the .fr TLD for over 20 years and as the back-end manager of 21 other extensions, Afnic has its own ISO 27001-certified DNS services infrastructure.

Afnic also guarantees a service 100% managed and hosted in France, complying with ICANN rules and European legislation on personal data protection (GDPR).



The costs

To apply for and then manage your TLD, various charges payable to ICANN and the service providers selected must be taken into account.



Estimated application cost

ICANN (once only)

US\$250,000



Annual fee

ICANN

US\$25,000



Current management expenses

Back-end registry operator, Registrar, Escrow agent, Service providers

Depending on the partners and the associated services

Project milestones

• The steps described below are those of the previous call for applications in 2012. They should remain similar in the next ICANN round and incorporate simplifications based on lessons learnt by the community.



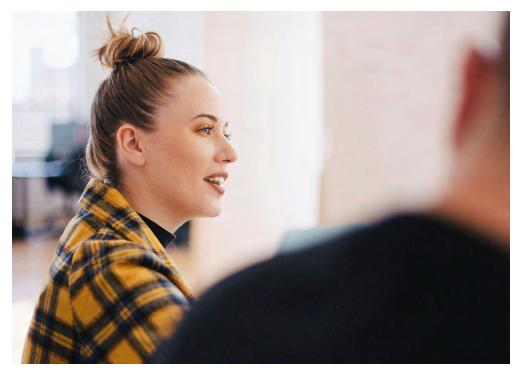
1. Application completion

This is a key step in the process since you must fill in an application to submit to ICANN. In it, you describe in detail your project and the associated business model, and answer some fifty administrative, financial and technical questions.



Applicant Guidebook made available by ICANN during the 2012 call for applications:

https://newgtlds.icann.org/en/applicants/agb



2. Application approval

The application examination consists of two steps.

- The first step involves submitting your application to the Internet community. In concrete terms, this means that your application will be made public and subject to comments. The goal is to make sure your application is not prejudicial to any rights holders.
- Secondly, ICANN examines your file in order to approve it. This step, similar to an audit, consists in answering a certain number of additional questions.

At the end of this step, you sign a contract called a registry agreement with ICANN.

HOW AFNIC CAN HELP

From drafting your application to signing the contract with ICANN, we are on hand to support you throughout the application process. Our technical skills, our knowledge of the regulatory framework and our expertise in .brand TLDs ensures your application is solid and based on a quality project.

ICANN approved 100% of the 17 clients we assisted in 2012.



3. Technical deployment of your TLD

ICANN checks that your technical infrastructure conforms to its specifications. Using an ICANN-approved back-end registry operator therefore increases your chances of success. This speeds up the technical deployment of your TLD, without having to undergo longer and more costly validation tests.

Your TLD is subsequently created and integrated by IANA⁶ into the Internet root. Once this is done, your .brand TLD is present on the global servers making your future web services accessible.

HOW AFNIC CAN HELP

As an ICANN-accredited registry operator, we handle the technical deployment of your TLD. We carried out all our clients' deployments in 2012 with a 100% success rate.



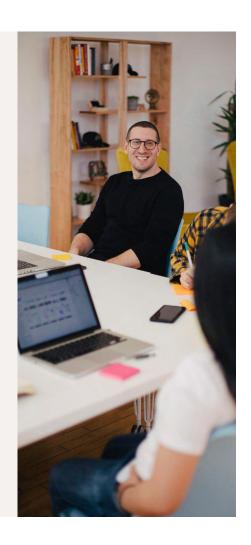
4. Launch of your .brand TLD

Your TLD is now active and ready to use to achieve your goals and in accordance with the rules set by ICANN.

HOW AFNIC CAN HELP

Our solid knowledge of the market and our experience provide our clients with tailored support to ensure the success of their project:

- Based on a feasibility study, we work together to outline a suitable project for your company and your ambitions and prepare each facet of its deployment (technical, marketing and commercial, communication, legal, etc.);
- We advise you on the project's structuring and help you set up an effective management system;
- We coordinate the launch with the various stakeholders;
- We provide institutional and regulatory intelligence to ensure your TLD's compliance.





Identify how to use your TLD from the start

Your .brand TLD must become a vital asset in your business strategy. Identify upstream how it can contribute in the medium and long term to your organisation's strategic objectives, taking into account several parameters: your business model, your level of digital maturity, your growth targets, your resources, etc. This will facilitate the preparation of your application and ensure its relevance.

Set up the right project team

Deciding to adopt a custom TLD is a strategic, cross-business project. In order to coordinate the project, the various departments in your company need to be involved from the start. The teams in the legal, administrative, marketing, communication, IS and IT departments will need to discuss the project together.



Prepare a step-by-step launch

Although a long-term vision is essential to your project, your launch is best prepared in stages, focusing on agile management. Feel free to test your new TLD on mid-sized projects at first.

Choose the right partners

Well-chosen partners will contribute to the success of your project at different stages in the process.

This saves precious time and avoids pitfalls in the application process. It also ensures you start out on the right foot to make your launch a success and get your employees onboard.

To make sure you don't miss out on the next ICANN call for applications, we encourage you to start thinking now about how a custom TLD can add value to your organisation and sustainably reinforce your online strategy.

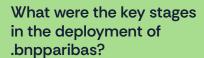
3 questions to BNP Paribas

Why did you register your TLD?

Our online user bases are private individuals as well as businesses and institutions.

Using our own TLD makes it possible to add an operational and technical security layer, to provide reassurance, and to offer something new to all our customers and partners: the assurance of knowing exactly where they're clicking, because we own the domain names within our TLD, whereas we are tenants under other TLDs.

All Group business activities using the "BNP Paribas" brand name can use our TLD as a channel, and be allocated their own domain name.



Firstly, we had to set up a dedicated team to raise awareness among our top management.

Then, we received assistance in establishing the three essential components, namely provision of the back-end, and understanding the registrar and registry roles. After that, we were in a position to set a budget for the launch and provide an annual budget forecast to ensure the domain's long-term management.

Lastly, when we were ready, communication was essential to raise employee awareness of the benefits of .bnpparibas.



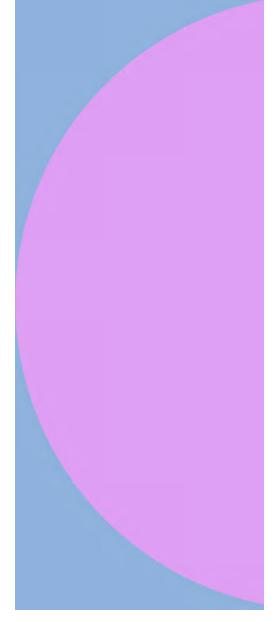


What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them?

The larger the company, the more difficult it is to communicate internally about this kind of subject. Buy-in is also an important part of deployment. The business lines' instinct was to opt for .fr, .com, and other TLDs, not only out of habit but also for reasons of consistency and understandability relative to the outside world. The tipping point was when one of our business lines started to use a domain name using our TLD.

The indicators resulting from this use meant we could demonstrate the benefits of this new foundation for our websites to all our business lines. It also confirmed that our initial choice was the right one, as is our goal of full deployment.





Want to discuss your project?



Get in touch with Cédric Michel-Flandin, Afnic's expert on .brand TLDs

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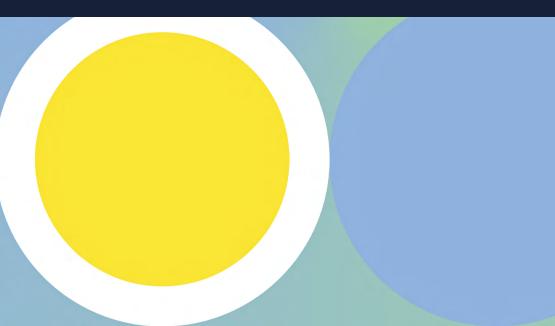
Become a member

Launched by Afnic in 2019, the Cercle des .marque ["The Brand TLD Club"] is the reference community in France for exchanges on custom TLDs, open to brands and their representatives (industrial property advisers, registrars, law firms, communication and advisory agencies, etc.).

The Cercle already has more than 80 members, who come together to decipher topical issues and trends relating to .brand TLDs and propose exchanges on the development and control of digital spaces.

Join us! cercle-marque@afnic.fr







WHITE PAPER

Internet made in France

- A TLD is the Internet's top-level domain. There are two types of TLD: geographic ccTLDs (.fr, .de...) and generic gTLDs (.com, .biz...).
- 2.brand TLD perception survey conducted by MV2 Group among 2,000 persons in 2024.
- 3. ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) is an international cooperation organisation whose main task is to regulate IP addressing and the domain names used on the Internet.
- Cybersquatting is a practice that consists in registering a domain name corresponding to a trademark, with the intention of reselling it to the rightful owner, altering its visibility or taking advantage of its reputation.
- 5. Typosquatting is a technique that consists in buying domain names that are graphically or phonetically similar to a popular website or a well-known brand, so that users making an unintentional spelling or typing error are directed to the site held by the hacker.
- IANA (the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority) is an international agency reporting to ICANN, whose primary
 purpose is to manage the technical and structural components essential for the proper functioning of
 the Internet.