TWO new internet domain names - ".post" and ".travel" - could appear online as early as next year as the internet's key oversight board announced preliminary approval. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), in advancing the applications for postal services and the travel industry, said it was still considering eight other proposals including ".asia," ".jobs," and ".xxx." Separately, ".eu" for the European Union also is in the works.

ICANN said the decision on ".post" and ".travel" had less to do with relative merit and was primarily based on the level of technical and commercial details their sponsors were able to quickly provide.

Negotiations will now begin on creating and running the domain names. The process could take months, though officials warned that there was no guarantee the domains would ultimately be accepted.

There are currently about 250 domain names, mostly for specific countries, such as ".fr" for France.

In 2000, ICANN approved seven new domain names for global use, the first major additions since the Domain Name System was created in the 1980s.

But the new names, including ".biz," ".info" and ".museum," aren't as widely known or used as the more traditional ".com" and ".org." In addition, some internet applications reject the new names entirely because they were programmed to recognise only two- or three-character suffixes.

The two names preliminarily approved are different from most existing names because they would be set aside for specific industries and interest groups. Applicants paid $US45,000 ($60,500) each earlier this year to have their proposals considered.

The Universal Postal Union in Bern, Switzerland, wants ".post" for national postal services, local post offices, business partners and stamp collectors around the world. Private companies that provide postal services, such as Federal Express and UPS, also would be eligible.

The Swiss postal union said a ".post" domain could ultimately link various electronic postal services now being set up at the national level, the way a British postal worker can deliver physical mail sent from the United States with US postage. The organisation envisions establishing up to 650,000 virtual post offices to let users access their local postal functions from anywhere in the world.

The Travel Partnership Corp., a New York-based trade group, is seeking approval for ".travel" for travel agents, airlines, bed and breakfast operators, tourism bureaus and others in the travel industry. It sees hotels, resorts and restaurants as among the suffix's biggest users. The organisation believes having a distinct suffix will encourage more businesses in the industry to develop or expand their web presence.
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