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Sent: Wednesday, February 07, 2007 8:41 AM
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stacy.burnette@icann.org
Subject: Santa Monica Regional Gathering

Dear Paul:

Last week I attended the North American Registry/Registrar Regional Gathering in Santa Monica. The ICANN staff deserves commendation for a well-run and informative meeting.

Stacy Burnette, in particular, gave a very well organized and thoughtful presentation regarding the new Compliance procedures for registrar (and registry) contracts. She was impressive in fielding some complex questions from the audience. At least some of the questions showed an element of hostility to ICANN's involvement in the area of compliance.

These questions, mostly from members of the registrar constituency, raise some important issues about ICANN's fulfillment of its mission. Some registrars appear to believe that ICANN should have only a very limited role in setting standards for performance. One representative of the registrars suggested that, in a free enterprise system, an accredited registrar should be able to offer a low priced registration service with minimal customer service. This approach to registrar operations (even if registrants are informed in advance about service standards) is not consistent with ICANN's corporate purpose of "promoting the global public interest in the operational stability of the Internet."

I have always believed that serving the public interest is an important element in the domain name system, including the operations of registries and registrars. Now that the Internet is the mass medium of telecommunications, service in the public interest takes on even greater importance. However, the development of the secondary market in domain names appears to have led some registrars to a view of their role that sacrifices the public interest to their economic interests. This is not conducive to the operational stability of the Internet.

While I recognize that the registrar function is best served by a competitive business model, the Internet has become too important to all its users to allow pure competition to set the standards for customer service. Indeed, ICANN's definition of its accreditation function for registrars recognizes that "'Accredit' means to identify and set minimum standards for the performance of registration functions."

It is time to consider clarifying these minimum standards. The discussion at the Regional Gathering, and especially the questions raised during the Compliance presentation, indicate that a race to the bottom in service standards may well be under way.

I hope that ICANN will turn its attention to this issue, and bring the concept of service to the public interest back to the registration of domain names.

Best regards,

David

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