

Registering new Top Level Domain names in China

Internet usage is booming in China. With more than 618 million 'netizens' (as of January 2014), China connects more people to the Internet than any other country. In fact, every fourth person on the Internet is from China. Facilitated by the increasing availability of broadband technology and the growing trend towards online shopping and purchasing, the Internet is an attractive business and marketing platform for many European SMEs. The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) has also now removed barriers to overseas companies and individuals to register domain names in China, and it is recommended that European SMEs take advantage of this if they are planning on entering the Chinese market or are already in China.

New and Less Restricted Domain Name Requirements

From May 2012, .cn and .中国 domain name registrations became available again for private individual registrations (both Chinese and overseas). The process takes a few weeks and currently costs €50-€100.

The following steps are required:

- Translate your domain names into Chinese and find an accredited registrar using either of these sources (domain name registration must be completed through an accredited registrar).
 - o International registrars - .cn:
http://www1.cnnic.cn/syjszc1/List/201210/t20121011_36680.htm
 - o International registrars - .中国:
http://www1.cnnic.cn/syjszc1/List/201210/t20121011_36685.htm
- Check (the registrar can do this on your behalf) if the particular .cn domain name is available for registration using the CNNIC domain name registry
 - o English – <http://www1.cnnic.cn/>
 - o Chinese – <http://www.cnnic.cn/>
- Complete an application form with business seal of applicant company (to be provided by your registrar)
- Provide a copy of local business certificate in your home country (or copy of passport, driving licence or other official ID, if you apply as an individual). A 'Letter of Commitment' must be signed by the registrant (to be provided by your registrar); these will be kept by the CNNIC.
- Submitting originals is not required, nor are copies of trade mark certificates to prove a prior right to the requested domain name.

These restrictions are both good news and bad news for European SMEs. The good news is that the removal of the local presence requirements enable European SMEs to register .cn and .中国 domain names, using their European company data and business certificates. This will enable European SMEs to register .cn and .中国 domain names, without needing to establish a local business unit within China. The flipside of the coin, however, is that after an immense effort by the Chinese authorities to make the .cn name clean from fake registrants, the same removal of local presence requirements may again make the .cn and .中国 domain names an attractive space for cybersquatters and other online criminals, now that these domain names have become easier to register. By keeping the requirement of copies of business certificates and passports for

private individual registrations, one can hope that the .cn domain space will not be as attractive to cybersquatters as other completely automated top level domain names such as .com and .net. A cybersquatter is an individual or firm that registers a domain in bad faith, with the intent to sell it to the rightful owner at an inflated price.

The new .中国 (.China) top level domain

In July 2010, CNNIC launched the .中国 domain name which was then officially ready for use. According to CNNIC more than 90% of Chinese governmental departments and more than 95% of news websites had already activated .中国 domain names. The new .中国 top level domain name is also expected to further promote Chinese content on websites. Meanwhile, for European businesses, the new .中国 top level domain name (TLD) will provide an inexpensive and efficient way to reach Chinese consumers in their own language.

What are the rules for registering .中国 domain names?

Registrants of existing .cn domain names with Chinese characters, such as for instance 中文.CN, will automatically be granted the same domain name using the .中国 TLD in both simplified and traditional Chinese.

CNNIC has just published that the linkage between .cn and .中国 domain names as described above, will be removed on October 29th, 2012. Then if you wish to register a domain name containing Chinese characters both under .cn (中文.cn) and under .中国 (中文.中国) you will have to file to registration applications).

Furthermore, it will be possible from October 29th 2012 to combine Chinese scripts with Latin characters, Arabic numbers (0-9), and the hyphen, '-', when registering under .中国.

Take-away message:

Registering Chinese domain names is now a quick, cheap and relatively simple process. To reap the business rewards of reaching Chinese internet surfers in their own language, EU SMEs should take care to register their company and trade mark domain names as early as possible in China.