



ICANN's Failures

[Alex Tajirian](#)

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The [Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers](#) (ICANN) has failed on a number of fronts, resulting in sub-par products and services in a global monopolistic environment. Failures will continue if not recognized and immediately addressed.

Leadership is about the future, a journey into uncharted territory, and it requires vision supported by technical, operational, and mind-changing competencies. Until people use a new product or service, it is unknown and unknowable, and that includes its value. For example, it cannot be determined *a priori* whether [new top-level domains](#) (TLDs) can viably compete with “.com” domains, or whether successful new TLDs will be driven by new business models. Failure is an integral part of doing business that cannot be avoided and (in certain situations) should be encouraged. That is especially the case with something like new TLDs, when so many imponderables are involved. But failure must be learned from and managed, and ICANN hasn't done that.

It does not require a rocket scientist to recognize that ICANN has fallen short because it lacks:

- **Clear objectives.** ICANN is driving blindfolded, which makes it hard to prioritize projects. For example, it created a buzz around selling [single-character domain names](#) in 2007, then dropped the project without explaining why it was abandoned or why it was considered a good idea in the first place. The current buzz is about new TLDs, but ICANN still has not convincingly articulated the problems that it expects these TLDs to solve. No public company can survive without having clear actionable objectives.
- **Selling skills.** When people don't understand the benefits of an organization's products and services, they will not only avoid said goods and services but also actively sabotage them. For example, ICANN has [not convincingly communicated the benefits of new TLDs](#), and thus has created a strong and vocal stakeholder opposition. In the corporate world, the lack of selling skills is tantamount to sending business to your competitor.

- **Trust.** ICANN has not been transparent in its communications with stakeholders who want to be informed and heard. For example, it has [commissioned a report on new TLDs](#) to bolster its view of the matter, as opposed to seeking an independent evaluation and listening to customers. Often enough, stakeholders who have been consulted don't mind if the final decision goes against them. They just want a fair and transparent process. ICANN, by not giving them one, has demonstrated a lack of respect.
- **Will to take the tough decisions** (irrespective of whether they are driven by internal or external resistance). For example, take the [flip-flopping on the approval of the ".xxx" TLD](#). Nevertheless, if it now believes that a [gradual introduction of new TLDs](#) creates more value than an all-out maximal launch, then ICANN should admit it and reverse course.
- **Social responsibility.** It should, for example, own (internalize) the [trademark mess it has left behind](#). A [three-regime domain registration process](#) can be a starting point.
- Last, but not least, **seeing failure.** ICANN has never acknowledged any of the above failures; and, not coincidentally, it has never tried to fix them. An organization won't drive itself to correct failure, and ward off further damage, if it doesn't recognize the failure's existence.

To start remedying these failures, ICANN must [rethink its objectives in an easy-to-understand language](#), and then develop and implement [mindset-changing solutions as well as performance measures](#). ■