



Making Sense of Google's .xyz gTLD Branding

[Alex Tajirian](#)

August 16, 2015

Google has a newly created parent, a holding company that is now its official owner. Of course, Google will keep using its extremely well-known name for its core search and related businesses. But the company now operates under an entity known as Alphabet—to give its name with extension, abc.xyz. Here specialists in gTLDs may be scratching their heads. Why .xyz? Why this little-known domain for one of the world's great corporations?

My theory: Google is trying its hand at a new style of inconspicuous consumption. Note that I say inconspicuous. We all know about conspicuous consumption, the drive many consumers feel to flash designer goods with accompanying logos. But a recent paper by professors Wilson, Eckhardt, and Belk entitled “[The Rise of Inconspicuous Consumption](#)” highlights an emerging consumer trend toward “discreetly marked products, subtle but distinct styles, or high-end brands that fly beneath the radar.”

Luxury brands have taken notice of the change. Louis Vuitton and Tesla have begun downsizing their logos, while the logo for Tiffany has shrunk from the company's full name to a simple “T.” Handbags sold by Michael Kors hide the company's name in the lining, and Tom Ford puts no logo on its clothes at all. Apple can play it inconspicuous as well. Marketing the high-end iWatch, the company never hints at status, instead highlighting the new device's outstanding practical benefits. High-end farm-to-table restaurants provide another example. They sell beer, chicken, and produce, not Dom Pérignon, Kobe beef, and beluga caviar. But the beer is home brewed, the chicken is free-range, and the produce is organic. Expensive fare that isn't marketed as a luxury, just a way for customers to be ethical and healthy.

Now, with Google's mysterious choice of abc.xyz, we may have another example of inconspicuous branding. After all, Google doesn't need a traditional mainstream .com branding. Its attitude may be something like “Everyone will remember and recall us as abc.xyz.”

The most obvious choice would have been Alphabet.com. However, the domain, owned by BMW, is reportedly unwilling to sell it, and Google has the money. Another choice

■ **DomainMart**
Making Sense of Google's .xyz gTLD Branding

would have been a .brand strategy. Using .Alphabet would have made a strong statement, and it would have reduced cost and risk. Or there's .global, since .tech might be too narrow for all the companies that may go under Alphabet's umbrella. But Google chose .xyz. If it had a reason, inconspicuous branding seems like the best candidate. (They might also have chosen a name other than Alphabet. The Twitter @Alphabet handle is owned by a third party.)

Whatever Google's reason, the move is heaven-sent for .xyz, which now needs to take full advantage of this manna. To focus the new gTLD on benefits to users, .xyz might adopt my [.com-competitor underdog strategy](#), with attention to warding off cybersquatting and phishing. The registry should also coordinate a unified inconspicuous branding message with potential registrars. Although Alphabet may be successfully (recognition and recall) branded under .xyz, it is not obvious to me that other businesses can expect the same result. True, such companies can associate their gTLD branding with that of Google, but who would remember which companies were under .xyz?

With business demand uncertain, and the fight against cybersquatting and phishing likely to be expensive, the success of the .xyz gTLD is far from obvious.

And with the .xyz registry's long-term viability in question, Google faces a bit of a risk. If the company winds up buying the registry, other registrants will have to be compensated before Google can operate it as a closed gTLD. Odds are it isn't smart to jump on the .xyz bandwagon. ■