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Internationalised Domain Names stand to reach full potential

Despite important advances, more work is needed by all parties if Internationalised Domain Names are to foster the growth of multilingual online, according to the 2013 EURid-UNESCO World Report on Internationalised Domain Names (IDNs). This year the report features the cooperation of Version for the analysis of IDN data in the .com, .net and .eu registers.

IDNs are domain names that include characters from non-Latin scripts, such as Cyrillic or Arabic. According to the report just 2% of the world's registered domain names are IDNs. This slow uptake is in stark contrast to the burgeoning multilingual content online. Most if not all IDN implementations underperform because of poor user awareness and experience, which lead to poor uptake. However, where IDNs are used, there is a 99% correlation between the language or script of the domain name and the language of associated website content, a clear indication that IDNs have a vital part to play in fostering a multilingual internet.

"Languages are who we are," states Jenia Karklina, UNESCO Assistant Director-General in the report's foreword. "By protecting them, we protect ourselves; by promoting them, we sustain cultural diversity. This must be true also for cyberspace. To have maximum impact, to be sustainable and to be beneficial to all, cyberspace must be inclusive. Every woman and every man should be able to speak and write in their mother tongue, and this is why IDNs are so important."

The future of IDNs

The launch of new IDN generic top-level domains (gTLDs) in late 2013, early 2014, and particularly the large number of top-level domains using Chinese characters, is expected to boost the market, providing an incentive for stakeholders to update internet infrastructure and to improve user experience on popular Web applications in order to access potentially valuable markets. The new gTLDs may also help to raise end-users' awareness that domain names can be in languages

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