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Telnic banks on mainland demand to push .tel domain

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Internet registry operator Telnic, the organisation behind the new .tel top-level domain (TLD), is banking on the vast number of mobile-telephone users on the mainland to spark demand for the unique domain name.

TLDs, such as .com and .asia, are used to identify one or more internet protocol addresses with the suffix.

What differentiates .tel from other TLDs is that a user does not need to create a website but simply uses the public internet infrastructure to store, update and publish all contact information, web links and keywords and have a user directly connect to the relevant number or link.

"We have received an overwhelmingly positive feedback from the registrar community about .tel," said Khashayar Mahdavi, the chief

executive at Britain-based Telnic. He estimates about 100 registrars worldwide – including 10 from the mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan – have signed up to sell .tel domain names, but notes that the mainland, with its more than 600 million mobile-telephone subscribers, could help drive adoption.

Telnic opens tomorrow the so-called "Sunrise" registration for .tel domain names through its certified registrars, all accredited by the Internet Corp for Assigned Names and Numbers.

The Sunshine period is open to owners and licensees of trademarks registered with national effect, such as "chinamobile.tel" and "pccw.tel". These preferred registrations – made on a first-come, first-served basis – will each carry a three-year term.

The so-called "Landrush" regis-

tration, which is open to everyone not registered during the previous period, will start next year from February 3 with domain names provided at a premium price. The "General availability" period, with lower TLD pricing, will start on March 24.

"What we're bringing to businesses and consumers in Asia is the ability to create an interactive, live communication hub under their control, but without having the cost of managing, maintaining and hosting a website," said Mr Mahdavi said.

He said Telnic was the first company to use the Domain Name System (DNS), which usually just translates domain names into web IP addresses, to store all the means of communication – including mobile telephone, fixed-line and fax numbers, online social network account, e-mail and location – of an individual



Khashayar Mahdavi

or a company. Once information is stored directly into the system, that data can be quickly and easily accessible to any internet-connected device. Encryption security can also be provided.

All existing TLDs track domain names to a website. For example, if one enters www.lenovo.com into a web browser, the system replies with an IP address.

The browser then uses this IP address to locate and load Lenovo's Hong Kong website.

When .tel queries this same DNS system with a domain, like http://hotels.tel, the contact information and key words that a user has stored directly into the DNS are returned.

A user can then click on any of the contact items and be swiftly connected – whether using a mobile telephone, personal digital assistant or laptop computer – because the .tel information is not as data-heavy as a typical Web page.

"With no website and no information technology services firm to have to run things through, your time investment is minimal. Just log on, enter new info, and press save, and the information is available instantaneously, and globally," Mr Mahdavi said.

The cost of a .tel TLD is the same as securing a typical internet domain name, which is usually from HK\$160 to HK\$200 per year.

That compares favourably with the HK\$2,500 to HK\$4,000 cost per year for a local *Yellow Pages* submission, or the hundreds of thousands of dollars it costs to build and maintain a website, according to Mr Mahdavi.

Stephen Chau Kam-kun, the chief technology officer at SmartOne-Vodafone, said there were already many online community-based directories that people use so it was difficult to predict demand for the .tel domain.

However, Alfred Mak, a director at local registrar 0101 Internet, said: "We have already received a lot of interest from local companies and anticipate that its benefit will drive serious interest for companies and individuals wishing to secure their .tel address."