.museum

Renewal Proposal
for the
dotMuseum
Sponsorship Agreement

16 November 2005

Museum Domain Management Association

MuseDoma
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The Museum Domain Management Association ("MuseDoma") herewith submits its Renewal Proposal for the operation of the dotMuseum TLD subsequent to the expiration of its present Sponsorship Agreement with ICANN on 17 October 2006. Paragraph 5.2 of that agreement states, "The Renewal Proposal shall contain a report of the Sponsor's sponsorship of the Sponsored TLD and include a description of its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the Sponsored TLD Community, proposed additions to or deletions from (a) the Charter and (b) the delegation of policy-development responsibility from ICANN to sponsor, and a certification that the Sponsor has complied with all material terms of this Agreement or, where that is not the case, a description of any failure to comply."

We are responding to these points in the order listed, and describe a revised approach to some of the terms of domain operation specified in the current Agreement, with the introduction of new elements that lack immediate counterpart in it. We also provide background information about the considerations that are guiding us.

Effectiveness in meeting the needs of the Sponsored TLD Community

The Sponsoring Organization's ability to represent the museum community is based on the unique position of one of its two founding members, the International Council of Museums ("ICOM"). ICOM is in its 60th year of continuous operation in the service of the global museum community as an NGO maintaining formal relations with UNESCO and having consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. ICOM addresses the needs of its constituency through its 114 National Committees, 30 International Committees, and major partnerships with other agencies in the museum and broader heritage management sectors. It is the sole such agency acting worldwide on behalf of the museum community.

ICOM's globally distributed organizational and communications network provides an inclusive platform for the consideration of all issues relevant to dotMuseum policy and operation. This has enabled the ready determination of consensus on issues where alternative procedures are available. ICOM's initial experience has, however, identified a need for additional mechanisms for more adequately reflecting differences in regional and local concepts of museum activity, as well as for accommodating wide variation in the resources available to prospective name holders. (This will be discussed in detail below.)

The dotMuseum domain was established at a juncture when the museum community was beginning a rapid extension of its concerns from the purely physical environment into the digital realm. The prospect of being able to build on a dedicated top-level domain generated considerable enthusiasm. The subsequent availability of that domain was immediately harnessed in the manner foreseen. Museums with well-established presences on the Internet began using dotMuseum as a guidepost to their branded sites. Smaller organizations based their networked action on dotMuseum as a primary identity marker. Organizations conducting activity exclusively in digital format and therefore lacking any of the conventional museum hallmarks, were able to indicate that status using the corresponding attributes of the Internet.

The ability of museums to call attention to the cultural actions of living communities that are not directly represented on the Net was greatly enhanced. Although not

foreseen at the outset, the availability of IDN has massively enhanced the potential of museums for playing a mediating role in the provision of material created outside the current perimeter of the Internet, thereby hastening the expansion of those boundaries, as well as enriching the material available to current users.

DotMuseum was envisioned with the audiences served by museums as its ultimate beneficiary. Internet users without particular ability to assess the authenticity of a resource ostensibly provided by a museum were given means for immediately verifying the origin of such material. One application of this can be seen by conducting a Google search using the special syntax 'site:museum' and, for example, comparing the focus of the results of:

>   http://www.google.com/search?q=portrait

with

>   http://www.google.com/search?q=portrait+site:museum.

This may be tested more extensively at http://about.museum/find.html. (The native index of the dotMuseum namespace which will also be found there is not certain to prove viable in the broadly multilingual context that will follow the full deployment of IDN, and may therefore already have reached the limit of its utility.)

In order to emphasize dotMuseum having been created as a global resource, when the domain was taken into operation, the Sponsor commenced efforts to establish an operating platform outside of the United States (where MuseDoma was incorporated as a tax-exempt charitable organization according to Section 501(c)(3) of the US tax code). The ICOM Secretariat's location in Paris seeded that process, and we are exploring whether further advantages for the extension of ICOM's role in the operation of dotMuseum would be present in a European-based not-for-profit foundation. (ICOM itself is incorporated under a French law that does not provide a suitable basis for such activity.)

The European Commission offered its support for the development of the dotMuseum Network Information Center ("MuseNIC") in Stockholm, at facilities hosted by the Swedish Museum of Natural History, shortly after ICANN indicated its intention to enter into Agreement with MuseDoma. The eponymous EC-funded MUSENIC Project included a two-year awareness campaign about the new TLD targeted to the European museum community (which is also the largest single facet of ICOM's own membership); the European public, and adjacent segments of the heritage management profession – particularly archives, libraries, and monuments and sites. A list of the activities and publications produced during that initiative, together with subsequent similar action, is provided at http://media.nic.museum/.

The implications of IDN for dotMuseum are profound and the cultural perspectives placed on it in this domain are likely to result in applications that lack counterpart in any other. The Sponsor has therefore participated actively in the general development of IDN and maintains a resource page at http://about.museum/idn/. We trust that you are familiar with the support we have provided to ICANN's own action in this area, some of which will also be seen via the link at the end of the preceding paragraph. This also provides reference to recent activity in which MuseDoma has participated, organized by UNESCO in Mali and Russia in connection with its own agenda for the

[Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace](#) (note particularly Recommendation 14 in that document, "Member States and international organizations should promote appropriate partnerships in the management of domain names, including multilingual domain names.").

Proposed additions to or deletions from the Charter

The Charter is based on the definition of 'museum' contained in the ICOM Statutes. Given the substantive changes to the role and responsibilities of museums, ICOM has been working with a redrafting of this definition. As it forms part of ICOM's Statutes, it can only be adopted by the ICOM General Assembly, at the earliest in 2007. The Charter may need to be modified to reflect the outcome, but nothing concrete can be proposed at the present time. It may be noted, however, that basic precepts of the museum profession include an ever greater recognition of the significance of digital media and communication. For example, what are currently informally termed 'virtual museums' may be fully recognized in the next restatement of the ICOM definition. This, in turn, will greatly strengthen the significance of the dotMuseum domain and may justify non-trivial elaboration of some component of the Charter.

Proposed additions to or deletions from the delegation of policy-development responsibility from ICANN to sponsor

The quantitative involvement of the dotMuseum target community in the actions described above has to date been significantly less than had been initially estimated. The cost of operating the domain is not met by revenue generated from the sale of names in it, nor is there any expectation that this situation will change in the near term. Although MuseDoma undertook its action in the belief that the domain would become self-sustaining within a foreseeable span of time, the initial prognosis of impending registration volume has not been borne out in actual practice. The business model in which the terms of the domain's operation were conceived therefore requires fundamental revision. Although many factors have contributed to this situation, a significant component derives from the policies regarding the acquisition of registered names.

These policies have not proven to be fully appropriate to their purpose, and greater responsibility for setting them needs to be delegated directly to the Sponsor. The current segmentation of the registration process charges the Sponsor with ensuring that all name holders are eligible in terms of the Charter, but completely isolates the Sponsor from the point of sale. The dialog conducted during the provision of Eligibility and Name Selection ("ENS") Services is often protracted and complex. There is frequent need for explanation of the details of the eligibility requirements and naming conventions. Particular difficulty may be encountered when the languages in which the ENS service facility is capable of communicating do not adequately overlap with those used by a prospective name holder. The latter situation had been anticipated from the outset but the particular understanding of museum requirements that the mediator in any such discussion of necessity must possess are not to be found anywhere outside the museum community itself. It is not realistic to expect this to be part of the battery of skills normally possessed by the ICANN accredited registrars nor is it reasonable to expect a registrar to regard the volume of business that would

result from the deliberate acquisition of the additional skills as justification for that expense.

The channel through which local support has been elicited in the provision of ENS service has invariably been via the National ICOM Committee most proximal to the prospective registrant. Although the dialog comfortably reverts to the central ENS facility once the requisite assistance has been given, the need at that point to refer the applicant to an external agency to process the actual registration, with the concomitant resumption of communication difficulty, renders the entire process complex to the point of having a deterrent effect. Even where linguistic concern is not a factor, this structure has generated the perception that dotMuseum is a business being run using the cachet of the ICOM name, but not operated with singular and unequivocal focus on the benefit of the global museum community and its audiences. This exerts a further braking influence on the development of the registrant base.

A substantial segment of the museum community is well acquainted with procedures for the registration of names in other TLDs as developed prior to the advent of dotMuseum. Such entities are well-served by the current dotMuseum registrars. There is, however, an equally important segment of the target community that is simply baffled by the intricacies of needing to conduct two separate discussions with two separate agencies, especially if they are at the outset of establishing their Internet presences, and even more keenly if they are in developing areas that are reliant on the support of technically more experienced members of their professional community located elsewhere.

DotMuseum must be, and be seen to be operated fully by, of, and for the professional museum community. This requires that not just the sponsorship of the domain but also its management and maintenance are all embedded in the organizational structure provided by ICOM and its regional entities. With that firmly in place it becomes possible to address the concerns expressed by various professional associations within the museum community about the extent to which a centrally operated international domain can adequately address local detail. MuseDoma was structured specifically to provide a platform for the shared development of dotMuseum policies by any and all museums or professional museums associations wishing to participate. The collaboration of a range of such organizations is necessary to the understanding of the full spectrum of national and regional determinants of museum identity. DotMuseum must therefore provide a useful and compelling basis for cementing the relationship between a recognized professional museums association and its own constituency. This can be done by making it possible for such organizations to allocate dotMuseum names to their members as benefits of that membership, rather than by referral to a distant office (which in turn refers to a third instance). ICOM's own membership provides an ideal prototypal basis for the development of requisite policies and procedures, and the block provision of names to ICOM members is on that organization's current agenda.

This new channel in the supply chain for the acquisition of registered names must be opened in the shortest time possible. Doing so will provide a clear basis for the significant and rapid expansion of the name holder base, and is the only means apparent for effecting that vitally important action. The further provision of ENS service by delegated local agencies will shorten the path for the participation of

newcomers to the Internet, particularly in developing areas. The meaningful utilization of IDN is particularly dependent on the ability to communicate with small language communities, thus adding particular urgency to the need for appropriate policies. Means for ENS providers to conclude the entire registration process on behalf of entities that wish for them to do so, or for the central ENS coordinating facility to do this transparently to the prospective name holder, must also be made available in parallel to the current sales channel, as soon as can be effected.

The only agencies that can reasonably provide this service are all members of the museum profession and have no interest in competitive participation in the domain name industry beyond serving their own professional community in regard to the dotMuseum TLD. Requiring the candidate agencies to acquire full accreditation as ICANN registrars is therefore not an appropriate solution. The new Agreement will need to delegate responsibility to the Sponsor for establishing the requisite mechanism, or at least articulate an expanded repertoire of action that may be conducted by the central ENS coordinator (currently the MuseNIC office in Stockholm).

Compliance with the material terms of the present Agreement

With the exception of reminders about submission deadlines for periodic reports ICANN has neither directly nor indirectly commented on any aspect of the Sponsor's compliance with the Agreement. No dispute regarding any aspect of the Agreement or the Sponsor's execution of its responsibilities under it has been initiated by any external party. MuseDoma therefore certifies that as the dotMuseum Sponsor it has complied with all material terms of the present Agreement.

Summary

MuseDoma looks forward to serving a continuing role as the dotMuseum Sponsoring Organization. It cannot, however, do so responsibly with the current degree of reliance on the in-kind support and subvention of its members. The new Agreement must make it possible for professional museums associations to provide dotMuseum names directly to their own members as benefits of that membership through block delegation. It must also be possible either for regional ENS facilities to provide all service necessary for the registration of dotMuseum names or for the central ENS coordination facility to ensure that this process can be concluded transparently to prospective nameholders.

MuseDoma was conceived as an enabling agent for ICOM to extend the service it has long provided to the global museum community and its audiences, into the domain namespace. Our achievements thus far clearly indicate the soundness of that initiative. The model on which dotMuseum is being operated has, however, not resulted in a stable production environment. We believe that viable means for doing this will follow from the implementation of the additional modes of distributing dotMuseum names described above. The new Agreement must provide a basis for this and enable dotMuseum to be operated as a public service, unequivocally on behalf of museums as they develop their identities on the Internet, and for the users who derive benefit from that action.