

Country Codes Primer



Making sense of country codes on the Internet

Companies that are serious about expanding into new countries must look beyond the .com domain name.

Every country has its own country domain code, such as .fr for France and .jp for Japan, and these domains prove valuable in ensuring that your Web site is easily found by local users and is indexed by language- and country-specific search engines.

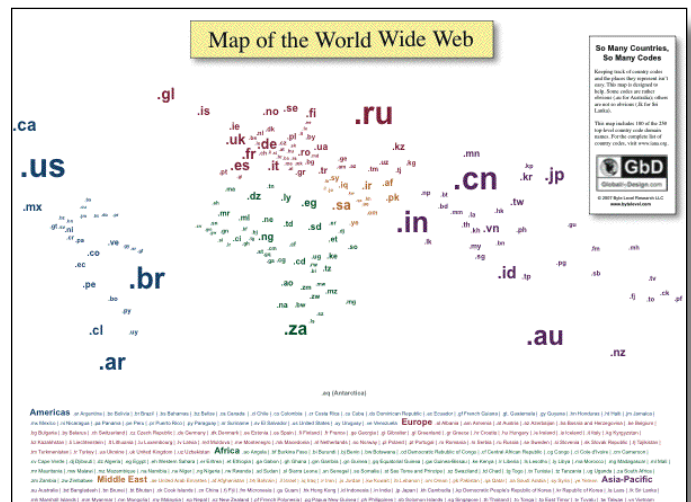
Where do country codes come from?

The International Standards Organization (ISO) has long managed a list of two-letter country codes and dependent areas, known as ISO 3166-1. This list is then used by ICANN (www.icann.org), the organization that manages the domain name system, as the foundation for country code top level domains (ccTLDs).

While there are 192 members of the United Nations, there are currently 250 country codes. That's because a dependent territory of another country may also request its own unique two-letter code. And there are also a handful of country codes assigned to regions, such as .eu for the European Union or .aq for Antarctica. For the complete list of current country codes, visit www.iana.org.

Do country codes ever change?

Country codes evolve along with the countries and territories that they represent. In 2006, Serbia and Montenegro, which used country code .cs, split into two independent countries. As a result, two new country codes were created: .me for Montenegro and .rs for Serbia.



For a map of the world's country codes, visit www.bytelevel.com/map

Understanding domains

The domain name system offers two types of top-level domains: generic domains and country code domains.

While country domains are managed by their respective countries, there are no geographic limitations to generic domains.

However, due to the way the Internet has evolved, many people view .com as synonymous with the United States, even though there is a .us domain available.

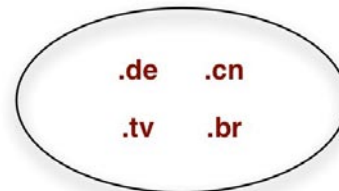
And some countries have made their domains widely available as a promotional tool, most notably the Pacific island of Tuvalu, which has the .tv domain. For example, YouTube can be visited at **www.youtube.tv**.

New generic domains are steadily being added, such as .mobi, for mobile services, and .travel, for the tourism industry.

generic top-level domains gTLD



country code top-level domains ccTLD



What Web sites use .us?

Not many companies host their American Web sites at the .us domain, preferring instead to use the .com address.

Volvo, however, is one company that does host its Web site at .us. On the .com site, Volvo hosts a global gateway page that allows Web users to select their country preference. By using this approach, Volvo takes a country agnostic approach to the .com address.

This is the fundamental problem with .com. So many companies view it as a United States domain when it is not. Multinational companies are grappling with this issue as more and more people from around the world visit their .com address hoping to find local content. Over time, we will see more companies hosting their American Web sites at .us.

