ICANN Start, Episode 2: What is IRTP?

Welcome to *ICANN Start*. This is the show about one issue, five questions:
- What is it?
- Why does it matter?
- Who does it affect?
- Who's going to fix it?
- What can I do about it?

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Scott: Glad to have you join us for another episode of ICANN Start. I'm Scott Pinzon. Our subject matter today is part of ICANN's alphabet soup: What is IRTP? Our subject matter expert is Marika Konings, Policy Director.

Welcome to the show, Marika.

Marika: Thank you very much, Scott. I'll try to tell you a little bit what about IRTP, or "Inter-Register Transfer Policy," is.

Scott: That hardly helps at all! "Inter-Registrar Transfer Policy." At least we know what it stands for. But what is it?

Marika: Inter-Registrar Transfer Policy was a consensus policy that was developed by the GNSO, the Generic Name Supporting Organization, in 2004. The objective of the policy is to provide a straightforward way for domain name holders – registrants -- to transfer their domain names between registrars; hence, Inter-Registrar Transfer.

Scott: Can you give me an example of how this works? Let's just take some domain name we'll make up, fictitious.com. How does it ever have to have an Inter-Registrar Transfer?

Marika: If you want to move fictitious.com from Registrar A to Registrar B, because you like Registrar B better, [IRTP] proscribes the rules which the registrars need to follow in order to move the domain name registration from one registrar to another. So it proscribes the form you need to fill in and to send to your registrar; what the registrar then needs to do in order to get the confirmation or the authorization to actually go ahead with the transfer; in which cases they may deny a transfer, and the certain reasons for denial that are incorporated in the policy.

Scott: Registrars can't just do it any way they want to.

Marika: No. Before that time there weren't any specific rules around it. And of course, with growing competition, more registrars in the market, domain name registrants wanted to move their domain names in a transparent way and make sure as well that they weren't blocked for just the registrar trying to keep onto the name and holding on to the name. It was basically spelling out the rules of the game.

Scott:	All right. That's a useful explanation of what IRTP stands for. But who does this issue affect?
Marika:	Well, at first sight, probably people think, "That doesn't affect me, Inter-Registrar Transfer Policy? That's only for registrars!" But if you look deeper, it affects anyone that has a domain name registration because at the end of the day, if you at some point in time would like to transfer your domain name, you would like to be able to do that in a clear and efficient way. And that's what the policy sets out to do.
	Although on the face of it, it might look like a technical issue or more something for registrars to consider, in my view, it's something that should be of interest and does affect the broader Internet community.
Scott:	That's a great point. I mean, I've registered a domain name. My wife has domain names. So, it really does come down to almost any individual.
Marika:	Yeah. It's one of those issues that you don't think about when you register a domain name. But often at the point in time that you want to change it, that's for a specific reason: because you're unhappy, you're not getting the service you wanted, you're getting a better price -- that's the moment in time when you want it to go smoothly. It's an area where ICANN receives a lot of complaints. It's the number one complaint, looking at the complaints received at the Compliance Department.
	So it's really key that we address these issues and make sure that the level of those complaints go down and it's clear and obvious -- for both registrants but also for registrars -- what the expectation is, what the rules of the game are. And then make sure that everyone sticks to those.
Scott:	Yeah, a nice predictable experience.
Marika:	Absolutely.
Scott:	Let's take another angle on who does this affect. This working group is actually working under the GNSO, the Generic Name Supporting Organization. So what effect will their policy decisions have on country code top-level domains?
Marika:	This policy as developed by the GNSO only affects generic top-level domains and doesn't have any impact on country code top-level domains. So there's no link.
Scott:	Why did this come up? Were there problems with it?
Marika:	Well, why it matters now… The policy was developed in 2004. When developing the policy you try to think of all the possible scenarios and all the different ways, all the different things that might happen during the whole process. But you cannot foresee everything.
Scott:	It's too complicated.
Marika:	Then there's always unforeseen elements that come into play. So as part of the implementation, the Generic Name Supporting Organization decided that it would be good to plan for a review of the policy to actually see whether the policy was working as intended, whether it was understood, whether there were loopholes that were being used in different ways.

As part of that review to identify the long laundry list of issues that the community brought to ICANN through public comment periods and through discussions where they felt that more clarification or additional information would be needed to ensure that the policy was being used and being implemented as it was intended.

On the basis of that long list of issues, they categorized those because they could see that there were certain themes in there. Some are related to the Dispute Policy that's incorporated there. Some are related to how to get your domain name back in the case of an unauthorized transfer or hi-jacking. They tried to make some kind of categories and came up with a list of five "buckets" of issues on which the GNSO decided to launch policy development processes.

Scott: Is that why when I see IRTP on an ICANN web site, it will often say "Part A" or "Part B"? Is that referring to these, these -- we're calling them "buckets"?

Marika: Correct. The five different PDPs -- Policy Development Processes -- were divided into A, B, C, D and E. We've already completed the work on Part A. A number of recommendations were made there the PDP has specifically addressed on new issues related to authentication and relating to transfers; some issues that didn't fit in any of the other categories.

A group already worked on that and provided recommendations to the GNSO Council. And now a group has actually started working on Part B. Part B actually deals with a number of issues that relate to undoing domain name transfers and registrar lock status.

It asks a number of specific questions such as, should there be a process for the urgent return resolution of a domain name? Should there be additional provisions for undoing inappropriate transfers, especially for example, in cases where there's a dispute between the registrant and the admin contact? Are there any special provisions needed for a change of registrant when it occurs near the time of a change of the registrar, which is often the case in hijacking cases?

Scott: Yeah. I was going to say, some of these questions sound like they are meant to maybe address fraud.

Marika: Yeah. They're to protect the registrant. So the idea is should there be any special protection mechanisms in those cases. But at the same time, the group, of course, needs to consider as well that these mechanisms shouldn't be overly protective. So, those are some of the questions they're looking at.

Then there's two questions related to lock status. They might be interested to know that actually ICANN gets a lot of complaints or questions in relation to when registrar lock status is being used.

Scott: I've seen the term all over the web site. What is a "registrar lock"?

Marika: Registrar lock is actually a status code that can be applied by a registrar to a domain name registration. The lock meaning that the domain cannot go anywhere. It's mainly done to prevent unwanted changes or an undesired transfer out.

The issue is that there doesn't seem to be identical approaches when registrar lock is being used by registrars. So there is no clear way of telling for registrants sometimes

	why that domain is being locked, what they should do to unlock it, what are the justified reasons for locking a domain name?
	Some of these questions this working group is also looking at: Should there be any kind of best practices identified? Or, should there be more specific rules in the Inter-Registrar Transfer Policy on when a lock can be used, or when it should or shouldn't be used?
Scott:	I see. There could be all kinds of reasons for a lock, right? If I'm the person who registered the name, or registrant, I might ask for it just in order to prevent fraud or domain name hijacking. But maybe a registrar would do it because that domain is involved in, say, a legal case.
Marika:	Correct. There are various reasons why a registrant lock can be applied.
Scott:	There's a working group that is addressing these Part B issues which are all phrased in the questions that you described to us. Am I following correctly?
Marika:	Yes, absolutely. There are five different questions. The way the working group is working, they're working themselves, discussing these issues but at the same time they've requested public comments where anyone in the Internet community can provide their feedback and input. They've gone back to the different constituencies and stakeholder groups that form the Generic Name Supporting Organization for specific input on these questions, bringing all of that information together.
	That's why the group is currently working on this development of an initial report, in which the group will set out the different discussions they had. They might already come up with some ideas or some suggested recommendations and bring that together in the report which they will then put out for public comment to determine whether they're on the right track and whether there's support for their recommendations.
	Once they've gathered that information and analyzed the feedback received, and also updated the report, to reflect that input received, they'll produce a final report which is then submitted to the Generic Name Supporting Organization for their review, and hopefully adoption of the recommendations. That then is transmitted to the ICANN Board, if there are any recommended changes to consensus policy.
Scott:	So, you've anticipated one of the questions we ask on this show which is who is going to fix this issue? It sounds like the answer is the IRTP Working Group with the guidance of the ICANN community in the public comments.
Marika:	Yes. Exactly.
Scott:	Okay. If someone is listening to the podcast and this is an issue they care about and they would like to get involved in it, how can they participate?
Marika:	Well, the working group is open for anyone to join. First way would be to become a member of the working group. You can find more information on the links that are provided on the ICANN and GNSO web site in relation to this issues, including a link to the Wiki, the workspace of the working group, where you can see as well what documents the group is working on and links to information on their meetings. It does require a commitment. The group meets on a weekly basis in the form of conference calls. There are lively debates through the mailing list. Documents are needed to be reviewed and edited so it requires, of course, a time commitment.

	You can also participate in one of the many public comment periods that are held on these issues. We've already had one comment period on initiation of the policy development process. The next one that's foreseen is once the initial report gets published. In addition, we also try to organize open working group meetings in conjunction with ICANN meetings.
Scott:	Yes. We had one in Seoul, for example.
Marika:	Yes, and they are open as well for the ICANN community to attend, ask questions, raise issues. It's likely as well once we have initial report we organize as well some kind of webinar or community discussion to allow for a more interactive debate and being able to maybe explain in more detail why the working group came to certain conclusions or recommendations.
	Just to add on that, of course, this is just the second one in a series. So there's still plenty of opportunity to get involved, maybe not this working group or maybe in the next or the other one after that –
Scott:	Oh, Part C or Part D –
Marika:	Yes. Absolutely.

[Music begins]

Scott:	That was a terrific introduction to this subject. Thank you very much for sharing with us today.
Marika:	You're welcome.

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