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## New Agreement May Save Conflict-plagued Domain Name System

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After struggling for months, the Federal Government's plan to privatize and decentralize the Internet domain name system has been resuscitated. The emerging system will allow Internet users to choose the administrator of their domain names based on the registration fees and other services which they offer. The Government hopes the increased competition will keep registration fees low and encourage the development of better search engines and online directories which use the master list of Internet users.

Since the Internet's origin, the Federal Government has overseen the administration of the Domain Name System, under which Internet users register the familiar .com addresses. In 1993, the National Science Foundation and Network Solutions, Inc. (NSI), a Virginia company, entered into a cooperative agreement which allowed NSI to act as the "registrar" of .com, .net and .org domain names and to maintain the "registry" of assigned names.

In 1998, the Government devised a plan to end the Government's role in the Domain Name System and to introduce competition in the domain name registration business. The Government recognized the non-profit Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) as the administrator of the reformed system, and ICANN authorized dozens of new domain name registrars to compete with NSI.

However, the transition has been marked by disputes among the Government, ICANN, NSI, the new registrars, and others. In particular, NSI refused to recognize ICANN's authority; NSI imposed limits on access to the master domain name registry which it maintains; and ICANN proposed controversial fees to fund its administrative operations.

On September 28, the Government, ICANN, and NSI jointly announced a set of new tentative agreements to restart the reform process. The complete agreements are [posted](#) and include the following measures:

- NSI will recognize ICANN's authority to select new domain name registrars and will enable all ICANN-accredited registrars to access NSI's master domain name registry.
- NSI will allow non-registrars to access the registry data and to develop Internet directory

services which compete with similar services offered by NSI.

- ICANN's authority over the domain name system will be subject to continued oversight by the Federal Government.
- NSI will provide funding for ICANN's operations.

The tentative agreements will not take effect until formally approved by ICANN, which will vote on the agreements after a 30-day public comment period. The comment period closes on October 29, 1999.

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