



 GoDaddy Corporate Domains

dotBrand Strategy Guide

Strategic Guide to Applying for a dotBrand in 2026

A Perspective on Securing Your Digital Future

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DotBrands

An Essential Layer for Digital Security and Brand Protection



When Google launched about.google in 2016, **it wasn't just unveiling another corporate website, it was demonstrating a fundamentally different approach to digital brand management.** By using their own branded top-level domain (TLD) rather than a traditional .com extension, Google showcased the strategic value of owning an entire slice of the internet's addressing system.

Nearly a decade later, this move looks prescient. Almost 600 major brands have now invested in creating their own branded TLDs—or dotBrands—proprietary internet extensions bearing their company names. From Toyota to CERN, leading organizations understand that in an era of escalating digital threats and intensifying online competition, controlling your own domain namespace represents strategic insurance, whether you use it extensively or not.

Intriguing? Yes. But getting a dotBrand is complex. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, better known as ICANN, is the global nonprofit organization that coordinates the internet's domain name system (DNS) and Internet Protocol (IP addresses). Their next application window for dotBrands and other TLDs opens in April 2026, so companies are asking whether to apply for a dotBrand. After all, it's the first opportunity to do so in more than a decade, and there's no way to know exactly when the next opportunity will come. This means **now is the time to assess** whether having a dotBrand in the future would be advantageous.

A Two-Decision Framework to Invest in the Future

Forward-thinking companies should approach the 2026 application round understanding that there are two questions to answer about having a dotBrand, one for the near term, and one you can make later. The first decision is **whether to apply for your brand** as a TLD. The second is **how and when to deploy** that TLD.

This separation matters because the opportunity cost of waiting could be substantial, and perhaps even critical. ICANN's last round of applications opened in 2012. Now after 12 years, ICANN announced the next round. While ICANN has committed to more regular rounds going forward, the specific cadence remains undefined. Recall also, that Google applied in 2012 and didn't choose to commence usage until 2016. Companies that skip 2026 could find themselves locked out for another decade or more, watching competitors secure strategic advantages they can't match.

From a portfolio perspective, consider this: Even if you never transition to your brand TLD, owning it provides optionality. "Whether to apply vs. what you're going to do with a brand TLD is a separate decision," advises **Phil Lodico, head of GoDaddy Corporate Domains**. "You're buying an option. You're investing in the future."

Market conditions change. Innovation creates opportunities. Security threats evolve. Consumer expectations shift. The brand that owns its own TLD can adapt quickly.

The brand that doesn't cannot.

12 YEARS

Time since the last round of gTLD applications.



Apply First, Strategize Later

Yes, your company owns its .com. **But...**

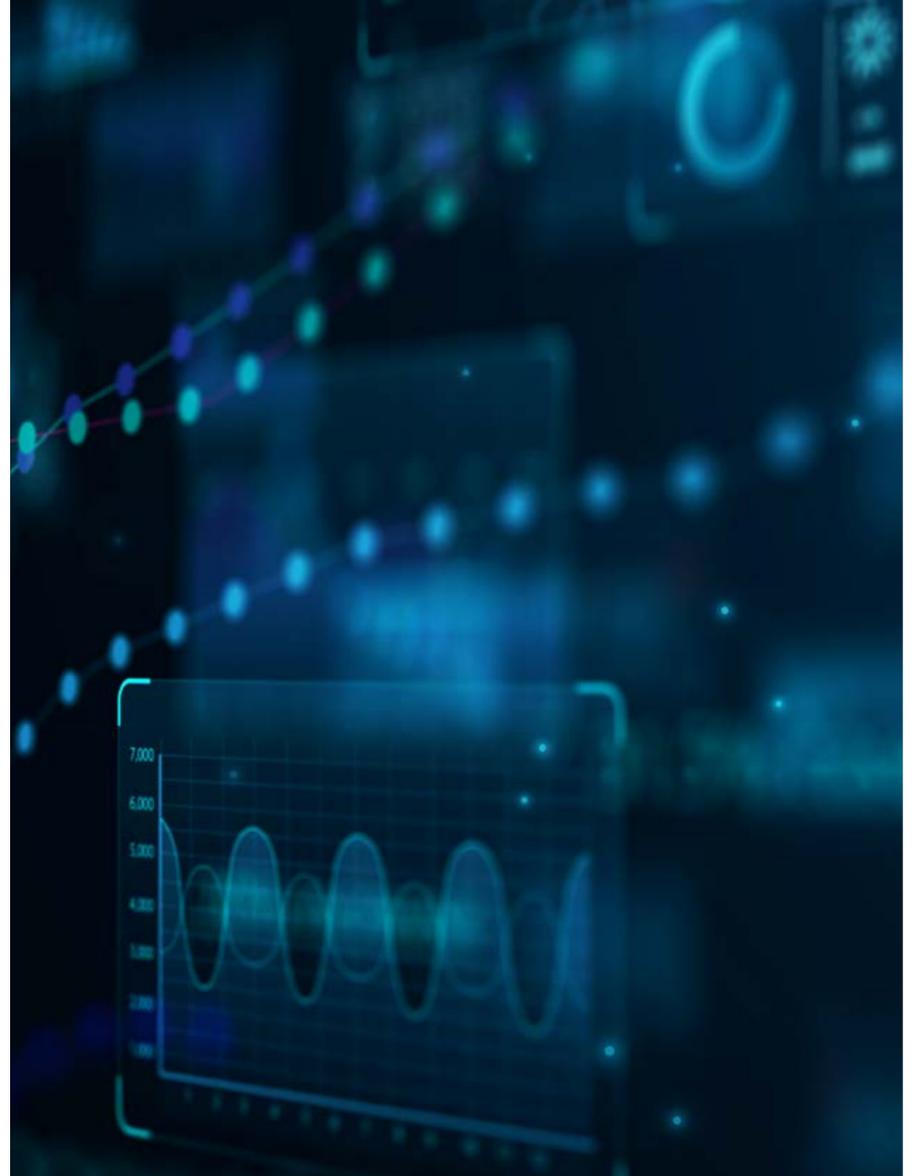
But a branded TLD is exclusively-controlled digital territory. Unlike .com and other gTLDs, where anyone can register variations of your brand name, brand TLDs are proprietary namespace. For example, Canon registered global.canon, which means only Canon can create subdomains within that space. They can use it widely, from hosting country-specific content on vn.canon to developing entirely new applications they haven't yet conceived.

This option for exclusivity emerged from ICANN's New gTLD Program, launched in 2012 to expand the internet's address space beyond legacy extensions. The program received nearly 2,000 applications, most of which were approved.

Branded TLDs must comply with ICANN's rule that these TLDs have to be closed to external registration, and must match the applicant's trademark to ensure authentic brand representation.

In the 2012 application round, technology leaders for many leading global companies jumped at the opportunity. Google applied for TLDs matching major products (.gmail, .chrome, .youtube, .android). Financial institutions like Citibank (.citi), HSBC (.hsbc), and Chase (.chase) secured their extensions. Automotive companies including BMW (.bmw) and Audi (.audi) also established digital territories. These weren't vanity projects, they were strategic investments in digital infrastructure and namespace protection.

During the 2012 round, Lodico says, there was a groundswell of enthusiasm for the new TLD opportunities. This time around, the buzz has



Understanding dotBrands Digital Real Estate You Really Control

**Exclusively Controlled
Digital Real Estate:**
A Proprietary,
Private Namespace

been later to start, but has been steadily rising as the application window nears. Lodico expects large companies to apply for their brand's name or the names of their major products as proprietary TLDs.

Why? There is still massive value to be added and extracted. We expect to see applications from companies in sectors like AI and Crypto, which weren't around last time, and from companies who have grown since 2012 who are looking to protect and creatively leverage their brand going forward.

While early enthusiasm might not yet have matched 2012, businesses have had time to experiment with dotBrands and consider options, so the decision is more straightforward: Will your business ever benefit from owning this asset.

Key Values of dotBrands



Namespace Control

Eliminates the need for costly defensive registrations and constant vigilance against cybersquatters.



Innovation Agility

Allows for rapid deployment of new subdomains for initiatives (e.g., ai.brand) without domain availability issues.



Premium Positioning

Signals innovation leadership and digital sophistication to both customers and competitors.



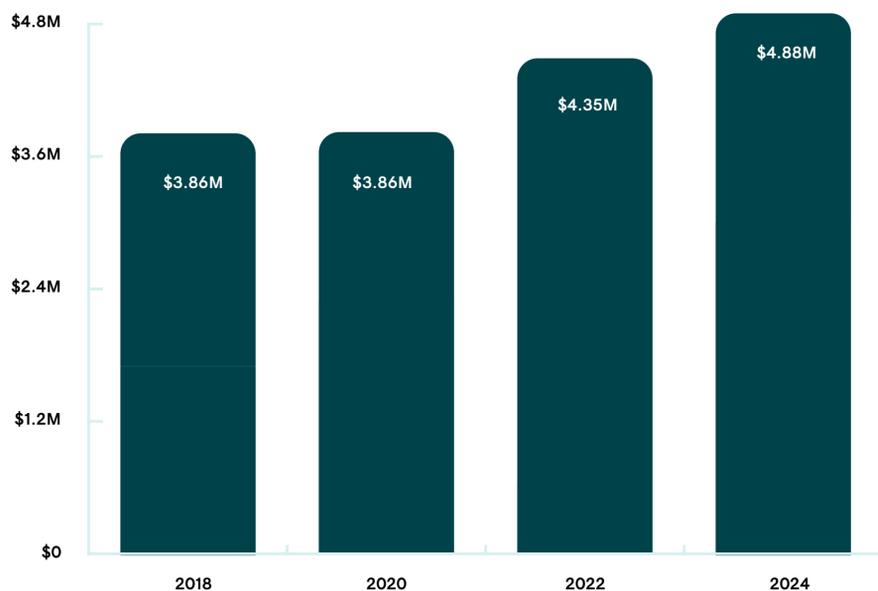
Enhanced Security Posture

Allows for the use of security features like the HSTS-preload list for gold-standard web security.

A Security Dividend That Pays Immediately

Companies uncertain about how (or whether) to deploy a brand TLD should still consider the immediate security benefits.

Growing cost of a data breach (IBM)



According to IBM's Annual Cybersecurity Report, **the average cost of a data breach in 2024 was \$4.88 million.** That number is expected to grow by 10% for 2025. In this threat landscape, owning your complete domain namespace helps build and secure the defense perimeter around your brand.

The mechanics are straightforward but powerful. Cybercriminals routinely register domains mimicking legitimate companies in order to fool consumers. Who hasn't seen a questionable purporting to be support or a job opportunity? These attacks succeed because people don't always distinguish legitimate domains from fraudulent ones.

DotBrand TLDs guard against this vulnerability. When our employees learn that internal corporate sites originate from .godaddy domains, for

example, it makes it harder for them to be phished. Our own TLD provides an unmistakable legitimacy signal for our organization.

Christina Yeh, former product strategy and marketing lead for the Google Registry, says the security benefits are key. "No 3rd party will be allowed to use it. Although you cannot prevent bad actors from registering and using open domains with your trademark in them, if you invest in using your dotBrand, you can train users to trust that these domains are authentic."

Yeh shares that you can also add dotBrands to the HSTS-preload list, which Google Registry did for both our open and closed namespaces. This ensures that any new website launched on your dotBrand can never be forced onto an insecure connection.

Says Yeh:

It's the gold-standard of website security.

Financial institutions in particular have embraced these security advantages. Banks face constant phishing threats, making brand TLD authentication signals especially valuable.

When Barclays redirected `barclays.com` to `home.barclays`, it illustrated how financial institutions can leverage brand TLDs to signal both innovation and security consciousness—qualities banking relationships rely on. With `.barclays`, clear domain ownership creates powerful defenses against social engineering attacks targeting the bank's customers.



600 Brands

Invested in creating their own branded TLDs—or dotBrands.

Brand TLDs Provide Immediate Operational Benefits

Value That Requires Minimal Implementation, Maximizing Namespace Control and Cost

Brand TLDs can deliver strategic value, even with minimal implementation. Traditional domain portfolio management demands constant vigilance against cybersquatters, defensive registrations across multiple TLDs, and complex trademark monitoring. Brand TLD owners significantly help eliminate these concerns by gaining complete namespace control and associated cost savings.

These TLDs provide premium positioning, which delivers value regardless of how much it's used. Operating on your own TLD signals innovation leadership and digital sophistication.

Marketing teams may value the flexibility for campaign management and product launches. Companies can rapidly deploy new subdomains for specific initiatives without worrying about domain availability or cybersquatting. When BMW previously created next100.bmw for their centenary celebration, they weren't just building a campaign website, they were demonstrating forward-thinking digital brand management.

A technology company launching an AI product could immediately secure a subdomain like ai.brand rather than negotiating for premium domains or accepting suboptimal alternatives.

Canon's move from canon.com to global.canon illustrates the practical benefit of this approach. Their press release explained they aimed to "enhance the Company's global brand value" through the simplicity and memorability of their brand TLD. The transition demonstrated technical capability, strategic commitment to digital brand identity, and enhanced digital security.



**“You’re buying an option.
You’re investing in the
future”**

Phil Lodico, Head of GoDaddy Corporate Domains, on preserving optionality when considering your own dotBrand application.

Investment

Is a dotBrand an Asset or a Cost?

There is, of course, a financial aspect to deciding whether to apply for a brand TLD. ICANN's 2026 application fee is \$227,000, with annual maintenance costs of \$25,800 plus additional expenses for registry service providers, optional outside counsel, and technical infrastructure.

Industry experts estimate total costs could exceed \$2 million over the first two years. It sounds like a lot, but the dollar amounts need to be weighed against alternatives and opportunity costs. Premium domain acquisitions regularly command millions—in 2011, *tesla.com* sold for \$11 million. Had *.tesla* been registered to the brand, they could have skipped this costly acquisition. For companies that would otherwise acquire multiple premium domains or invest heavily in defensive registrations, dotBrand ownership can provide better value.

Consumer Adoption

Gradual but Growing

Successful consumer adoption requires education and consistent implementation. Companies integrating branded TLDs across all marketing touchpoints, from television advertising to business cards, likely have the best recognition rates. The Australian Football League's broad use of *.afl* provides a well-executed example of a comprehensive approach, exposing millions of viewers to their branded TLD through integrated media.

Colin Costello, Senior Account Executive at GoDaddy Corporate Domains, points out another example: dotBbrands have even appeared in Super Bowl ads, signaling that companies expect consumers to recognize them.

Consumer trust metrics show particular promise in business sectors where authenticity matters most. A 2024 survey of internet users in France showed **77% had increased confidence in clearly branded domains**. This trust factor proves especially valuable for customer service interactions and secure transactions, like in banking, where companies like Barclays and BNP Paribas have adopted branded TLDs strategies.

Success Stories

From Cautious to Comprehensive

Real-world implementations demonstrate diverse approaches to brand TLD value realization. Google's systematic rollout showcases comprehensive deployment: `safety.google` for security initiatives, `ai.google` for artificial intelligence resources, `diversity.google` for inclusion programs, and `environment.google` for sustainability efforts. Each domain serves specific strategic purposes while reinforcing Google's brand identity.

Apple's `experience.apple` generated significant media attention at launch, demonstrating how brand TLDs amplify marketing impact. The domain hosts Apple's retail experience content, creating a memorable destination that reinforces brand while serving practical business purposes. Similarly, `newsroom.apple` provides a clear, branded destination for media resources.

CERN exclusively uses `.cern` as its TLD—appropriate, given that Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web there in the late 1980s.

With more than a decade of dotBrand implementations available to review, it's easier now for businesses to find examples that span from comprehensive deployment to selective implementation, showing how these TLDs deliver value across a variety of usage strategies.

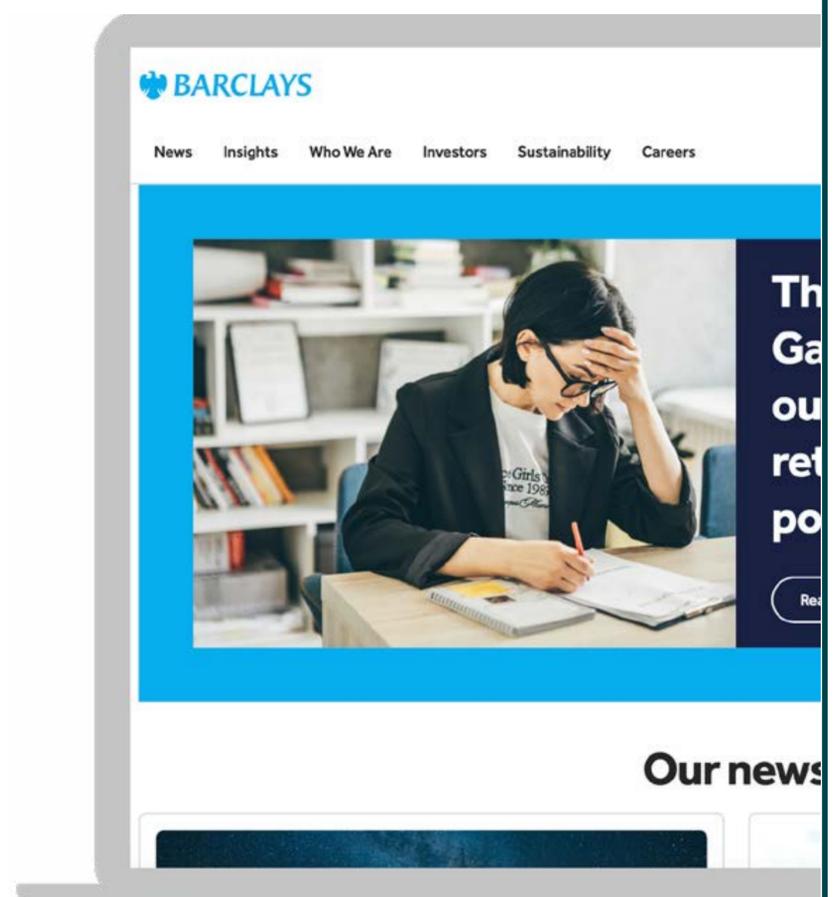
Case Study: Barclays PLC

Signaling Trust & Security

When Barclays moved from `barclays.com` to `home.barclays`, they leveraged their branded TLD to signal both innovation and security consciousness. For a financial institution, this clear domain ownership creates powerful defenses against social engineering attacks and provides an unmistakable assurance to customers during high-value interactions. Training users to trust this unique namespace is a strategic security decision.

Security and Brand Outcomes:

- **Stronger Phishing Defense:** Clear, proprietary namespace minimizes opportunities for domain mimicking.
- **Unmistakable Authenticity Signal:** The `.barclays` extension guarantees the domain is legitimate.
- **Innovation Leadership:** The transition demonstrates a strategic commitment to digital brand identity.



The Decision Framework:

Have an Opinion, Then Take Action

ICANN will open the next application round in April 2026. This timeline means you need to be planning now if you're going to apply. "Whoever's making the decision, you need to have an opinion," Costello says. Otherwise, you may miss your opportunity.

The first question, should we apply for our dotBrand, should be answered independently from questions about how it will be used. **Cole Quinn, a consultant who managed Microsoft's domains program and portfolio** for many years, says you have time to decide what to do with your dotBrand, but only if you have one: "Figure out the now and next. Do you want to make an application? If you don't do that, the other questions are answered."

To make your decision, ask your internal partners and collaborators:

- Do we want to maintain optionality for the future?
- Might we want to leverage a dotBrand within the next decade? No one really knows when the next round of applications will be.
- Do we need to ensure no one else gets the dotBrand with our name? Does anyone else in the world have rights to the same name as ours? While large organizations can often protect IP, there are only so many words that can be used as TLDs. Does your company want to protect its namespace in this way?
- Can we afford it? Preparing for the application and applying for branded domains will cost more this round than they did in 2012, but for big companies keen to implement a branded domain strategy or simply to protect future choice, the costs are reasonable.
- Would owning this namespace solve any ongoing problems or help us achieve key objectives?

The second question is, "how will you use your brand TLD?" You don't have to answer it right away, but it's a useful exercise to think through the following:

- Could owning our dotBrand protect us from millions of losses related to phishing?
- Might we want to innovate in this kind of digital territory?
- How might our customers be served better in the future if we have a branded TLD?
- What might we miss if we don't own this digital space?
- How do we plan to manage our dotBrand internally? What team will own it?

For organizations evaluating whether to apply, the decision should prioritize optionality over immediate implementation plans while taking a pragmatic look at what would come after application. Consider brand protection needs, digital transformation goals, customer security requirements, and long-term digital strategy.

Companies with significant cybersquatting concerns, complex domain portfolios, or strong premium brand positioning often find the strongest business cases, but the broader question is whether you can afford to be locked out of this opportunity for potentially another decade.

Our Recommendation

Preserve Optionality in an Uncertain Digital Future

- The 2026 window is a once-in-a-decade chance to secure digital infrastructure optionality.
- Decide first whether to secure the asset, and only then how to deploy it.
- DotBrands create clear authenticity signals in an environment of rising cyber threats.
- What matters is whether you can afford to forfeit the option to own the TLD for another decade.

We won't tell you that you need a dotBrand, but we do advise making a proactive decision, rather than letting this round pass you by. Affirmatively decide to apply or affirmatively decide not to.

As digital channels become increasingly central to business operations and customer relationships, brand TLD ownership represents strategic insurance against an uncertain future. The security benefits alone—creating clear authenticity signals in an environment of rising cyber threats—justify consideration.

The 2026 application window represents a once-in-a-decade opportunity to secure digital infrastructure optionality. Companies that invested in the 2012 round gained more than a decade of strategic flexibility and brand protection, whether they deployed extensively or not.

When you recognize that you're making two separate decisions, it becomes easier to decide first whether to secure the asset, and then how to deploy it. "If the answers to the 'why' questions are yes, the 'how' will come," Quinn says. In an increasingly digital world where trust, authenticity, and brand differentiation drive competitive advantage, controlling your own domain namespace isn't just a technical consideration, it's strategic insurance.

It doesn't matter whether you'll immediately transform your digital presence; what matters is whether you can afford to forfeit the option to do so. The internet's addressing system will continue evolving, but opportunities to acquire branded digital real estate are rare.

As you consider your brand's digital future, keep this in mind: **The companies that act on this opportunity will be best positioned for whatever digital transformation the next decade brings.**