



Entrepreneur Ray King with one of his pet pygmy goats

.gay Has a Lot to Say

Top Level Design introduces first-of-its-kind and socially conscious domain name.

BY JENN DIRECTOR KNUDSEN

In an online world inundated with content, certain words still have a way of cutting through the noise — even with only three letters.

“A domain name is an important, but sometimes overlooked, opportunity to convey meaning,” says Ray King, the entrepreneur behind domain name registry Top Level Design. (*Nota bene:* Top Level Design’s acronym is TLD, which also stands for top-level domains, or extensions, such as .com, .org and .net.)

Top Level Design’s .design extension was recently purchased by GoDaddy Registry. Top Level Design’s newest extension is .gay, a word that holds deep significance and meaning to communities around the world. “A domain name may be a tiny amount of content, but it can still convey a huge amount of meaning,” King says.

In 2012 ICANN, the internet-governing body that makes domain names available,

opened up the possibility to create new top-level domains.

“Since .com is so ubiquitous, it no longer conveys any specific meaning,” King says. “These new alternatives really stand out from the crowd.”

King and colleagues jumped at the opportunity to manage .gay, seeking to create a socially conscious domain that also makes a difference. Less than a year after its public launch in September 2020, .gay has 10,000 registrations and counting.

“We want people to know if you’re coming to a site that ends in .gay, you’re looking at a person, organization, or business that’s pro-LGBTQ,” King says.

He continues, “We want .gay to do more than just provide a new option; we want to do things differently to better serve and protect our core audience. We prohibit the use of .gay for homophobic, harassing, or anti-LGBTQ content. If we discover that someone is using .gay to spread hate or harm, we take swift action.”

“This policy is a domain-name industry first,” says King, noting that Top Level Design has acted against violations of the .gay Rights Protection Policy only around a dozen times since launch. “We thankfully haven’t had to

use the policy much, but we are prepared to step in whenever necessary to keep .gay a safer place.”

Another industry first is .gay’s baked-in community donation program: 20% of all new .gay registration revenue is donated to LGBTQ nonprofits. So far, .gay has donated more than \$148,000 to its inaugural beneficiaries, CenterLink and GLAAD.

Notable users of .gay domains include George Takei, Roxane Gay and Billie Jean King, as well as companies like Absolut Vodka, Atari and Calvin Klein. For businesses, .gay presents a brand-new opportunity to demonstrate support for LGBTQ communities.

“When a company uses a .gay domain, it sends a signal to LGBTQ people that they are welcome and valued,” says King. “With just three letters, .gay conveys respect, safety and pride. This is the power of the extension.”

King sees .gay as a model for other companies looking to make a positive social impact.

“By making our part of the internet safer, hopefully we’re helping to win the war against bad behavior. We want to show the industry and the world that focusing on community is good for business,” says King. ■

For more information, visit ohhey.gay.