

Unleashing the Power of a .brand

Sharing the Lessons Learned from the Launch of .neustar

A NEUSTAR REGISTRY SOLUTIONS EXCLUSIVE

neustar[®]
www.registry.neustar

What is a .brand?

Over 550 of the world's largest brands now have their own piece of internet real estate.



It's time to end the search, and start connecting

.brand

The future for a connected world

www.hello.neustar

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Executive Summary

THE WORLD OF DIGITAL HAS CHANGED

Today's digital marketers are facing ever-increasing challenges, with overly complex websites, skyrocketing paid search costs and greater interference in their customer relationships. Added all together, it's making their jobs harder by the day.

At Neustar, we truly believe .brand Top-Level Domains (TLDs) have a huge role to play in putting the power back into the hands of marketers. By empowering customers to connect directly to specific online information from the organizations they love, companies will see an increase in the efficiency of advertising, enhanced customer loyalty and meaningful impact to the bottom line.

We're so confident that .brands represent the future of the next generation of the Internet that we launched our own .neustar TLD to truly "walk the walk". In addition, we have created this launch guide for companies across the world, sharing what we learned during the journey up to our launch.

The .neustar launch has encompassed a wide variety of activities, including:

1. Rebuilding our new website using home.neustar
2. Building dedicated sites for each of our business units
3. Building our own Neustar search engine
4. Moving our staff emails to .neustar addresses
5. Moving to a new, branded URL shortener for social media
6. Creating additional pathways to our content via vanity URL redirects
7. Conducting an SEO analysis
8. Integrating the TLD with existing systems
9. Building an analytics framework
10. Creating a thorough communications plan
11. Making additional updates to reflect the change in address

We're excited to bring some further detail on our launch activities in this guide, to assist other .brands in their efforts and to inspire the marketers of today and tomorrow about the potential of .brands to create endless possibilities in our connected world.

Shawn Donovan

Chief Sales and Marketing Officer, Neustar

About This Launch Guide

If you're one of the 550+ companies that have already applied and received approval for your own TLD, this document is designed for you. It's a detailed look at what we learned as we planned, executed and launched our .neustar TLD.

Quite simply, we believe .brand TLDs represent one of the major pillars for the future of the Internet. The possibilities for creativity and innovation are nearly endless. And we're not alone – dozens of Fortune 500 companies have already joined the movement and launched their TLD.

Moving to .neustar was about more than promoting our own Registry Services capabilities. If we are going to talk the talk about TLDs, then we need to walk the walk. There is no stronger statement for a product or service

than using it yourself, and we're incredibly excited to be among the pioneers in this space.

This document will provide you with important tips, hints and suggestions based on our own experiences so your .brand launch goes as smoothly as possible. By sharing what we've learned in this Launch Guide, we hope to inform and empower other .brands with the know-how and resources to launch their own TLDs.

Want to get in touch to ask us questions or share some of your experiences? Feel free to reach out to us anytime at dotbrands@registry.neustar.



Why We Did it

There are countless motivations and benefits of launching a branded TLD, including:

Better control of the user experience

Our .neustar URLs are more intuitive and memorable, and require less clicks or keyboard strokes from visitors to get where they want to go. We know that very few people want to navigate our homepage to find what they want. Using .neustar URLs allow our customers to find the specific information they're seeking – first time, every time.

Increasing brand awareness

We now truly own 360-degree branding before and after the dot. Every website URL prominently features our brand name, while allowing huge creativity to include products, sub-brands and services to be built into the address itself and not relegated to a messy extension after a forward slash.

Reduce our search engine marketing expenditure

The nature of digital today means brands are more dependent than ever on search engines for their traffic – and the costs to play in this space are skyrocketing, putting significant pressure on our marketing budget and our ability to invest in other forms of advertising. By giving customers a better way to navigate to Neustar content, we can begin the process of reclaiming our traffic from third parties and reducing or reallocating our marketing spend.

Building trust with consumers and partners

Every address we create and promote contains our brand name and our digital 'seal of approval', because only we can create a .neustar address. Now every person who types in a .neustar URL or clicks on a link can do so with confidence because they'll know they're visiting an official, verified web page.

Improve our calls-to-action and stop paying twice

By creating more memorable and intuitive domains, we can use CTAs in our advertising that let customers find us quickly and easily. This saves us from paying once for advertising, then a second time for paid search because there's no easy way for customers to navigate directly to us.

Being an innovator, not a follower

By getting started now, we can truly be ahead of the curve. We're showing that we're committed to taking bold steps to provide a better, more intuitive online customer experience – and be among the .brand pioneers.

We're in great company

The 550+ organizations that secured their own .brand TLDs read like a "who's who" list of the world's biggest, brightest and most innovative brands. We're thrilled to be among the likes of Google, Apple, Microsoft, Audi, Samsung and many more – that's truly great company!

See who else is using .brand TLDs by visiting makeway.world.

The .neustar Initiatives

The What, How and Why

1. Rebuilding Our New Website Using **home.neustar**

This initiative was the primary public change of our .neustar transition. We've moved our company website from its original .biz address (neustar.biz) to a .neustar address (home.neustar).

Why did we do this?

This is the key step in presenting our new TLD to the world. Moving our web presence over to .neustar means our online presence now sits on our very own corner of the Internet, and lets us start communicating to our customers and contacts that there's now a simpler, quicker, more intuitive way to navigate to Neustar content online.

Plus, it's our homepage – so let's start calling things what they are, right?

How did we do this?

Choosing a domain

Owning our own TLD gives us full reign on the words and phrases we choose to register as domain names, so we could have chosen anything for our homepage. However, tapping into consumer navigation behavior online is key, so it was important to choose something visitors would find intuitive and memorable.

Also, we're not alone, as 'home' is the most commonly registered term

among all .brands, with more than 50 organizations having already registered their 'home.brand' domain.

Building in a website redesign

Moving our website to a new address was a good opportunity for us to assess our overall website. We chose to use this time to also revamp the design to create a better user experience with more user-friendly functionality, letting visitors navigate and access information in a cleaner format. We implemented rollover elements, changed our drop-down menus, redesigned the footer, and much more.

Grouping large updates like this into one launch obviously requires more work, but can minimize the impact to end-users by reducing the number of times obvious cosmetic changes are made.

In addition, we've also added some streamlined functionality that we think will add to our site's quality scores and domain authority, and may help with factors such as SEO.

Moving to a .brand TLD is an ideal time for your web designers and marketing experts to consider creative solutions to build out an engaging homepage that will rack up the page views and send your bounce rate tumbling.

Assessing website content

A .brand launch is also a prime opportunity to evaluate content on the front end and make some adjustments "behind the scenes" in preparation for your migration. This may involve:

- Performing a content audit
- Deleting old, obsolete web pages
- Deleting or updating material that may be using an outdated design and URL
- Updating web addresses in online display ads
- Adding or updating text links to improve SEO for your new TLD
- Developing a strategy on using your brand TLD to create any microsites
- Updating your 404 page to something more creative with new links so it's not a "dead end" for users
- Checking in with your Legal department to make sure you are following the rules and regulations regarding operating a TLD.

Upgrading our CMS

With future scalability in mind, we took the plunge and invested in a newer, more sophisticated system that can handle the demands of a multi-site TLD. This allowed us to install one code base that could scale to hundreds of domains without the need for a lot of time and effort from our development and content teams.

One of the biggest challenges was taking the existing blog and breaking it out into the separate sites. Existing tagging, clever engineering and time-intensive manual work ultimately produced the solution we were seeking.

The upgrade gave us an opportunity to invest more time and effort in automated testing. We have a mix of both unit tests and acceptance tests. Each code change triggers a suite of unit tests. After each deployment a suite of acceptance tests are executed to ensure everything runs as expected.

Pros:

- A single point of entry for content management of all sites
- A single code base promotes code reuse
- A single application is cheaper and easier to maintain

Cons:

- An outage could impact all sites

Long term, this is going to pay enormous dividends for us as we gain operational efficiencies and streamline our previously complicated work processes.

Key considerations

Website technology checklist (preparation)

- Update Google Tag Management and AdWords tags
- Update/clean cookie tagging for more accurate tracking
- Update Google Analytics, create a Segment for each of your TLDs
- Benchmark pre-migration metrics and data, so you can measure pre- and post-launch performance for domain authority, organic search, paid search, SEM rank, referral traffic, bounce rates, etc.
- Register your new domain in Google Webmaster tool
- Create a new XML sitemap
- Map out all URLs from current website and move to the .brand
- Use 301 permanent one-to-one redirects from the old pages to new pages (as they are permanent) to ensure the best link equity for search engines
- Communicate to Google that it should stop tracking/ crawling your previous domain
- Set up “drop” alerts for your keywords and traffic
- Cleanse and append your vanity URL list
- Perform keyword matching, tying strategically important keywords to the most relevant URL on your website
- Contact high-referring sites and have them update/ change backlinks to the new .brand address.



2. Building Dedicated Sites for Each of Our Business Units

To replace the traditional structure of having business units, sub-brands, and so on, all located on the same single domain with lengthy extensions (i.e. [neustar.biz/security](#)), we set up specific sites for our key business units on their own dedicated domains, including:

- [security.neustar](#)
- [marketing.neustar](#)
- [registry.neustar](#)
- [risk.neustar](#)
- [communications.neustar](#)

Why did we do this?

Having unique addresses for each of the business units allows our Solutions groups to have their own memorable, .neustar-branded home online. This can then be used as a call-to-action in marketing collateral, at events, in digital and out of home ads, and much more. It taps in to one of the key benefits of .brand domains – creating short, memorable domains that tell you from the outset what information you can expect and who's bringing it to you. In addition, it allows for customization of the user experience and of the messaging to targeted personas.

How did we do this?

Maintaining regular website functionality

Firstly, we wanted our online presence to still function like a standard website. We studied the existing information architecture and looked at the new sites' IA to determine the best user experience. This informed our new navigation. It was important for a user to access general corporate information (like news and job opportunities), as well as support product and logins from each site.

We carried the same look and feel through each of these sites, creating a master navigation that links from the homepage menus so visitors can navigate to and between different business units and parts of the website, just as they could if it was all on one site.

With the use of a common header and footer across all sites, updates can be made once in the CMS and be automatically reflected across all sites. Additionally, we established a multi-site instance of our CMS to accommodate the change to multiple TLD sites.

Updates to the TLD sites are still made by the same group of people who maintained the single site, but bloggers can now add or update their blogs within each TLD site, rather than search through a lengthy list of blogs by date to find what they are looking for. Additionally, we split resources up by TLD for easier management and updating.

Lastly, we applied data layer tagging in the CMS to tag each page with the TLD site name, the associated product, the type of page (blog, product page, corporate page), and so on. This helps us in Google Analytics reporting (so we can segment one TLD site from another) and look at sets of pages within a TLD, for deeper analytics. If you do this, make sure your GTM regular expressions get updated to reflect your new structure.

In addition to the primary business units, we also created other departmental domains like [support.neustar](#).



3. Building Our Own Neustar Search Engine

Beyond the standard internal search function of our website that many organizations have, we chose to build a new search tool at search.neustar that allows visitors to find whatever they need within the Neustar site.

Why did we do this?

Our existing search function wasn't used that much. We know people are searching for information about Neustar, but we'd prefer it if our customers did the searching directly on our website. We created our own search.neustar page where visitors can quickly search and find the relevant content they're looking for because it scans each of our six different sites – without confusing ads or distractions from irrelevant or competing results.

How did we do this?

As it turned out, we (and pretty much every company) had a site search tool already operational in some hard-to-find little box in the top of our website. In our case, it was being powered by a Google tool we have on our network known as a Google Search Appliance (GSA) which will soon be unsupported by Google, but indeed there are lots of organizations that power similar tools.

From there, our awesome design team simply mocked up a page and connected to the API, and once complete, we managed to "tune" the results set in terms of bringing the results we'd like our customers to see for specific terms. This involved a bit of moving the outdated info farther down the results page, and highlighting the most relevant info to come to the top when relevant for the keywords entered by the user.



4. Moving Our Staff Emails to .neustar Addresses

This initiative involved transitioning our staff and group emails from @neustar.biz addresses to a variety of new addresses on .neustar, including:

- All staff emails now have the structure name@team.neustar
- Customer Support teams have emails on @support.neustar
- Some unique cases have been built on @team.neustar that sit outside the regular structure

Why did we do this?

Email is one of the first and most regular touchpoints that our clients, customers, suppliers and other stakeholders have with the Neustar brand. Every time we contact someone by email, they'll now see an address that ends in .neustar – making it a great way to introduce people to the .neustar TLD and train them to recognize this as our verified home online. Not only that, but it gets reinforced in every email and in all our email signatures, business cards and more, so it's like free advertising for the .neustar TLD.

How did we do this?

Preparing and performing the email domain cut-over

An email transition such as this starts with the discovery phase. The first two

things we needed to find out were:

1. How are email users being authenticated?
2. How are the email addresses linked to our Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP)?

Fortunately for our program, our IT team has the inventory of all applications including our Identity Management Systems. We then had to find out where and within which apps the user's information was stored – such as in third-party applications like PeopleSoft, Workday, etc. It took our team a month just to get the lay of the land, design a strategy and assess the impact to users, customers and processes.

Why use varying addresses?

While the majority of staff emails were restructured as firstname.surname@team.neustar addresses, we decided there were benefits in having some different options for certain groups.

- @support.neustar – If a customer types in "support.neustar" as a URL, they're taken to the Customer Support login portal. Consistently with this, the same domain is used by all Customer Service staff so they're instantly identifiable to clients, as well as mitigating blacklisting risks as above.

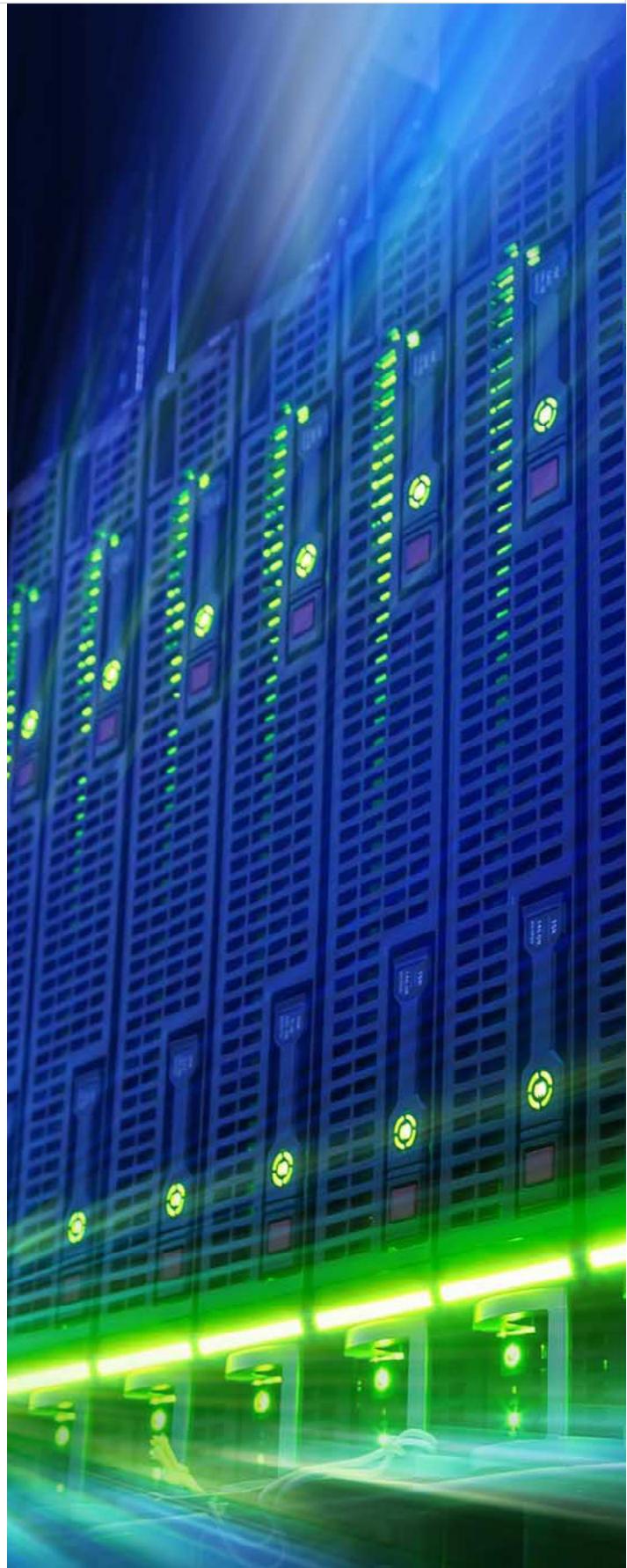
- youoptionhere@team.neustar – In some instances we've opted for creative solutions to replace the "firstname.lastname" email structure. This allows us to create useful group addresses, as well as providing some privacy for senior executives so their email addresses aren't easily predictable.

Timing & process – a staggered approach

We decided to execute the cut-overs through a staggered approach, by breaking the emails into multiple groups. Initially, a very small and select test group of 20 users was transitioned and used to identify any bugs.

As confidence grew through our experience with the test group, we expanded the size and scope. The second group was 50 people, then we included an entire organizational unit, followed by a regional rollout.

After each rollout, we checked in with our designated power users/program champions for feedback. This was critical in making sure we were ready for each successive rollout. We also sent out a survey directly to each user within two weeks of the rollout to gain further feedback. This was instrumental in providing the information we needed to refine the cut-over process and make any necessary fixes.



Contingencies & back-up plans

We retained everyone's previous @neustar.biz emails as a secondary email address in Microsoft Exchange, ensuring contacts who are unaware of our .brand transition will still be able to successfully send us emails.

Keeping the @neustar.biz emails was also an important backup in the event staff try to sign into an external system that doesn't yet recognize .neustar as a valid email address. While rare, this does still happen, so it's valuable to have as an alternate option.

Key considerations

Email migration checklist

- Ensure you have a detailed communications plan to inform, reassure and educate employees and external contacts about the change.
- Test automated email and lead generation software for compatibility with the new addresses, such as Salesforce and Marketo.
- Log the testing details for each test plan as you go, creating an easy reference to see which ones successfully passed.
- Provide white-glove service and support for senior executives and other prominent voices to ensure their ongoing support of the project.
- Work with IT and external partners to ensure your new TLD emails are white-listed and aren't sent to spam.
- Integrate as many external applications with your Single Sign-On (SSO) as possible so as to minimize the number of manual updates to credentials required by staff.
- Set reasonable expectations and timeframes so everyone is comfortable with the transition.

5. Moving to a New, Branded URL Shortener for Social Media

Having previously used a combination of URL-shortening tools such as Bitly, Ow.ly and Spr.ly, we now shorten all our social media links using a .neustar vanity URL. Since moving to .neustar, each post we put on social media now primarily uses t.neustar links to reinforce our brand and message in every post.

Why did we do this?

There are countless reasons to implement a URL shortener on a .brand domain. For us, this included the fact that it;

- Was easy to implement using free or low-cost tools
- Provides added security with the reassurance that .neustar links are secure
- Fits in simply with our social team's existing workflow
- Provides a regular, repeated touchpoint for our customers with the .neustar TLD

Every time we post a social link, our followers are exposed to .neustar – so it's invaluable reinforcement of our new .brand.

How did we do this?

Choosing a domain

The key factor when deciding which domain to use for our URL shortener was length. For a number of reasons, including the fact that ".neustar" already contains eight characters, we decided a one-character domain was the way to go.

Our first choice of vanity URL was "t.neustar". Given that the shortener is used primarily on Twitter, the "t" character subtly references the platform, and also gives a sense of familiarity with the new domain as Twitter's native

shortener is "t.co". However, for testing purposes we also use "i.neustar" on some platforms and will likely consolidate to one of these domains in the long term.

Integration with existing workflows

One of the key factors in ensuring the new URL shortener is used consistently was to integrate it with the existing processes, systems and workflows undertaken by the social team. This meant that there would be little-to-no behavioral change required on their part and wouldn't require extensive re-training or configuration. To ensure this, we spoke with the teams about their processes and determined which platforms were most popular for management, and then looked for solutions that could integrate with these systems.

Choosing a technical provider

With our social team primarily using Sprinklr for day-to-day management of our social channels, the provider we chose to host the URL shortener needed to be able to integrate with Sprinklr.

In the initial phases we used two providers as we were still testing the best practice for our URL shortener. Some of our platforms used a link-shortening application called Rebrandly, as it had the capability to customize the extension text in each shortened link (i.e. i.neustar/launchguide instead of i.neustar/jf43H). Alternately, we also used Bitly, as it was already set up to integrate with the Sprinklr platform. However, note that it does not currently allow for customization of links on a baseline package. The choice of provider is a decision that will be determined following further testing and requirement-gathering.



6. Creating Additional Pathways to Our Content Via Redirects

In addition to our individual sites for our business units, we've created more than 600 domains on .neustar that are set up as temporary or permanent redirects to content deeper on the Neustar websites. This means that domains like [lisahook.neustar](#) and [blog.neustar](#) don't each host individual content, but can be used to navigate to specific locations and information on our site.

Why did we do this?

There was both a proactive and defensive reason to adopt this strategy. Defensively, our redirecting domains include common misspellings and relevant terms that could capture people attempting to use the .neustar domain, but they misremember the address. More proactively, we want to train visitors that when they know what they want from Neustar, they can type in '`<anythingtheywant>.neustar`' into the URL bar and find the most relevant information – rather than going to search, where our probability of extra costs or lost traffic increases substantially.

Our 600+ redirects mean that customers looking for products or services, such as DDoS mitigation, could go to [ddos.neustar](#) and end up on our Security Solutions page, and so on. This gives us greater control of the customer experience, as well as reducing our paid search costs.

How did we do this?

Combining a variety of our data sources, we scraped all the major keywords that could relate to our organization. This included:

- Search data
- Subdomain folder names
- Keywords we bid on
- Metadata tags
- Product and service areas (i.e. [ddos.neustar](#))
- Key staff (i.e. [ceo.neustar](#))
- Locations (i.e. [newyork.neustar](#))
- Key functions and keywords (i.e. [contactus.neustar](#))

From there, we used a variety of public and private search tools to determine the relevance of each term and rank it for importance.

Once we had determined the exact list of terms we wanted to the left of .neustar, we went through the process with a team of internal experts determining where the user should land for each of these .neustar domains that were typed in.

For example, [ceo.neustar](#) would redirect the user to [home.neustar/about-us/leadership](#) page.

We're very fortunate at Neustar, in that we run one of the world's premier DNS networks. Using our own technology, we were able to put in place 301 redirects for each of these domain names in a matter of minutes. Most organizations will be able to handle this with their own infrastructure and a little support from your IT team.

7. Conducting an SEO Analysis

To be extra sure we had taken all the right precautionary steps toward addressing the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) impact of our transition, we partnered with an SEO agency and our own Registry and Marketing teams to analyze the impact of the transition on our SEO performance, and develop an action plan.

Why did we do this?

The move to home.neustar was a significant one, in that we were changing domains and also building a new site simultaneously. The analysis included an initial audit of our digital assets and allowed us to devise a plan to minimize adverse effect on our SEO and SEM when we moved from neustar.biz to home.neustar, which included strategies to build authority on the new sites as quickly as possible.

How did we do this?

Plan, monitor, test, repeat

After our initial analysis had been completed, we put together a detailed step-by-step plan to make sure all best practices for SEO were followed. In addition, our agency had SEM campaigns ready to launch immediately, to boost both the Domain and Page Authority for all our new websites.

This is an ongoing effort, for which we'll obviously gain more data and results over time. Through constant monitoring and testing, we are continuing to uncover the best approach and provide guidance and advice for other brands.

Here are a few details on what we did:

Part of our plan included the timing of the TLD launch. Choosing a low-visibility month, December in our case, to launch our TLDs was critical for this project. With less traffic on the site, we had more time to monitor, make adjustments and ensure the move proved successful.

We soft-launched mid-November to test out all integrations between the TLD sites, knowing we needed full confidence for the public launch on Dec. 1.

Our December traffic typically drops as much as 20%. Couple that with a site move, which is generally expected to drop 10-15%, and you have a big fall-off in traffic. Scary? You bet.

The good news: Our January metrics from all sites rolled up compared to December have increased for Sessions, Page Views, and Session Duration. We even managed to decrease our bounce rate. Better yet, Organic traffic has increased 15%. And some of our individual TLD sites are seeing nearly double their typical traffic.

We established one-to-one redirects for

each page of the original site. This step is laborious, but key to retaining SEO. Since the launch, our search rankings appear to be back to pre-launch levels and are improving weekly.

We also looked at the data-layer tagging on each page and updated any pages we had created during the cut-over to ensure we could report correctly on traffic.

We added new XML site maps through Google Search Console and Bing Webmaster, and told both Google and Bing (our primary search engines) to stop watching the old site. At the time of launch, we closely watched the indexing patterns of Google and Bing to ensure the sites were being crawled properly and indexing was increasing each week. Now we update our sitemaps monthly, adding new sitemaps to Google and Bing to ensure new pages have a chance to be indexed. We also cleaned up our sitemaps to only include the valuable content and asset pages we wanted crawled, rather than a dump of every results pages.

We also followed backlink reports to make sure we retained as many backlinks as possible (and we did). By comparing pre- and post-backlink reports for each site, we were easily able to see trends.

The first weeks were nerve-racking, as Google and Bing took their time to crawl our sites. So give it time – it will rebound!



8. Integrating the TLD with Existing Systems

We worked diligently to ensure our .neustar domains can be integrated with various other technical systems already in place at Neustar, including our content management system (CMS), customer relationship management (CRM) tools, Single Sign-On (SSO) and more.

Why did we do this?

For ease of use internally, as well as consistency of message, we wanted to ensure staff members could use their new .neustar email addresses wherever possible and make a simple transition, rather than having to maintain the .biz addresses for use in various systems.

Like all big organizations, we use multiple applications that have evolved over time. The move to .neustar allowed us some time to rationalize this and find methods for consolidation, ensuring we have maintained our network with maximum efficiency.

How did we do this?

Again, just like with the email migration, it all starts with discovery and figuring out how employees are authenticated from the systems. Our IT organization owns the detailed inventory of all our users and the technical information of all our applications as part of the company's COBIT governance process. We then had to find out where, and within which apps, the user's information was stored – like Microsoft Exchange, PeopleSoft, Workday, Salesforce, etc. It took our team more than a month to interview different business and IT owners/stakeholders of each application to understand all the configurations and special setups. We then documented all our findings and designed a common strategy to access the business impacts to our users, customers and processes.

With that information in hand, we then proceeded to work with different internal system owners and SaaS (Software as a Service) vendors to integrate as many systems as possible to our Single Sign-On system (Neustar uses Sailpoint.) The goal was to

minimize any potential business impacts when we moved our employees to the new @team.neustar email addresses.

For systems that were either not compatible or too risky to integrate with our SSO system, our communication plan included separate emails to those employees with new instructions on how to continue to use their old email addresses as their log-in credential.

Things to consider: application checklists

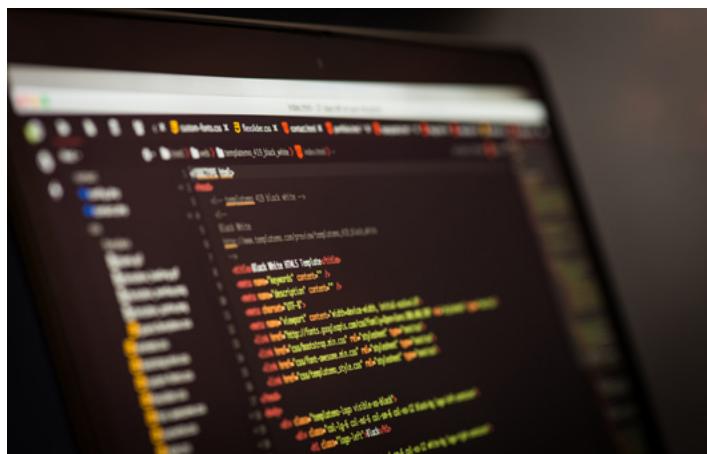
- As you are testing application compatibility within your system, you might want to log the testing details for each test plan as you go, giving you an easy reference to see which ones have successfully passed.
- If you're concerned about users going into their browser for the first time after the cut-over because the Internet is not part of their authentication, you should consider adding that into their SSO. It will make for a smoother user experience and cut down on "access denied" screens like we would get from Zscaler.
- The Help Desk team might need to be on standby to be deployed quickly if the cut-over didn't go as designed. We identified all of our company's individuals and vendors of each applications that were required to perform any necessary steps, in sequence, for the cut-over to be successful, then set up a "war room" to execute the steps.
- We broke the email rollout by phases. After each rollout, we validated the success with the program champions. We then sent out a survey to each user to create a feedback loop to improve the smoothness of the next rollout.

9. Building an Analytics Framework

Being able to gauge the success of our .neustar launch meant bringing together several key metrics and objectives into a seamless analytics framework, so we could track this over time and determine the overall success of the project.

Why did we do this?

Given the scale of the launch project, it was important to be able to take an overall view of its success as well as identifying any specific areas that were under- or over-performing. This allows for continual monitoring and the ability to locate and address issues as they arise.



How did we do this?

Post-launch website monitoring checklist

Once the initial fanfare of the launch had passed, we developed a checklist of items to monitor post-launch, in order to gauge key performance indicators (KPIs) and identify any issues.

- Keep track of weekly indexing numbers through Google Console and Bing Webmaster tools
- Monitor any flags that have triggered a drop alert
- Check Search Engine Marketing (SEM) rankings for paid search
- Check keyword performance through tools like BrightEdge
- Monitor inbound links to our homepage from external sources (using available tools from third-parties such as Moz, Majestic, BrightEdge, or Google Console)
- Check backlink history over time
- Check for any change in Domain Authority – if it drops, contact Google
- Check the metrics for microsites individually and set up separate views of these in GA
- Ask individual teams and subject-matter experts to review websites for broken links, bad redirects, 404 errors etc., and fix them ASAP, or use a tool like SiteImprove to do it for you!

10. Creating a Thorough Communications Plan

Our Corporate Communications and Customer Service teams, together with many others across the organization, meticulously planned our internal and external announcements and communications throughout the entire process.

Why did we do this?

In any major change, communication is key and we've gone to significant lengths to make sure all of our stakeholders understand the timing and purpose of our transition. Internally, this ensures all our teams feel a part of the change and can become champions of the new .neustar TLD. Externally, it ensures our clients, partners and other stakeholders are informed and know how the change impacts them.

How did we do this?

A Neustar branding project

It was important to us that launching our .neustar TLD was about more than domain names; this is a project that supports and grows the Neustar brand and will be integrated into everything we do in digital. Therefore, our communications and marketing plan was driven by the Corporate Communications team, supported by the technical and subject-matter experts across the organization. This allowed for a more centralized approach to communicating internally and externally about our move to .neustar.

An integrated marketing & communications plan

Our Corporate Communications and Customer Services teams, together with the IT group and many others across the organization, mapped out both internal and external announcements and communications throughout the entire process. Some of the platforms and channels we incorporated into this plan included:

- Internal email announcements
- Client & partner communications
- Public relations and media releases
- Social media posts and advertising
- Campaign landing pages
- Content marketing
- Programmatic & digital advertising
- SEM campaigns

Preparing customer-facing staff

From an external view, keeping our business partners and customers apprised of the move was crucial to maintaining harmony in our most important relationships. We knew there was a chance of receiving questions, so we prepared a "talking points" document for customer-facing staff, with answers to some of the most common queries. As a private company, we didn't have to brief analysts, but this same approach can be adopted for investor and analyst relations teams in publicly traded companies.

11. Making Additional Updates to Reflect the Change in Address

We did a sweep of our marketing collateral, social media accounts, email signatures and more to ensure any reference to our website or email addresses was updated to reflect our new addresses.

Why did we do this?

This step is a no-brainer. We're all-in with .neustar, and it's important that we convey a clear and consistent message about our new web and email addresses. Having a mix of old and new domains scattered around online and offline would have weakened our message and could lead to confusion.

How did we do this?

Lots of planning, then be nimble

As much as possible, we considered all the places where our web and email addresses appear, are linked to, or are listed. Beyond this, we ensured that as soon as we discovered anything that had been missed, we were able to move quickly to update this as well. Some of the platforms and locations to consider updating include:

- Voicemail messages
- Business cards
- Email signatures
- Boilerplates
- Marketing collateral
- Product and service literature
- Social media accounts
- Digital advertising
- Partner websites

Provide instructions for internal updates

One of the major updates we conducted to reflect the address change was in our staff email signatures. As they all include our website, it was important that we update this so that every email we send acts as reinforcement of our new address. In addition, we added the email address to our signature as further reiteration of this message.

As our email signatures are not managed centrally, in order to roll out the change we required the manual effort of all staff members. Because of this, we included clear instructions of why and how to make this change as part of our internal communications plan, allowing for customization where appropriate. For example, people in our Marketing Solutions team may choose to use [home.neustar](#) or [marketing.neustar](#) as the primary website in their signature.



Key Considerations – Questions to Ask Before Launch

OK, so you have your plan and you're ready to go.

Here are the top questions you may want to ask yourself before you take your first steps into the new digital world with your .brand.

Does our C-suite support this project?

One of the first things a .brand team needs to accomplish is gaining buy-in from the C-suite and other executives. At Neustar, we had tremendous support from our CEO Lisa Hook, and she was a driving force and strong advocate for our .neustar transition. This went a long way in maintaining financial and resourcing support for the project throughout its entirety and helped us overcome the occasional bump in the road when we found ourselves facing a minor challenge.

Who should be in our project team?

We knew for our .neustar launch to be successful, we needed to cover our bases and ensure all aspects of the business were considered and represented. In order to facilitate consistency and accountability, we identified some key internal roles:

- **C-Suite lead** – facilitator, decision-maker, financial supporter, resource allocator
- **IT lead** – executes the plan from a network/systems perspective, defines scope
- **Program/project manager** – schedule keeper and delegator
- **Communications & marketing leads** – create and distribute internal communications and external marketing campaigns
- **Organizational unit leads** – power users, system testers, conduits to their teams

Do we have a soft launch, or a hard launch?

When it's time to hit the "go" button and launch your .brand, you'll have to decide on a soft or hard launch – that is, when do you make a public announcement about the change? To mitigate risk, Neustar decided to take the soft launch approach.

While we felt fully confident that we had done our due diligence and tested everything fully, we decided it was in our best interest to give ourselves some room and test the TLD live. Over a number of months, we rolled out our multiple .brand TLD email domains including @team.neustar email addresses, and select websites, conducted a soft launch of the new sites, progressed to a public launch and announcement, and then a full-scale marketing campaign.

Do we launch all at once, or take a piecemeal approach?

Another decision .brands need to make is whether to change your entire website to a .brand, or start small with a specific part of your business while leaving your existing domain as your primary web source. At Neustar, we went with the "big bang" approach to launching our TLD, moving everything from our .biz domain over to .neustar as part of the same project (though rolling it out in a soft launch approach, as described above.)

In addition to our steadfast commitment to becoming a .brand, doing everything at once means that we don't have to consistently revisit the process. While this means we need to carefully plan the initial education and

learning phase for external stakeholders, over time they will come to recognize .neustar as our official online presence, while also eliminating potential confusion that could come from having different elements on different TLDs.

Do we create a policy for creating domains?

Taking the time to implement an internal domain policy is extremely important.

We worked across functions to develop guidelines for creating new domain names, to provide structure, make the process easier, and avoid future naming disagreements or issues. Just as the creative teams adhere to design style guides for websites and graphics; having a clear set of principles for creating domains means there's much less of a chance for misinterpretations or surprises in the future, and increases the consistency of our digital brand.

This will also include your approval paths, branding guidelines, etc.

Expect this process to have a variety of senior marketers, digital/IT specialists and some involvement from your legal team.

How Neustar Can Help

We have already supported dozens of brands in their .brand launches – and while this Launch Guide is designed to provide a ton of valuable information for building out your .brand, we know there are always going to be additional details and questions that arise.

For a more detailed look at the ICANN process and requirements, as well as some of the legal-related tasks you should undertake before going live, take a look at our 30-page

[whitepaper](#), "A 360° View on Launching and Operating Your TLD". Note that this was written before we launched .neustar so it doesn't include the context of our own experience.

We're proud to be the only global Registry Solutions provider in the world with first-hand experience as a .brand applicant, so if you have questions or would like to know how we can help you with your .brand project, please get in touch with us at [1-855-898-0036](tel:1-855-898-0036) or dotbrands@registry.neustar.



About Neustar Registry Solutions

As the largest provider of core Registry and digital naming services, we help the most innovative global brands tap into the power and possibilities offered by today's new platforms for digital identity. Neustar Registry Solutions guide brands through the complete lifecycle of developing a trusted and secure Internet domain ecosystem from identifying the possibilities of a new domain name strategy and the initial set-up to the implementation and ongoing ROI analysis.

We support over 300 of the world's .brand pioneers and operate the back-end technology and marketing for several Top-Level Domains (TLDs), including the fastest growing city TLD .nyc, and high profile domains like .biz, .US, .CO and .au. Our Registry Solutions portfolio is part of Neustar, Inc., a leading global information services provider driving the connected world forward with trusted, holistic identity resolution. More information is available at registry.neustar.

About Neustar.

Neustar, Inc. is a leading global information services provider driving the connected world forward with trusted, holistic identity resolution. As the only company capable of understanding who is on the other end of every interaction, Neustar is trusted by the world's great brands to grow and guard their businesses with the most complete understanding of how to connect people, places and things. The combination of Neustar's unique, accurate, and real-time identity system and our cloud-based workflow solutions empower our clients to make actionable, precise and valuable decisions across marketing, risk, IT/security, network and operations departments. As the sole provider of the U.S. Number Portability Administration Center (NPAC), Neustar also facilitates the routing of all telephone call and text messages in the U.S. More information is available at www.home.neustar.

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