



A dotBrand's Journey

THE HISTORY OF .CISCO
FROM APPLICATION TO
CURRENT USE CASES

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Inga is a legal professional with 18 years at Cisco Systems, specializing in managing global trademark and domain name portfolios. Known for collaborating with cross-functional teams, she develops strategic solutions to optimize processes and enhance operational efficiency.

Outside of work, she enjoys gardening, traveling, exploring the outdoors, and spending time with her family.



Manager, Strategic Initiatives
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Chris is a domain name professional with 20+ years of experience in the corporate registrar space. A subject matter expert on the New gTLD Program and dotBrand generic Top-Level Domains, he has managed multiple gTLDs through all aspects of the program (application, evaluation, delegation, and launch).

He is a thought leader who is adept at delivering services and support solutions around dotBrand Services, Domain Strategy, and Domain Recovery

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Markmonitor is a corporate registrar that has worked with Cisco Systems, Inc. (hereafter Cisco) for over 20 years and has provided services in relation to Cisco's dotBrand generic Top-Level-Domain (gTLD), .cisco, since 2019.

In this white paper we will discuss the following:

- The definition of a dotBrand gTLD
- History of the .cisco dotBrand gTLD
- Cisco's use cases in the .cisco name space
- Markmonitor services that Cisco utilizes to support the management of .cisco
- Markmonitor services for applicants in the ICANN New gTLD Program: Next Round
- Concluding thoughts

Learning about a particular dotBrand's journey can help potential applicants for dotBrand gTLDs in 2026 determine their application and use case strategies, select providers, and make other internal tactical decisions that can positively affect their efforts in the area. for potential implementation is crucial. Also, as the term of the Registry Agreement is 10 years, determining the value proposition of owning the gTLD and how it could affect future use cases over time is a wise consideration.



Key Insights

1/

Identifying executive stakeholders and establishing strong cross-functional collaboration among core teams, such as Legal, IT, Digital Marketing, and others as appropriate, ensures that all relevant perspectives and expertise are leveraged, given the strategic impact and ongoing responsibilities associated with owning and operating a dotBrand domain. Having the disparate parts of the organization aware of the dotBrand gTLD and processes around its utilization can also lead to organic development of use cases for internal and external purposes that result in deploying the gTLD in unexpected ways.

2/

Choosing a partner in the dotBrand space is important given the complexity of applying for, launching, and maintaining a gTLD registry. Service selection is key to streamlining processes and minimizing the effects of the dotBrand 'lift' on the internal resources of the applicant/future registry operator.

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Applying for a gTLD can be a lengthy experience (a minimum of 15 months from the point of application by ICANN's expectation), so understanding the actual timelines for potential implementation is crucial. Also, as the term of the Registry Agreement is 10 years, determining the value proposition of owning the gTLD and how it could affect future use cases over time is a wise consideration.

Backgrounds: Cisco and Markmonitor

Who Is Cisco?



Cisco is the worldwide technology leader that revolutionizes the way organizations connect and protect in the AI era. For more than 40 years, Cisco has securely connected the world. With its industry leading AI-powered solutions and services, Cisco enables its customers, partners and communities to unlock innovation, enhance productivity and strengthen digital resilience. With purpose at its core, Cisco remains committed to creating a more connected and inclusive future for all.¹ Cisco offers products in the networking, security, collaboration, computing, and observability spaces.² Cisco is expected to have revenue of \$56 billion USD in the 2025 fiscal year.³

Who Is Markmonitor?



Markmonitor is a corporate domain registrar that helps enterprises take control of their digital presence with tailored, strategic domain management. We support businesses across all industries — including many of the world’s best-known brands — with the tools, expertise, and personalized guidance needed to manage and protect their domain portfolios. Our focus on security, transparency, and client service means we’re not just a provider – we’re a trusted partner in helping organizations reduce risk and strengthen their online foundations.⁴

What is a dotBrand?

A dotBrand gTLD is a unique, branded space on the internet exclusively owned by your business. Unlike traditional domains like .com or .org, a dotBrand gTLD gives you complete control to shape and grow your online identity.⁵

The simplest definition of a dotBrand (or ‘Specification 13’) gTLD is a gTLD that:

- consists of a trademark with a related Trademark Clearinghouse (TMCH) record
- has second-level domains registered to, and DNS records associated with, those domain names controlled by the registry operator, its affiliates, or trademark licensees only
- is not a ‘Generic String TLD.’⁶

.cisco: A Collaborative Journey From 2012 to Now

The .cisco gTLD was applied for in ICANN's New gTLD Program's 2012 application window. After moving successfully through the evaluation process, the ICANN Registry Agreement for .cisco was signed on December 22, 2014,⁷ and the gTLD was delegated on May 15, 2015⁸ and launched in the second half of 2016.⁹ There are currently 37 domain name registrations in the .cisco registry.¹⁰

The history of Cisco's decision to register the .cisco domain highlights a strong collaborative effort across multiple teams. The initial interest in acquiring a dotBrand domain originated with its Digital Marketing organization. Their primary motivation was to strengthen Cisco's digital presence and ensure the company kept pace with industry trends. Due to the complexity and potential impact of the decision to become a dotBrand registry operator, multiple executive stakeholders were involved. Digital Marketing, the primary owner of .cisco, worked closely with leaders from Legal, Finance, and IT. Legal managed trademark and regulatory considerations, Finance addressed the financial statements, cost planning, and escrow requirements, and IT provided technical guidance on implementation and security.

Recognizing the need for specialized expertise, Cisco's then Head of Trademarks brought in an external consultant experienced in applying for dotBrand domains and ICANN's complex procedures. This consultant guided us through the requirements, anticipated challenges, and helped ensure a strong application. With this expert support in place, they began the dotBrand application process for .cisco, as well as two other key brands. However, it soon became clear that pursuing multiple dotBrand domains would require significant financial investment and ongoing management. As a result, Cisco decided to focus solely on the .cisco domain.

Cisco's teams worked together through frequent discussions and collaborative sessions, ensuring this approach allowed them to make well-informed decisions that supported Cisco's broader digital objectives and Cisco's commitment to both innovation and responsible growth. The cross-functional teamwork that guided this process continues to support the ongoing success and strategic value of .cisco today.

Cisco and Markmonitor History

Timeline of Cisco's Use of Markmonitor's Services

Cisco has utilized Markmonitor's corporate domain management services since 2003.

Cisco began utilizing Markmonitor dotBrand services in early 2019.

Why Cisco Moved .cisco to Markmonitor for Management

Cisco's decision to move .cisco domain management to Markmonitor was driven by the potential for significant cost savings and exceptional customer support. Initially, .cisco was managed separately by an external dotBrand consultant and used only for the required nic.cisco page and a few domains with basic redirects to marketing content. As Cisco's needs evolved, consolidating .cisco under Markmonitor offered greater efficiency and helped lower its annual operating costs.

Beyond cost, the quality of customer support was a key factor in the decision. Managing a dotBrand domain like .cisco requires specialized expertise and proactive support. Markmonitor stood out for their high level of service and deep knowledge of operating dotBrand domains, giving Cisco confidence that its domain is managed by a trusted and capable partner. This assurance enables Cisco to operate with greater efficiency and peace of mind as it expands its domain strategy and initiatives.

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Cisco's decision to move .cisco domain management to Markmonitor was driven by the potential for significant cost savings and exceptional customer support.

-Inga Smith, Business Operations Manager | Legal & Trademarks, Cisco

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.cisco Use Cases

.cisco and FedRAMP

The Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP®) provides a standardized, reusable approach to security assessment and authorization for cloud service offerings.¹¹ FedRAMP empowers agencies to use modern cloud technologies, with emphasis on security and protection of federal information, and helps accelerate the adoption of secure, cloud solutions.¹²

Cisco uses the .cisco domain to help meet FedRAMP compliance requirements for cloud services provided to U.S. federal agencies.¹³

By hosting FedRAMP compliant cloud services and solutions¹⁴ on dedicated .cisco domains, Cisco enhances both security and user confidence in accessing trusted cloud platforms. Using a dotBrand domain provides several additional benefits:

- **Exclusive Control and Authenticity:** A dotBrand TLD is owned and operated by a single entity, giving the brand owner complete control over domain registrations. This exclusivity ensures any website or email ending in the dotBrand is legitimate, significantly reducing the risk of unauthorized use or impersonation.
- **Reduced Cybersquatting and Phishing:** Unlike traditional domains, a dotBrand prevents malicious actors from registering similar-looking names for phishing or typosquatting, helping to protect customers from deception.
- **Centralized Security Management:** As the registry operator, the brand owner can enforce consistent security policies across all domains, including managing DNS Security Extensions (DNSSEC) for data integrity and stricter controls over domain creation and management.
- **Proactive Brand Protection:** Owning a dotBrand proactively safeguards the brand's digital identity, reduces the need for defensive domain purchases, and allows registration of domains unavailable under generic extensions like .com.

The .cisco domain offers a trusted, brand-specific namespace that clearly distinguishes FedRAMP-authorized environments from other environments.

.cisco: Profit Center vs. Cost Center

Currently, the Digital Marketing Team owns and manages .cisco, covering all ongoing operational costs. As new use cases for the dotBrand domain emerged, the team introduced a chargeback model to improve sustainability.

Now, when a business team requests a specific .cisco domain, they contribute through a one-time registration fee. This approach helps offset annual expenses and ensures costs are allocated more equitably based on actual usage. Depending on your organization's use cases, implementing a chargeback model can position your dotBrand as a potential profit center.



.cisco dotBrand Services

Cisco's Use of Markmonitor's dotBrand Services

Currently Cisco utilizes two primary Markmonitor services in support of the .cisco dotBrand:

New gTLD Registry Administrative Support

New gTLD Registries are required to fulfill a number of roles and perform many tasks to stay in compliance with requirements set forth in the ICANN Registry Agreement.¹⁵

To meet these requirements, Markmonitor will:

- Act as selected ICANN 'TLD Role' registry contacts to receive inquiries and requests from ICANN and act as a first level response team to determine how to respond depending on the context of the inquiry. Of primary importance is acting as ICANN Compliance Contact for compliance issues regarding the gTLD, etc.
- Provide regular review and approval or rejection of Centralized Zone Data Service (CZDS) requests to access the zone file of the gTLD.
- Assistance with the creation of the Annual Certification of Compliance with Specification 13 documentation and submission to ICANN for the gTLD, before January 20 each calendar year.
- Provide other ad hoc assistance as needed.

New gTLD Payment Services

Markmonitor manages the submission of payments for the following services provided to the customer for the gTLD:

- Payment to Registry Service Provider (RSP) for backend registry support
- Payment to Data Escrow Agent (DEA) for escrow services
- Payment to ICANN for registry-level fees

Utilizing these Markmonitor services allows Cisco to minimize the internal resources needed to support its dotBrand. That is, Markmonitor services help keep .cisco in compliance with ICANN requirements while ensuring that all the involved third parties are paid successfully to maintain their services, with minimal input from Cisco required.

dotBrand Services for Next Round Applicants

ICANN's Next Round Expected April of 2026

ICANN is conducting a New gTLD Program: Next Round¹⁶ that is anticipated to have a new application window open in April 2026. As applying for and then running a dotBrand can be a large undertaking, MarkMonitor has developed a solution to streamline this process while minimizing vendor setup.

Markmonitor's dotBrand Services: From Idea to Implementation

The service is in two parts:

1. From pre-application through delegation (the 'idea' phase)
2. Launch and maintenance (the 'implementation' phase)

Idea Phase

Application Consulting and Information Compilation

Markmonitor will complete pre-work with the applicant, including discussions around registry entity selection, budgeting, use cases, and other related matters. Markmonitor will also work on the preparation of application answers and obtaining supporting materials from the applicant.

Application Writing and Submission

Markmonitor will write full answers to the application questions to meet the requirements specified in the Applicant Guidebook. Markmonitor will then submit a complete application during the application window and can manage payment of the application fee to ICANN.

Evaluation Through Delegation

Markmonitor will provide support in completing all administrative and operational steps required to complete ICANN processes through the Contracting, Registry Services Testing (RST), and Delegation phases, such as facilitating the signing of the Registry Agreement between the registry operator and ICANN, liaising with the Registry Service Provider to arrange RST and finalize delegation steps, etc.

dotBrand Services for Next Round Applicants

Implementation Phase

Once delegation is complete and the gTLD is in the root and exists on the internet, Markmonitor will assist the former applicant, now registry operator, in activating all required third-party services so that the gTLD can be successfully launched. And in doing so, with all technical requirements met, such that registrations and updates can be made to dotBrand domain names.

Those services include:

Registry Service Provider (RSP) Services

Markmonitor will contract with a third-party RSP to service the client's new gTLD. The RSP will meet ICANN's technical requirements and operate the gTLD in a secure, reliable and efficient manner.

Registrar Services

Markmonitor will provide registrar services such that the dotBrand gTLD will be available in the Markmonitor portal, with real-time Extensible Provisioning Protocol (EPP) messages and responses being sent between the RSP and Markmonitor to complete domain registrations, updates, and renewals.

Data Escrow Services

Markmonitor will liaise with a third-party Data Escrow Agent (DEA) to service the client's new gTLD. The DEA will meet ICANN's technical requirements and complete the escrow deposits in a secure, reliable, and efficient manner.

New gTLD Administrative Support

As discussed in the prior section, Markmonitor will assist the New gTLD registry in fulfilling several roles and performing a number of tasks to stay in compliance with the requirements set forth in the ICANN Registry Agreement

Payment Services

As noted above, Markmonitor will manage the submission of the payments to the various third-party services on the customer's behalf.

dotBrand Services for Next Round Applicants

By offering these services, Markmonitor seeks to simplify this complex process and undertake as much as possible to give our customers who want to apply for and run their own dotBrand gTLD a comprehensive and manageable solution, driven by, and alongside, industry experts.



Closing Thoughts

Closing Thoughts: Cisco

Whether you already own a dotBrand or are considering applying in the next round, it's important to actively identify use cases across your organization and communicate the benefits of a dotBrand to stakeholders at every level. Involve key decision makers from teams such as Legal, IT, and Marketing early in the process, and consider engaging an experienced partner, like Markmonitor, to guide you through the application and implementation journey. By working together and leveraging expert guidance, your organization will be well-equipped to unlock the full potential of your dotBrand.

Closing Thoughts: Markmonitor

Markmonitor and Cisco have had a long and significant relationship in the domain management space. Markmonitor is honored that this has extended into the dotBrand gTLD services area with our support of .cisco.

What have we learned from .cisco's story?

1. Selecting a partner is important and can lead to long-term success in managing the high-touch, specialized services that are inherent in running a dotBrand gTLD.
2. As Cisco discussed, getting the appropriate stakeholders involved in decisions like "Will we apply for our own dotBrand gTLD?" is significant. It allows the different parts of the business to have a voice in a large strategic initiative. Over time, the sharing of information across different functional areas (security/IT, marketing, etc.) can result in organic use cases that were not apparent at first – for instance, the use of .cisco domains in the company's FedRAMP program some years after the gTLD was delegated.
3. It's a marathon not a sprint: applying for a gTLD all the way through to its delegation, launch, and ongoing maintenance are long timeline activities. Thinking of a dotBrand in terms of years or longer (the ICANN Registry Agreement has a ten-year term!) is paramount when day-to-day activities can keep an organization focused solely on the next month or the next quarter. Planning and long-term strategy need to be front of mind when considering the decision of whether to apply for a dotBrand gTLD. Add in ICANN's propensity to take a long time to execute policy development and implementation and there are a number of factors that should be taken into account during the decision-making process.

Next Steps

Markmonitor Is Here to Help With Your Brand's dotBrand Journey

To work with Markmonitor on broader domain management matters, please reach out to us [here](#).¹⁷ To work with Markmonitor in the dotBrand area, please reach out to us [here](#)¹⁸ or contact the author.

As the leading corporate registrar, Markmonitor can assist companies with all aspects of their domain name portfolio management needs, from registration and strategy to recovery and SSL Certificate management to security and best practices. Let us help you with the tools, expertise, and personalized guidance needed to optimize your domain name portfolio and take control of your digital presence.



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Should you need any further information or assistance, please contact your Domain Portfolio Advisor (DPA) or email customer.service@markmonitor.com

Markmonitor provides strategic domain management solutions that help protect the revenue and reputation of the world's leading brands.

Since 1999, Markmonitor has served the domain portfolio needs of businesses around the globe, including many of the most visited websites in the world. An ICANN accredited domain registrar since its establishment, Markmonitor leverages its extensive industry relationships, innovative technology, and broad expertise to manage and protect company domain portfolios, all with data-driven, white-glove consultation designed to maximize domain portfolio value.