

Interview with  
**Domenic Torani**

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# An insight into the migration to dot KPMG



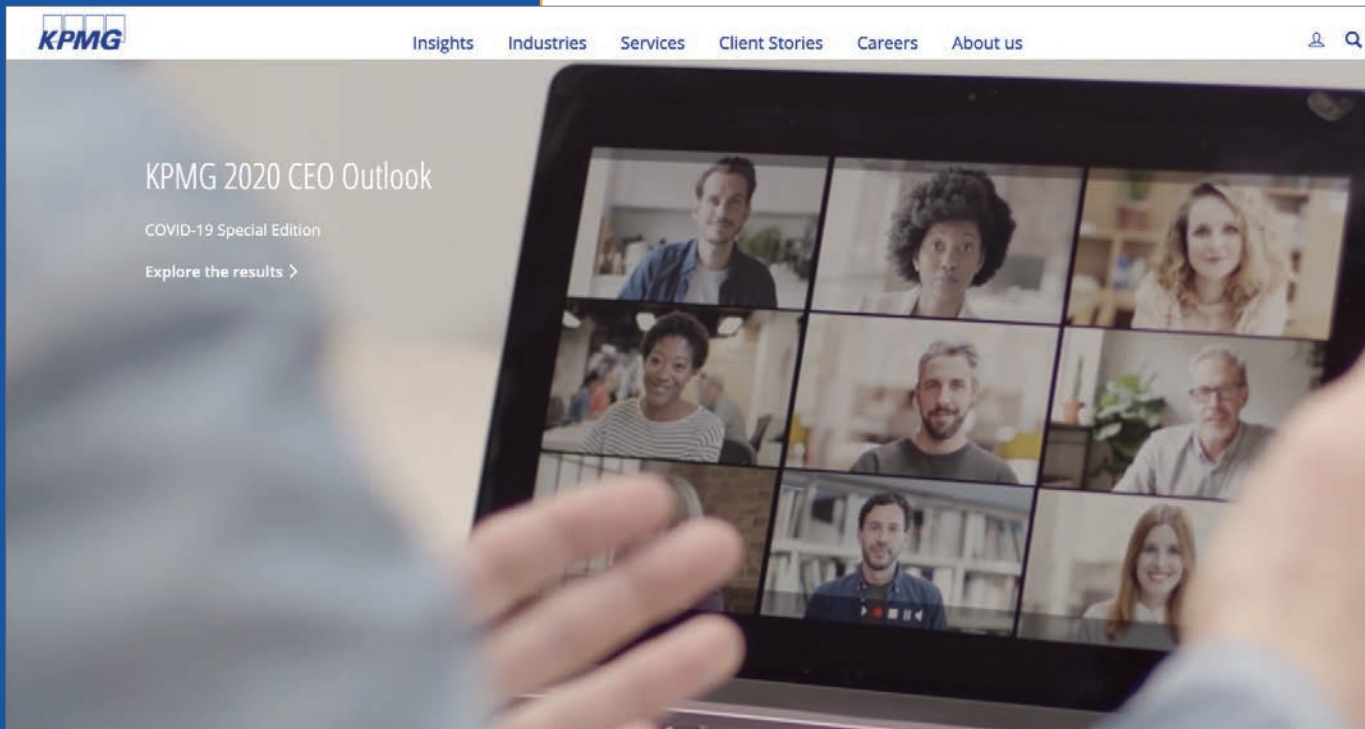
**Domenic Torani**, Senior Digital Transformation Program Manager at KPMG International, shares his insights and experiences on the migration from **KPMG.COM** to **HOME.KPMG**.

**Dot Brand  
Observatory**  
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**For Domenic, .KPMG and its CMS are “living proof” of the benefits of migrating to the new DOT BRAND**

Similar to many other global businesses, professional services firm, KPMG, built up an extensive digital portfolio of fragmented domains and microsites over numerous years. With a member network operating across nearly 150 countries, the portfolio included various generic top-level domains (gTLDs), such as KPMG.COM, as well as country-code (ccTLDs) sites, from KPMG.COM.AU to KPMG.CO.UK.

In 2012, KPMG’s Global Marketing team recognised that a DOT BRAND would offer an opportunity to not only streamline this extensive portfolio, but also provide a more efficient level of control over KPMG’s network of offices around the world, known as its member firms.



HOME.KPMG

Each member firm has localised website content tailored for its specific market. The content for all the member firms is controlled by KPMG’s centralised content management system (CMS), which supports hundreds of thousands of unique pages of content and numerous third-party technical integrations. In 2019, KPMG migrated this CMS platform from KPMG.COM to its dot brand, at HOME.KPMG, becoming the first DOT BRAND to execute such a complex CMS migration.

### From application to realisation

The road from application in 2012 to launch in 2019 was long, due to the constraints of the ICANN process. Thus, when KPMG was finally permitted by ICANN to launch .KPMG much had changed, including leadership of the Digital Marketing team. However, the initial business drivers - “costs savings, ways to strengthen the brand, and increase trust, security and aspects of communication” - remain valid today, says Domenic Torani, now Senior Digital Transformation Program Manager at KPMG International, in Toronto, Canada.

*“My predecessors in digital marketing looked to pursue [the DOT BRAND] as an evolutionary step for how domains would look in the future,”* he explains. This was supported by considerable alignment across senior management both in the International business and

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across the regional member firms, which operate independently within the KPMG network. However, as Domenic notes, making the decision to apply for a DOT BRAND TLD is one thing, making the decision on how to utilise it is another.

A crucial factor in this decision was the team's analysis of the implications of shifting away from the .COM: *"We learned that in the different countries, not everyone uses or knows the .COM,"* explains Domenic. *"You might assume that the .COM is a worldwide signifier, but actually analytics told us that people in their respective countries would actually type in their own ccTLD before they would type in .COM; for example, KPMG.NL or KPMG.BE. Once you recognise that, you realise that .COM isn't that important, so making the leap to our own TLD was an easy decision in that respect."*

At the time, the main corporate site was hosted on HOME.KPMG.COM, so dropping the .COM to launch HOME.KPMG was a natural transition: *"While people are still being familiarised that brands do now have their own DOT BRAND domains, for us to make that shift wasn't that big a change. It wasn't a question of introducing something new for people to become familiar with. In this case, we're dropping something, and so it's one less thing to remember."*

However, that isn't to say that it happened overnight. *"[While we knew that] dropping the .COM was not going to harm us that much, there was a lot of work to be done in the back end".* In particular, the appropriate communication, technology, and SEO measures needed to be understood and implemented before the decision was made to transition.

### Communication: changing user habits

*"You need to continuously educate, reassure and inform,"* says Domenic. *"Internally, we had more than enough reasons to want to make the change, [but] our IT group, marketing, compliance... everyone has to be aligned."*

*"[Externally,] people still have the habit of referring to the .COM [or their local country equivalent], or may have those sites bookmarked in their browsers for example. That means building all the safety nets, [so that] even if people aren't aware of it, they will get redirected and their experience will still be seamless at the end of the day."* At that point, he believes the "evolutionary step" will take place. *"People will notice - they'll see it in their browsers, in print materials - and the thought process will naturally change."*

It's a generational shift, he believes: *"The [next] generation will start thinking from the approach that maybe TLDs aren't just .COM, maybe they are more specific to the brand and company that I'm looking up, and that's maybe another level of thought that will now come. It just needs to take its time."*

But, as long as people are still accessing the old ccTLDs, you can't just stop operating them. *"We still keep those domains functioning, whether for redirects or for protection,"* he agrees, *"so you don't want to get rid of them right away: you need to still protect them and their SEO, and keep the user experience online. But, we'll get to a point where we'll stop buying them, even for protection, because we're hoping to establish .KPMG as the only domain affiliated to us, so naturally educate people that anything that isn't .KPMG isn't our organisation."*

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*[One of our first jobs after activation of .KPMG] was to poke around to see what was happening in the industry, how other organisations, whether competitors or in different industries, were using their top-level brands,” says Domenic, adding that while they recognised potential in some of those approaches, “we wanted to go full out on it.*

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### Technology: understanding the constraints

There were also technological constraints to overcome. “According to [its provider] Adobe, our CMS is the second largest, most complex multi-site manager in its portfolio of multisite platforms,” says Domenic, but “along with that title comes the complication of operating sites for nearly 150 different member firm countries, including all the different third-party applications, technologies and integrations. We had to understand how that would be impacted.”

A key step, therefore, was to understand their own technology, but with the added challenge that “there wasn’t a huge amount of information out there on how this technology would be impacted if we made this change.” This meant reaching out to all vendors and looking into every area of the CMS to see what would happen once the TLD was changed. “It’s like an iceberg”, says Domenic. “People will only see the website; what they don’t see is how deep it goes under the water level.” That means doing everything you can to prepare, ensuring you put in place all possible safety nets, and consulting the third-party technologies who “despite the fact some were aware of it, hadn’t configured their technology to allow for it at the time.”

SEO is the last important element and helps to tie it all together, explains Domenic. “One of the first questions that came back from the business was: what is going to happen to our SEO? SEO is such an anomaly, because different search engines have different algorithms, and it’s so complex and ever changing that you never know exactly what the right or wrong thing is to do. [However,] we had some ideas and obviously knew it was important, and that we needed to do everything we could not to destroy it.”

Here, the team was able to look at the different companies that had previously tried to make the move: “We could see that SEO was one of the things that was making or breaking their shift to their dotbrands, so we have to thank them a little for being the first movers here,” he says.

### When it comes to SEO, preparation is crucial

He advises consulting an SEO subject matter expert before even thinking about flipping the switch. First, you need to benchmark where you stand and how it functions at the moment: “That baseline will help you gauge when you make the move whether you’re getting worse or better,” he says. It will also give you the opportunity to begin making SEO improvements and set up safety nets, such as redirects, first: “You want to make sure your SEO is optimal prior to the switch. [That means making] improvements to your SEO, regardless of what you already have. You need to make sure you’re scoring 100% in terms of keywords, search rank etc. That will allow you to at least get yourself as high as you can to weather the storm.”

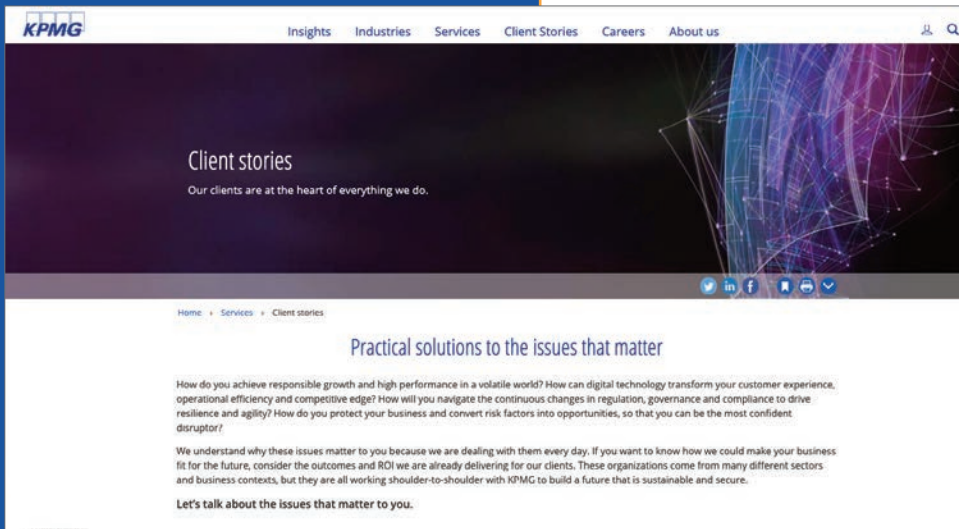
Avoiding that storm completely isn’t possible, in his view: “You won’t avoid every issue,” he says. “[For example,] right after the switch, we learned something really interesting that we couldn’t have possibly prepared for, which is that when you change domain that has such heavy equity or is already ranked really well, you will unleash the full wrath of a search engine algorithm [and] uncover all the configurations that were not applicable to your domain before.”

What does that mean in practice? “It’s almost as if you just shake the hive and all the bees come out,” he says. “But the good thing is that we had built up our equity and SEO so well before the switch, that it helped us weather that shake up. [Thanks to that initial work], we quickly saw our SEO climbing again - and became better than it was before.

“Today, HOME.KPMG outranks KPMG.COM, and we see that [our] .COM is slowly being erased from the internet, so we will reach a point where all our metrics relate to .KPMG,” he adds. “If you do a simple Google search, you’ll see most of the [ranked] domains are ending in .KPMG. The site is crawled, indexed and is now the standard on browsers.”

## Getting social – and inventive

Before the migration to HOME.KPMG, Domenic and his team had tested out the water with a series of vanity URLs and a new social media URL shortener, SOCIAL.KPMG. “We saw the benefits straight away,” he says. “In fact, social network use spread like wildfire on Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social networks. In this day and age, where social is your gateway to everything, this obviously strengthens our brand and knowledge of the TLD.”



As word gets around within the organisation, people naturally want to use .KPMG on their own digital projects - whether through microsites, vanity URLs or new country-specific redirects - and this presents a new type of challenge for Domenic and his team. Vanity URLs are quick and easy to deploy from a global standpoint, but there is work that needs to be done when it comes to managing registration in the different countries, especially if they want the same domains.

Taking its tax advisory practice as an example, Domenic explains: “Tax in one country is not the

same as tax in another country, so can you simply register a TAX.KPMG and call it a day? Well no, because you have 150 different member firms competing for that name.”

That means defining a nomenclature that goes along with the DOT BRAND, to control how names are to be used by member firms around the world. “It’s about setting the foundation,” says Domenic. “We can see what has happened naturally over time [with the evolution of the previous domain name system], and how things take on a life of their own, so why not take those learnings and apply them to our nomenclature/guidelines to avoid that in the new system?”

## Words to the wise

For Domenic, .KPMG and its CMS are “living proof” of the benefits of migrating to the new DOT BRAND, but he also understands the hesitancy of other DOT BRAND owners in fully committing to the move. Here, he advises:

“Don’t listen to the naysayers or be discouraged by what it looks like outside your organisation. There are [businesses] out there that have made the switch, panicked and gone back, but have since returned, because they learned from those experiences. If your reasons for making the switch are the right reasons – for example, SEO, or branding – do it for those reasons.”

HOME.KPMG/CLIENT STORIES

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To read DOT BRAND use cases, visit: [observatory.domains](http://observatory.domains).