
New company name announced in all employee broadcast heard at Merrimack Valley and around the world

It was a well kept secret right to the very last moment. The process began last September 20 when AT&T announced its proposed restructuring into three stand-alone entities.

The selection of a name for the new systems and technology company, the old "Network Systems," the old "Western Electric," started with over 700 possibilities.

The story goes something like this:

All the "sys"s and "tel"s were taken. A "net" or two may have been up for grabs, but why sound

like every other company with a network?

Naming isn't easy. Ask any parent. There are no cute handbooks for naming corporations. But, fortunately, there are identity consulting firms.

And it is to them that Dave Shaver, charged with heading up the corporate naming effort, turned last fall, shortly after AT&T's restructur-

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ing was announced. Shaver, vice president-advertising and brand management, and an inter-business unit team chose Landor Associates of San Francisco, which is credited with taking the “eral” and “press” out of FedEx.

Landor immediately moved into high gear; and, before the three-month whirlwind was over, 699 names would lay on the cutting room floor; and everything from cultural sensitivities to how the name would look painted on trucks would have been considered. And reconsidered.

The process was tough, says Shaver, partly because it was done in half the time it normally takes. But Landor drew on its expertise and quickly gleaned the 700 possibilities by conducting worldwide research. It picked the brains of the public, industry leaders and customers. It listened to employees worldwide in a series of focus groups.

The new name and symbol would have to do three things: retain the proud images of the past (such as reliability and experience); lose some negatives (bureaucratic and pricey) and hone the image of the new company (energetic and innovative).

Landor looked into a number of basic categories of names, says

Shaver. They checked coined abstract names, such as “Microsoft;” dictionary words, such as “apple;” and industry “root” words, such as “sys” and “net.” The roots didn’t hold up under cold statistics that revealed their overuse. For example, naming sleuths discovered that 11,665 companies have the word net in their names. It would be hard to stand out in that crowd of corporate John Does.

Landor also considered the trends favored by the 1,000 or so companies that adopted new or revised names each year. These trends include a preference for shorter titles and for dropping product names, which may limit their image, from corporate names.

Came the day, Thursday, January 4, when the leadership team of the new company gathered in New York City to select, from the finalists, the name and logo that will launch the new company. Their choice was scrutinized legally and checked against 12 languages and the customs of 60 countries for ease of pronunciation and cultural sensitivities.

Lucent Technologies, the name selected and announced Monday, February 5, to all employees, is a

dictionary word that means “glowing with light” and “marked by clarity.” “Lucent” has been joined with the word “technologies,” the underlying strength of the new business. Linking the new name to the endorsement line “Bell Labs Innovations” symbolizes the new company’s roots. The symbol, “The Innovation Ring,” is a hand-drawn artistic brush stroke.

Most people don’t fall in love with new names immediately, Shaver cautions. “It takes time to adapt to a new identity. Plus, it’s tough to leave a powerful brand like AT&T behind.”

In fact, some employees who took part in the focus groups were loathe to do that. They lobbied for the much-loved “Western Electric,” a name with special meaning, but too much a part of the past. They wanted Bell Labs, which was enticing, but unavailable for legal reasons. Others saw things differently. “Don’t give us an acronym,” one person said.

Another employee voiced a sentiment that Shaver — and CEO Henry Schacht, for that matter — concur with. A sentiment that will probably prove itself true in the exciting years ahead.

“It’s not your father’s AT&T.”

Lucent Technologies Bell Labs Innovations

