

What's In A Name?

All those people who compile all those statistics for so many events and issues should think of taking on a small job, pro bono. Is it just me, or does anyone else out there see some sort of correlation between the name of a company and the efficiency of a company's officers and directors and the quality of their business decisions?

The big hoopla as this journal goes to press is about Enron and the one billion dollars plus received by insider sale of stock before the company collapsed. My internal MABCSA meter (Moron Alert, Bad Company, Silly Advertisement) went off the scale the first time I ever saw an Enron advertisement on television. I even remarked to my wife how stupid the ad was – not only did it leave you with no idea of what the company did, but the name was another one of those stupid, “modern” corporate names which are vague and mean absolutely nothing. This phenomenon is evident everywhere – for any number of slick, trendy, Madison Avenue rationales, corporate leaders either choose some ethereal, nonsensical name, or they re-name their company with a name that is supposed to inspire something to someone, somewhere. A good example we have had here in northern Idaho of this exercise in semantic acrobatics is the very expensive name change by a utility known for years as Washington Water Power (a name that said who the company was and what they did) to “Avista.” The company promptly went into the power brokerage business and lost their collective rear ends. It must be a chicken and egg thing – does the name beget the bad decisions or do bad business decisions influence the choice of the name?

Think back to the Super Bowl of two years ago. You couldn't help but look forward with anticipation to the many quality, innovative ads in the annual contest of one-upmanship among advertisers. Remember your first reaction to one of many stupid, useless, senseless dot.com ads. After each one you would look at your friends and the general consensus was always: 1. “That was stupid.” 2. “What does that company do?” 3. “What a stupid name!” Most of those companies have since disappeared, or are a shadow of their former selves. I maintain there must be a statistical correlation between stupid names, poor corporate management, and in most cases, ridiculous advertising.

Always, though there is one underlying absolute: corporate management always ends up cashing in and coming out smelling like a rose. Perhaps the entire structure of things needs to change, where people do not get to act like government employees, with no repercussions for their actions. But don't hold your breath.

As a footnote, since I am discussing responsibility, as we go to press, the headlines are now sounding the concern over rescue workers and nearby residents suffering respiratory and fatigue problems at Ground Zero. The consensus by health officials is that it is asbestos exposure. Somewhere, someone must take the responsibility of screening these people for *chemical* exposure as detailed in my last two editorials. Perhaps if we formed a non-profit corporation that would screen these people, and gave it an ethereal name, someone would invest time and money into the project.

Al Czap,
Publisher