

Juvenile Fish Transporter

Julie Todaro

At the same time I was watching a TV news magazine about salmon fishing (which apparently is an area rife with controversy), I was reading in my e-mail a thread on the community college discussion list about “what should a community college library be ‘called?’” Or, how should our services and resources be identified? As usual, the list was interesting, individuals were quick to respond, and general comments were supported by data and advice (it’s a great list!). But the names, opinions, and advice differed greatly, which, in our field, makes sense. During my reading of this thread (which lasted days and is archived), I recalled the last twenty-five years at my institution and the name and identification discussions we have had, and when we had them. I realized that these discussions often occurred at junctures of changing presidents, new buildings, renovations, and major shifts of direction in higher education, in general. Few of these discussions were pleasant, as so many people at so many levels had ideas and opinions, and not many agreed.

Although in the past I have addressed names, titles, and the like in this column, I found this current discussion to conjure up a “lessons learned” in the “name game” for both my college experience and my consultant work. Also—as most of you know—I can’t keep my mouth shut, so here are a few lessons I learned through the years. But first, a little of my own history.

I was not around at the inception of my college (thirty-five-plus years ago), nor was I at the initial identification of our services and resources. That being said, I’m not sure how they chose our name, but it is a classic name for college services. We chose “Learning Resource Services” (LRS) for the overall entity, and then “learning resource center” (LRC) for each individual location. Although it didn’t really matter to me when I came to the college (based on my experience and certification in the K–12 arena), learning resource centers were K–12 school library environments. It made sense to me, however, that a higher education environment would choose a name with learning resources in it, since the point

of this name was to illustrate the educational environment and our support for learning. In addition, the name would illustrate the fact that we offered far more than the books and other print materials more traditionally thought of in a library setting, *and* we offered a diverse format for all levels and types of learners.

Twelve years later, however, we revisited our name and found that many didn’t know what we did (no surprises there). So the college changed the larger departmental name to Instructional Resources and Technology; we changed the departmental name to Library Services (cleaner, neater, more recognizable); and then individual locations were called libraries. This necessitated, of course, dozens of new signs, as well as changes to literally hundreds of documents. In addition, we had to rethink the “sign over the front door,” as well as our marketing and public relations. Based on our strong relationship with peer departments of media services and open access computer centers (always in or contiguous to our libraries), we decided to identify ourselves more specifically as what people “knew” or recognized, but—most importantly—to identify each space, function, or service. So the signs look like: “Library Services,” “Media Services,” “Computer Centers,” and “Instructional Resources and Technology.”

It made more sense to me then (and it still does) that these words are more recognizable to most individuals. Any second thoughts on my part would include a need to continue the discussion (similar to the electronic list discussion) that we need to absolutely have a “computer” or “technology” label somewhere in the identification of services; hence, a possible name of “Library Services and Technology Support.” (For a number of interesting names, see the community college electronic discussion list.)

My lessons learned, therefore, are a hodgepodge of issues. I have tried to look at the bigger picture of all types of institutions, and the lessons are “sort of” in order of how you might approach this process—so read on . . .

Why Now?

In my recollection of our own name-change discussions (even though I think we made the right change), I feel



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that my institution went down this road when we probably shouldn't have. That is, while changes in the administration typically mean organizational, title, or departmental changes, thought should be given to the cost of changing names or identification. Realistically, managers should archive background content to use when trying to talk administrators *out* of proposing a name change. Any "why" in the "why now?" factor should have compelling data to avoid the pitfalls of "making a change for change's sake" rather than:

- making changes when the environment really has changed or is significantly different;
- making changes because the environment has *not* changed and people feel that changing names will stimulate other changes; and
- making changes because constituents have changed.

What are similar areas named in your institution? How are services identified in general? How are other departments identified in your institution? If you are in a city or county, are there systems or policies for naming departments or areas of services? Have other departments taken newer names or identification, or perhaps taken more twenty-first-century-sounding names? Are the words you want already, and recently, taken? Do departments or services have separate names? Does the institution have naming guidelines?

What are similar areas named in your institution, generally? If you are in an institution where there might be similar departments—whether or not they are named appropriately—might your new name have more overlapping content than it should, and does it result in ill will or confusion among constituents? Also, what are similar areas named in the bigger community? Take a step back and look at the community where you live. What are services and resources named and, of course, what are they called by constituents and employees? Might your name add to the clarity or add to the confusion? Are you forced to take a certain name and therefore you should choose a process that identifies limitations up front?

In honor of the elephants in the room (that nobody talks about) at work, maybe keeping a bad name is better than changing your name. I stated earlier that we changed our name fifteen plus years ago. You won't be surprised then if I tell you that we have *never* gotten all the content changed within our institutional confines, nor have we gotten some individuals to change what they call us . . . or what they tell our students to call us *to this day*. For example, some budget documents have initials built into character fields, so that our old LRS three-letter designation fits there, but our new (by now almost two decades old) LS letters do not. Some faculty members still have the older designation on their print syllabus and merrily transferred the wrong initials or name to their website, where it remains to this day. Some staff members

still refer to us using the older terminology as well.

Does it bother me? Well, yes, and that issue was part of the thread on the community college electronic discussion list; that is, other areas in the college giving wrong information about what we are and who we are. Where do we draw the line? Give up the push to shift that paradigm? One might say just give it up, but the reality is—and electronic list members provide an excellent discussion on this—if constituents are steered in the wrong direction by being given the wrong information, then ultimately customer service and constituents suffer.

Opt for extensive, even wordy, signage. Many architects and interior designers minimize signage in public spaces, either when new environments are created, or even in all situations. In addition, when sign audits and sign "experts" assess for signage systems, many move to the more streamlined sign packages. While I don't believe in millions (or even dozens) of signs, we have to correlate our signs with what we call ourselves. If our name isn't clear, then we need to provide clarification with signage. How to find out what to say? Have focus groups . . . three of them . . . one with staff, one with adults and one with younger constituents. Show them signs, phrases, and wording, let *them* tell you what they think you are and what they think existing signs mean, and only then have someone design a system of signs. It's an incredible eye opener.

If there are multiple words, check the initialism or acronym of your name before you finalize it. Customers or constituents (as I am calling them these days) will give areas nicknames or shorten names to initialisms completely on their own. When you move toward a new name, be sure you tease out (maybe with your original focus groups) what this name might be shortened to or what initialism might be formed. We had a brief (less than twenty-four hours) stint for one of our areas where our boss had picked out a name on his own and we pointed out that the initials for his new area were also a feminine hygiene product. Enough said.

Explore trends. If everyone else jumped off a cliff, would you? Trends often inspire us and while that's exactly what they *should* do, we need to make sure that these trends reflect who we are, or are going to be, *and* that they are more than a trend. You don't want to spend many hours and many dollars only to later realize that the words are too trendy and you've moved beyond them, or you went in another direction. I have seen this in youth areas in public libraries and in faculty support areas in academic and school libraries. Keep in mind that you can change for a pilot, or make a one-year change for a special project or an event. If this is a direction you want to take, minimize the money you put into it and the public relations and marketing.

Shorter, temporary changes are often for those constituents already coming in, so environments don't have to market broadly. Examples can include a faculty resource center named for the "life" of a course or the duration of

a year or a project (e.g., Biotech curriculum design center), or a youth area for a summer/teen club (where the youth area could be the “summer tech shack”). One might think of this pilot or temporary name as the “doing business as” (DBA) approach to managing your environment. Often, people characterize this as your second title or name, such as “Comfort Public Library: Community Resource Center” or “Franklin College Library: Undergraduate Technology Research and Study Center.”

Do the proposed changes reflect who you really are or who you want to be?

We should be careful about picking names for where we want to be, not where we are now. If we choose a name such as “tech gateway,” we need to make sure that we really *are* a gateway. To propose this with few computers or no plan to have a gateway or portal, for example, in the hopes of attracting people in, leaves the library open to criticism. And, frankly, your target audience may not return once they have visited the gateway and there’s nothing there.

Ask this question of a bigger group, but make your decision with a smaller, educated group. Make sure any focus groups or small group discussions are characterized as information-sharing and idea-generation sessions. Don’t give the impression that when people leave the group at the end of the session, the name is chosen. It’s easy to interest people in participating in the final choice process,

but promise an explanation of comments for *why* the final decision was made.

Don’t Forget

Politically expedient is as politically expedient does. Be careful about choosing names to please administrators or those in power at the time. We need to be aware and include them in discussions, but making changes for a small group, or even sometimes one person, opens you up to criticism and, more than likely, future changes.

For a million dollars I would change *my* name. Although this column isn’t about naming opportunities per se (which is an entire other column later this year), there are urban legends in addition to real-life situations where naming opportunities have been a major issues in all types of libraries. A small rule of thumb includes temporary or one-year “adopt a library” initiatives, or summer club names, such as the gift that required a naming opportunity, some of which, like the “Heidi Fleiss Teen Girls Babysitting Club” might be—just maybe—problematic.

So “what’s in a name” *is* critical. I mean, can’t we just use the correct name? My new favorite is the title of my column. Couldn’t the salmon industry just rename the barge “Babies on Board?”

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Keiko Koda, and Michael Fender, in *Learning to Read Across Languages: Cross-Linguistic Relationships in First- and Second-Language Literacy Development*, eds. Keido Koda and Annette M. Zehler (New York: Routledge, 2008), 13–30, 68–96, 101–24; and Marti, *Words and Worlds*, 141. This discussion leaves aside the differences between Pinyin and traditional Chinese script.

29. The Heteronym Page, <http://jonv.flystrip.com/heteronym/heteronym.htm> (accessed Jan. 8, 2008); Douglas W Oard, He Daqing, and Wang Jianqiang, “User-Assisted Query Translation for Interactive Cross-Language Information Retrieval,” *Information Processing & Management* 44, no. 1 (2008): 181–211, esp. 186.

30. Jung-ran Park, “Cross-Lingual Name and Subject Access: Mechanisms and Challenges,” *Library Resources & Technical Services* 51, no. 3 (July 2007); For cross-lingual search queries (also called bilingual lexicon construction), see Wang Jenq-Haur, Teng Jei-Wen, and Wen-Hsiang Lu, “Exploiting the Web as the Multilingual Corpus for Unknown Query Translation,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 57, no. 5 (2006): 660–70.
31. Gautschi, “Search in Any Language”; Ian Harris, “Search Engine Marketing in Multiple Languages,” *MultiLingual Computing & Technology* (April/May 2006): 47; Jill Cousins, “The European Library—Pushing the Boundaries of Usability,” *Electronic Library* no. 24 (2006): 434–44.