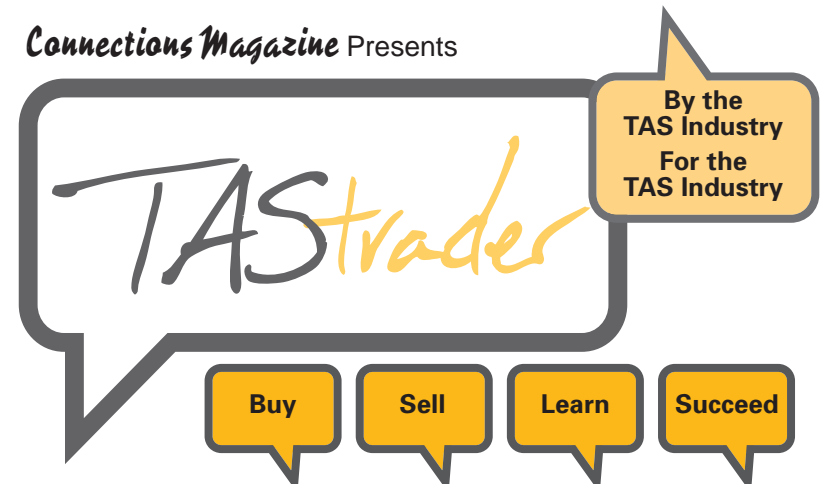


# Thinking About a Name Change?

By Darlene Campbell



Many answering service owners consider changing the name of their company from time to time. Changing your name sounds exciting, providing an opportunity to play in the strategic branding arena and escape the day-to-day concerns of staffing and hold times. However, it can be a costly and a dangerous minefield if not planned well and executed with precision. A few years ago, I changed the name of my business from Metro Message Services to Information Communications Group. Here is how we proceeded and what we learned:

## Why We Changed Our Name:

I increasingly found myself saying to prospects, "I am not just a message center." This had become necessary as I positioned the multifunctional capabilities and capacities of my business to executives and board members of my new target prospects beyond the medical community. It became evident that this target population of decision makers had a preestablished definition of my business based on its former name, Metro Message Services Inc. Since our inception, we evolved from:

- Being locally focused to an international and multilingual focus

- Being labor intensive to becoming Web-enabled and highly automated
- Being internally focused to seeking alliance partners
- Being segment specific to strategically seeking diversity

With continually strained margins in the traditional live medical answering service arena, we had grown to a level where a significant percentage of revenue began to come from other sources. These segments have expectations beyond that of the local medical community. We looked to find a way to be service sensitive to our roots but yet present an image that met the expectation of the growth markets of Fortune 1000 companies and notable nonprofits. Central in this discussion was a complete costing of the name change and a projection of the lift in targeted relationships we would need to pay it back in twelve months.

## Planning:

Our first discussions about name change began when we completed a strategic review of the business. At minimum, a twelve-month planning process is recommended, as the name change in and of itself is the major component of an annual marketing plan.

In our case, it was a two-year process. In the first year, we developed and implanted the products, technologies, and resources necessary to be what we want to be. During the second year we incorporated the name change into our annual marketing plan:

- Staging and coordinating annual media placements like Yellow Pages
- Lowering the emphasis of "brand" and reducing media expenditures in advance of the name change

*(Continued on next page)*

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- Running off inventory of all brand supporting collateral material

### Measuring Success:

The simple response to this subject is the return on investment (ROI). We knew what our costs for the name change were. A careful tracking of new business over the ensuing thirty-six months would allow us to measure our success and track the ROI. Our definition of success was growth in the business segments we have targeted. Beyond that, we became more sensitive to listening to the market and our prospects.

### Picking a Name:

- We wanted a name that:
- Reflected what we presently did

- and planned on doing in the future
- Would not limit our capacity to do more in the future

We did not deploy an external focus group but opted instead for a focus group of our constituencies: employees, customers, vendors, and industry experts. The synthesis of this effort was the realization that we generically deal with two subjects: information and communication. From there, Information Communication Group was formed.

### What We Learned:

We learned many valuable lessons along the way. Here are our recommendations for anyone considering changing the name of their answering service:

- Anticipate heavy marketing expenditure in year one of the name change. It makes no sense to go through the effort and not tell anyone. Additionally, you will have to consider “transition promotions” as you may reference your old identity in selected media. Do not assume that your clients or market saw your letter or ad announcing the change.
- Do not become consumed in the graphic design elements of the name. Seek professional counsel here. Every little decision, such as the number and type of colors in your logo, can have major financial implications over time.



- Develop a complete communication matrix for the name change. Provide at least two direct communications with each constituent group (client, vendor, intermediary, and so forth).
- Consider a public relations agency to support your program. We can all prepare media kits, but securing placement is their expertise.

*(Continued on next page)*

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- Do an inventory of every item with your logo on it to work towards updating, consolidating, and eliminating every possible form and document you can. This can be a surprise cost-benefit of the program.
- Check with governing agencies for possible duplication, and register your new name with the help of legal counsel. Also, check that an appropriate Web address is available and secure it.
- Determine the balance of expenditure between Web site redesign and the investment in new paper and trade show marketing

material. A new name and look means a new Web site.

Several years after our name change, we at Information Communications Group are delighted with the overall experience of the name change. We received feedback from our clients that was above our expectations. It gave our employees a lift, and our promotional initiatives have born much fruit.

Changing your answering service's name is not a task to be entered into lightly, but with creative thought, careful planning, and meticulous execution, the results can be well worth the effort – it has been for us!

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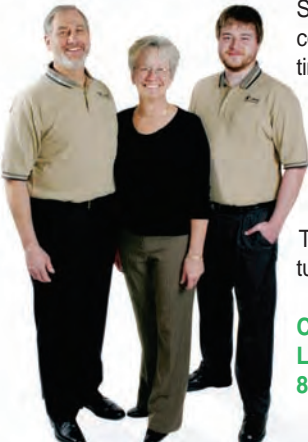
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