



<http://www.namingtoolbox.com>

## New Local Competitors Play 'Tune That Name'

Inter@ctive Week -- November 23, 1998

By Louis Trager

The name Teligent thankfully beat out ACOM. ACSI got trendy this year and switched to e.spire. Rhythms NetConnections is leaning toward dropping the less-than-rhythmic second part of its name.

When it comes to their corporate identities, upstart telecom competitors are shifting gears, moving away from geeky initialisms and technology-driven hybrids made up of bits and pieces like "net" and "com" and moving toward monikers that promise to resonate with would-be customers.

"You're beginning to see the CLECs [competitive local exchange carriers] go through some changes," says Terry Barnich, president of New Paradigm Resources Group Inc., a consultancy that advises new telecom competitors. "They want to move away from names that are hard to remember and differentiate themselves."

The search for better brands corresponds to the evolution of the new competitors into expanding and maturing marketers from their origins as technocentric start-ups. "Many of these companies tend to be extremely engineering-driven," says S.B. Master, president of Master-McNeil Inc., a naming consultancy. "Even in quite large companies, you'll find a well-developed sales function and a nonexistent marketing function."

Many competitive carriers are trying to broaden their customer base from a small number of large and midsized enterprises to the larger arena of small businesses, Barnich says. The rule of thumb: The wider the market, the more important a memorable and personable name is because impressions are created less by personal contact and experience and more by image.

"Generally, real words or coined words are more appealing and more meaningful to customers than initializations," Master says. "It's very difficult to give meaning to a meaningless set of initials."

But as hard as coming up with a good name can be, it's harder to find one that hasn't been taken -- reserved as a Web address or trademarked. Deregulation, competition and the Internet have sparked an explosion of telecom companies and brands. The number of telecom services names trademarked annually more than tripled from 1990 to 1995, to 6,740 -- 37 times the number in 1980.

"Every good name is taken," says Vernon Irvin, marketing and strategies senior vice president at e.spire Communications Inc. ([www.espire.net](http://www.espire.net)), which changed its name earlier this year from the less melodic American Communications Services Inc., better known as ACSI.



**Try our easy-to-use naming software.** Find the ideal name for your company or product in a matter of minutes. A powerful database and your keywords generate memorable names quickly and easily. [Click here for more information.](#)



<http://www.namingtoolbox.com>

Through the name change, the company wanted to reflect its transformation from origins as a competitive access provider to a broad-based carrier with data services. The e.spire label, an amalgam of "electronic" and "inspire," conveys "extranets and Internet commerce," Irvin says. "We are that next-generation communications company."

The e.spire name was developed originally as an ACSI service brand with help from a consultant who charged less than \$50,000. ACSI then spent in the six figures with other consultants looking for a new corporate name before rejecting all their suggestions.

Irvin says the biggest problem with the new name is that people don't always know how to pronounce it. For the record, "e.spire" has a long E and a silent dot.

Even with the name clutter, artistic successes still occur. Master especially likes the Teligent LLC ([www.teligentcorp.com](http://www.teligentcorp.com)) name, which the organizers picked out of the chute last year over runner-up ACOM. She says the name economically conveys the nature of the operation -- telecommunications -- and a favorable attribute -- intelligence.

But sometimes a name's sound can be more important to the company than the literal meaning it conveys. The founders of Covad Communications Co. ([www.covad.com](http://www.covad.com)) were thinking "copper value-added" when they came up with the name for the company that offers high-speed data services over conventional phone lines. Customers often don't get the reference, says marketing director Lou Pelosi, but the name still works because it's short and connotes speed.

Another new competitor, Electric Lightwave Inc. ([www.eli.net](http://www.eli.net)), has an attractive albeit longish name, Master says. "Lightwave" suggests fiber optics, and "electric" offers a comfortable retro glow without screaming obsolescence, she adds.

"Wall Street likes it," says Jack Hardy, a spokesman for Electric Lightwave. "It stands out from the rest of the group. There's a connotation of movement and energy, so it gives us a lot of flexibility."

Other companies doggedly stick with names that are at best nondescript. ICG Netcom, the chosen brand for ICG Communications Inc. ([www.icgcomm.com](http://www.icgcomm.com)), strikes Master as telecom's answer to the new Frankenstein of corporate naming, accounting firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP.

The initials "ICG" are shorthand for the original corporate name, IntelCom Communications Group. When ICG bought Netcom On-Line Communication Services Inc. last year, it combined its initials and the Netcom name for marketing purposes. The rationale: The Netcom name is well-recognized and helps convey the company's breadth of services, says Carol Post, marketing vice president at ICG.

Companies can't just turn their backs on established brand names, agrees consultant Barnich. "You don't jettison that overnight," he says.



**Try our easy-to-use naming software.** Find the ideal name for your company or product in a matter of minutes. A powerful database and your keywords generate memorable names quickly and easily. [Click here for more information.](#)



<http://www.namingtoolbox.com>

But data CLEC Rhythms NetConnections Inc. ([www.rhythms.net](http://www.rhythms.net)) has become established enough for Chief Executive Officer Catherine Hapka to consider lopping off the unwieldy second half of the name and go with just the sexier first name.

The "Rhythms" label suggests helping telecommuters "work at their own rhythm," she says, while conveying predictability and dependability.

Original article: <http://www.naming.com/assets/news/interactive.html>



**Try our easy-to-use naming software.** Find the ideal name for your company or product in a matter of minutes. A powerful database and your keywords generate memorable names quickly and easily. [Click here for more information.](#)