

# Strange things happen when you let people choose their own name, part 1

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One of the things that happens when you arrive at Microsoft is you are assigned an email account, and the name of that account becomes your identity. The IT department has a set of rules which they follow to arrive at your account name, but you can petition for reconsideration if the result of their algorithm produces something you don't like.

You have more flexibility with your display name. For example, you may commonly go by a less formal version of your legal name, or you may go by your middle name or your initials or you may choose to adopt an English name as your professional name. But even though you have flexibility here, you don't have total freedom. I doubt that a request for my name to show up in the address book as Raymond Luxury-Yacht would be approved.

There is a third component to your name, however, that you do have much more freedom with. The official name for it is the *differentiator*, and it appears in parentheses after the rest of your name. Here are some common uses for this bonus text:

Name	Explanation
John Smith (MSN) John Smith (NEW YORK)	To avoid confusion with other people with the same name.
Jane Smith (DOE)	Maiden name or other name you once went by.
John Kennedy (JFK)	Another name you are commonly known by.
Alan Smithee (MOBILE)	To let people know that you are rarely in the office.

Originally, the differentiator also was submitted for approval, but the people who were responsible for approving them must have gotten tired of wading through thousands of boring requests for approval for this and other categories of personnel record changes that used to require approval. People are now simply trusted not to choose differentiators that are offensive or misleading.

Some people have used this new freedom for humorous purposes. One prominent member of the application compatibility team has a non-English name that people often pronounce incorrectly. For the sake of discussion, let's say his name is *Lav*. At first, he signed his email

| -Lav, rhymes with Dave

After a few months, based on a suggestion from a colleague (who might have been me), he changed it to

| -Lav, doesn't rhyme with "have"

At this point, things got silly pretty quickly. A few months later, the signature changed to

| -Lav, rhymes with orange

The last step was changing the differentiator after his name in the address book. If you look him up, he is listed as "Lav Pivo (ORANGE)".

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