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## A Project by Any Other Name

By [PIMM FOX](#)  
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Corporate IT projects and military campaigns have something in common. Both receive monikers designed to either focus the team or heighten the participants' resolve.

This name game is fraught with problems, as the Pentagon found when it named the military operation in Afghanistan Infinite Justice. For some, that sounded like "eternal retribution," usurping the Almighty's role. As a result, Enduring Freedom was penciled in, and we became sensitized to the repercussions of names.

And yet there isn't a proven convention for IT projects to take into account the relevancy of a name. At RightNow Technologies, an online customer service software vendor in Bozeman, Mont., IT project names are borrowed from geysers; after all, the company is only a boulder's throw from Yellowstone National Park. There's also a hidden meaning to choosing geysers, according to Mike Myer, RightNow's vice president of product development. "Prior to a new software release, there's a lot of steam and vapor," he says. "Also, just like a geyser, you never can tell when something unpredictable will happen, and finally, sometimes after the release, people go: 'So what?'" RightNow gets help from a Web site ([www.geyserstudy.org/geyser\\_main.htm](http://www.geyserstudy.org/geyser_main.htm)) in selecting names.

At Du Pont, project names are left to project leaders, says Ronald Carrick, CIO of the packaging and industrial polymers business. "We don't have a rigid process for naming, but most often they are named in a way that makes three or four [letters] work," he says, citing CAR (corporate authorization record) and SAM (strategic account management) as examples.

Experts in naming and branding place a premium on names, and perhaps IT professionals should as well. "Names are the ultimate sound bite," says Burt Alper, strategy director of naming firm Catchword LLC. Alper says names don't have to be descriptive, but they should have some connection to what's being accomplished.

Richard Owens, president of TDC/The Design Company, says choosing a name is also a creative outlet for a team. "It's a fun moment and can have power because it can be a secret," he says. But, the fun can turn to frustration if teams don't find a name everyone agrees on. "Names are about words and semantics," says Owens. "Choosing a project name should connect a word with an outcome." Latin and Greek word roots help generate names that resonate with meaning.

In the military, blending verbs with nouns seems popular, as in Uphold Democracy, making it sound like a mission statement. But in searching for names of projects, we've yet to encounter one called Ultimate Peace.

*Pimm Fox is Computerworld's West Coast bureau chief. Contact him at [pimm\\_fox@computerworld.com](mailto:pimm_fox@computerworld.com).*

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