

In era of Web searches, business names aren't all about the A's

By Shawn Ledington - 11/2/2007

James Rossell didn't have to think too long about a name for his tattoo shop on West Market Street in York. It needed to be catchy, and it needed to always be near the top of the phone listings.

And that's how A Built to Last Tattooing and Body Piercing came to be.

Rossell said he intentionally put the letter A at the beginning of his business' name so it would be listed toward the top of phone and Internet directories.

He said he had hoped that the boost to the top of the lists, such as in the newly distributed Yellow Book telephone book, would help his business.

It couldn't hurt, he said.

The position does help his online presence, the 31-year-old said. He's not so sure about how the telephone book is working out. He's not really worried about it either, because the tattoo business garners clients by word-of-mouth referrals.

Historically, placement in the phone listings meant everything, said Valerie Moul, president of Godfrey Advertising Inc. in Lancaster.

But the advancement of online search engines and directories has made phone listings much less relevant, she said.

"Search engines don't care about alphabetization," she said. "They are about relevance and content."

Rather than fabricate a name for the sake of alphabetization, Moul said, businesses should focus on giving a name meaning.

"It should be pronounceable, relevant and memorable," she said.

A business name that naturally begins with an A — or more than one — can't hurt, said Scott Austin, president of Double Dog Communications in York Township, York County.

He said his marketing experts think it's foolish to put an A in front of a name just for the sake of it being closer to the top of listings.

"But, if it fits, and it works, then use it; you will have an advantage," Austin said.

Such was the case for Walter Harclerode, owner of AAA Welding, based in Manheim Township, Lancaster County. He said the three A's in his business name had nothing to do with the alphabet, even though his listing is one of the first in the phone listings for Lancaster County.

He meant that his business is Anywhere, Anyplace, Anytime Welding. He said he relies more on word-of-mouth referrals than phone-book advertising for new business.

Olga Lembesis, owner of A&A Designs at Lily Manor in Mifflintown, Juniata County, needed a catchy name for her second wedding and catering business, which she opened a few years ago.

She chose to call her business A&A Designs because her daughters' names both start with an A. She said she also chose it so she could be closer to the top of online wedding-planning directories.

Lembesis, famous locally for her detailed weddings, went through growing pains as a result of owning a business and then selling it.

When she decided to go back

into business for herself, she needed something that would garner attention, she said.

"Once you sell a business, people think you're out of business," she said.

John Klein, director of marketing for Super Pages' Mid-Atlantic region, said putting A's in front of business names is common, and he said he thinks that it makes a businesses feel good about its placement in the listings.

But, the best way to draw more attention to your business, Klein said, is to pay for the larger advertisements that are printed inside the phone listings. He said Super Pages' research shows that people will look at an average of

three businesses when they search in the Yellow Pages.

"So, you might go to the phone book to look up one business, but you might see the bigger ad and think about calling them for a price, too," Klein said.

And while the decision to put an A at the beginning of his tattoo shop's name isn't necessary, according to marketing experts, Rossell's decision to focus on online directories is essential.

These days, fewer businesses

rely on the telephone book for new clients, Moul said. She said her younger employees do not get the newspaper or use phone books.

"They do everything online," she said. "When we get new phone books, they sit in the lobby for six months."

But, Lisa Johnson, spokeswoman for Super Pages, said there are still plenty of small and midsize businesses that need the Yellow Pages for marketing. And there are still a lot of people who use the telephone book to search for the numbers they need, she said.

Johnson disagreed with the view that phone books are becoming obsolete, but she did concede that more people search online.

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