




April 1, 1997

ICL is pleased — well... puzzled, but maybe **some** people are pleased anyway — to announce a name change for one of our most important products, **ISS45**. From this point forward, it will be called “” or “The System Formerly Known as ISS45.”

Perhaps this turn of events requires some explanation. It all started about a week ago, when on the way to work I had a terrible premonition. For some reason I had been musing about shirts with banded collars — I’m not exactly sure why I would be thinking about banded collars, driving along Central Expressway at 6:15 AM, but there you have it — and I suddenly was overcome by this awful sinking sensation, a feeling that something would go terribly wrong that day. And sure enough, three hours later Bernard appeared at my door. Today’s outfit: black silk tie; matching black silk shirt with a *banded collar*; black vinyl belt about the width of fettucine; black vinyl trousers with random cut-out geometric holes; shoes fashioned from some strange material not of this earth. “Versace,” he explained, rolling his eyes with faux patience. **Versace.**” The pants in particular, I thought, looked like they originated from a really ... bad ... movie.

(If any of you are not familiar with Bernard — pronounced BERNerd, if you had any doubts — he’s the NYNY based media maven who’s been assigned to me, and you have him to thank for all our memorable titles and slogans of late, like oh, never mind.)

“Renamed the product—” he chirped rather commandingly as he opened up his Halliburton Zero which had been recently re-anodized in black. It was frightfully stylish I suppose, but it nevertheless suggested what aluminum siding would look like for Generation-X. I was baffled by his plan. “BERNard,” I shook my head, “The System Formerly Known...?” It’s finally happened — you’ve truly gone around the bend.”

“Far *from* it, boyfriend,” was his silken reply. “Think about Prince. What was his name before — Roosevelt Jefferson or something? Much too cumbersome for people to latch onto. Renaming himself ‘Prince’ was a dazzling move. Look where it landed him — the top of the charts, the acme of the business — and when that started to wear out, well, he took his name down to the consummate level of abstract minimalism; a pure symbol, no name whatsoever. Even the ‘formerly known’ thing: sheer *brilliance*. Notice how it made everyone refer to him as an ‘artist’, that he was ‘known’, that ‘former’ thing. *Brilliance!*”

“Bernard, Bernard, Bernard” I reply. “That’s wonderful for rock stars — and you know, you really ought to write a book on the popular mass media someday — **but what’s this all got to do with helping people sell PoS systems?**”

“Dear child, don’t you understand? Look what the business has done to names the last few years. Remember the ‘Vanguard?’ That was ten years ago — way back then products had

real names. But look at your system today: 'ISS45'. There's a name that's clean, modern, perfectly abstract, perfectly meaningless. Just initials and a number. Now that was fine for its time in the mid '90s, but hey, phat man, we're not *in* the mid '90s anymore. We've got a comet up there in the sky to tell us it's millennium time — the great odometer is fixing to roll over, my son, and we've got to go with the flow. "∞." That's the name, that's the game, anything else is lame."

"But I'm not sure I *like* this particular flow you want me to go with..."

"Of *course* you like it. They like it — *loved Express*, remember? And think about that clumsy, clumsy 'ISS45 for IGA' title. Dopey, but then when we branded it *I!*, well, it just took *off* and we sold, what, 150 systems in fourteen minutes? See what media-with-a-capital-'S' can do for you?"

"But Bernard, it's — it's — it's ... *unnatural*."

"Shush, sir, shush. It's the most natural thing in the world. The progression: Vanguard ISS45 ∞. From long name to short name to no name. From literal to abstract to nothingness. From pedestrian to passable to perfection. Ooo! Ooo! Ooo! Three Ps just like the three Rs, mad, mad, *mad*. You need to get mister corporate attorney to copyright that *stat*, mister marketing man."

"Bernard, look," I say. "This is just too weird. I mean, I like out-of-the-box thinking as much as the next guy, but this idea is out of the cat box. No one, and I mean *no one*, is going to go around telling grocers to buy something called 'The System Formerly Known as ISS45.' Can you picture Dennis Malloy trying to keep a straight face? Can you picture Perry Potter sitting down in some little backroom office with the Wednesday ads plastered on the walls with a guy who has a grease pencil in the pocket protector of his short-sleeved white shirt and Perry's telling him, 'Well, Earl, I've looked at the direction of your business, and I urge you to consider The System Formerly Known as ISS45' and Earl says 'Did you really say what I think you just said, Perry?' Bernard, this is PoS, not show business. These are grocers. These are serious people. They don't hang out at Tower Records. Body piercing is not a source of interest. They don't even *like* cappuccino. We'll be the laughingstock of the industry."

"Nonsense, my dear boy. The reality is, you're palpably *late* with this change. Everybody else is *already* doing it. Think about Innovax: The Product Formerly Known as Sweda 6000. ACS: The Product Formerly Known as Unity. S4: the Product Formerly Known as Edge. Shall I go on? ISI: The Product Formerly Known as Goodwin's. 4694: The Product Formerly Known as 4684. ACR: The Product Formerly Known as H.E.Butt's Homemade Checkout. More? Falcon: The Product Formerly Known as Omron. S.A.S.I.: the Product Formerly Known as ... well ... S.A.S.I. They're like the Who — 'Meet the New software/Same as the Old software...' Nothing ever changes there—"

I had to admit it, Bernard may be certifiably insane, but he did have a point.

So, here we go, ∞ it is. We've hired an army of temps to revise all the Marketing Bulletins, and then there's the trade shows we have to change all the graphics for, all the new business cards... all our proposals have to change, all the contracts. The title screens on the system, and then all those CD-ROMS to re-issue, and oh, the PowerPoint presentations, the course materials...

And naturally, we're reprinting all the brochures to reflect the new name, too. You should receive a set of them by SDA. Yeah, and you'll have a complete plug-and-play, easy-to-install, easy-to-support NT PoS system by the 4th of July.

To your success, I guess,

Tony
Tony van Severter
Director: ∞