

# Can We Please Have A Name Change?



**Frank Rolfe**

Here at the Journal, there are several words you cannot use to describe our industry. One is the “T\_\_\_\_\_” word. The other is the “M\_\_\_\_\_” word. While that’s fine, I frequently wonder what’s so great about “Manufactured Home”. My informal testing tells me that the new moniker is just as bad – or worse – that its forefathers. And I think it’s about time

we came up with something better.

## **My first experience with the stigma**

I was at a Home Depot, ordering a bunch of supplies for some renovations to a manufactured home community I had just bought. I was there with my manager. When they asked where to deliver the load, the manager told them the address. They then ask, “what’s there”. And she answered “its sort of an apartment complex”. When we walked out of the store, I ask the manager why she had lied and told them “an apartment complex”. She told me that she would have been humiliated to tell them it was a “manufactured home community”. Now, this woman was about 75 years old, and didn’t have a lot of pride, and yet she could not bring herself to say the words. Clearly, there’s something wrong with the name “manufactured home” when it seems like a badge of shame.

## **Why “manufactured home” does not seem to work**

Things that are built in factories do not get a lot of respect compared to their hand-built alternative. For example, few people are going to opt for the frozen dinner built in a factory when they can have something cooked fresh at the chain restaurant. And few true connoisseurs prefer the “Made in China” ceramic statues to the actual bronze ones – even though they are built in a factory and packed better. So exactly what product in your life *do* you prefer because it is built in a factory? A car (Ford Taurus versus hand-built Lamborghini), or a dress (Walmart versus hand-built Coco Chanel) or a painting (Hobby Lobby print versus original oil)? I can’t come up with any, either. So why would anyone think that the term “manufactured” would lend consumer excitement to a house?

## **Where did “manufactured” even come from?**

When the industry changed all labeling from the “T” and the “M” words to “Manufactured”, it was as though they had invented the soft drink. Even when I first heard about the name change, I was less than impressed. You would think that, for such fanfare, the name would actually be decent. But it sounds like something my daughter would come up with for a title to a science project. Hardly the anticipated result of significant marketing and consumer research – and certainly not the type of thing that textbooks would one day call the “decisive moment in industry history”. Obviously, a manufacturer thought it up

(wow, what originality) but aren’t these the same people that have created products that no longer sell? Hardly the guys you want to sit next to if you want to cheat on the math exam.

## **Time for a better alternative that actually helps sell product**

I am very excited about some of the directions that the manufacturers are now taking the industry – particularly Clayton with their I-Home and E-Home. They seem to be saying “we’re not trying to copy a stick-built home anymore – we’re creating something unique”. That’s what this industry needs – originality. The name “manufactured” reeks of non-originality and mass production. Can’t we come up with something that we can use as a sales tool, not a deal breaker? One that breaks the stigma and makes customers proud?

I personally think that’s why Clayton calls it the “I Home” as opposed to the “Manufactured Home”. They already know the dilemma, and are trying to figure out a way to correct the current mass marketing blunder. Way to go, Clayton.

## **Have you heard about Pam Anderson?**

Recent articles have said that former Baywatch star Pam Anderson, who is having financial problems, has moved into a manufactured home. This could be the marketing breakthrough of the century for making our product look “cool” and “desirable” to a new generation. But I know we’ll just blow it by touting the label “manufactured home” – too bad that she didn’t move into Clayton’s I-Home, where we could pump that story for all it’s worth.

## **My personal challenge to you**

Even though I’m a miser, I’m going to get out the old check book and put my money where my mouth is. I am hereby starting a challenge to find a better name for our industry. And I will pay \$100 to the person or persons who can come up with it. Send me your suggestions, and I will announce in a later article who the winners are. I’ll even announce the second and third place winners as well as some of the craziest names presented.

Don’t be shy. Anyone can do better than “manufactured home”, so the bar is set pretty low. And don’t procrastinate – send me your ideas today, while they’re still fresh in your head. The fate of our industry may well depend on it!

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*Frank Rolfe has been involved in all facets of Commercial Investing. His experience includes purchasing and operating over 25 mobile home, RV Parks and Self Storages as an investor, performing "due diligence" on hundreds of other mobile home and RV parks, speaking at mobile home park investing seminars and real estate clubs and telling it like it is! Visit <http://www.selfstorages.com> for more insights on investing in Self Storages.*