

# Rebranding move backfires on troubled media group

June 3 2016, by Rob Lever

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Tribune Publishing, which includes the Los Angeles Times and other large dailies, is searching for a new direction in an industry that is increasingly digital

Troubled newspaper group Tribune Publishing was trying for a new image as it seeks to fend off a takeover bid and adapt to the digital era.

Instead, its new name "tronc"—all in lowercase letters—drew ridicule, mockery and disbelief.

The "rebranding" provoked a flood of derision on Twitter and from media analysts and critics.

"At first I thought it looked like hoax," said Dan Kennedy, a journalism professor at Northeastern University who also blogs about the media industry, calling the name change "ridiculous."

Kennedy said it appears to be a move by a group seeking to evolve from the struggling print newspaper business "but they don't sound like they have a clue on how to."

The name tronc—derived from "tribune online content," according to a statement—was chosen because it "captures the essence of the company's mission" to "deliver personalized and interactive experiences to its 60 million monthly users."

But "tronc" is also a British term for the pooling of tips or other resources. And in French, it translates to tree trunk.

On Twitter, the comments were merciless.

"If you wanted to signify the pathetic nasal honks of the last dying dinosaur, 'tronc' would be a pretty good word," tweeted New York Times deputy tech editor Quentin Hardy.

"The robot overlords appear to have won," said NPR media writer David Folkenflik.

Emily Bell, director of the Columbia University Tow Center for Digital Journalism, said in a tweet: "I thought Tronc was a Lars von Trier trilogy about the moral descent of a suburban architect and his customs officer wife."



Over the past month, the newspaper group Tribune Publishing has been fending off a takeover effort from USA Today publisher Gannett

The company, which includes the Los Angeles Times and other large dailies spun off the larger Tribune Co. media conglomerate in 2014, has been searching for a new direction in an industry that is increasingly digital.

Over the past month, it has been fending off a takeover effort from USA Today publisher Gannett.

But the name change did little to inspire confidence.

**'Cartoon caveman'**

Mashable's Patrick Kulp called it "a head-scratching name that might sound better suited for a cartoon caveman."

At the Nieman Lab media blog, an editor's note said the lower-case spelling would not be accepted.

"Because we do not hate our readers, Nieman Lab style from here on out will be a capitalized Tronc, no matter what the company insists," the note said.

A Los Angeles Times article also used the Tronc spelling.

Washington Post [media](#) writer Erik Wemple pulled no punches, writing that "the Tribune lost its mind" with the name change.

"Far worse than the name and punctuational idiosyncrasies is the direction in which (chairman Michael) Ferro is pushing the company," Wemple said.

Wemple said the release simply offered "buzzwords" and phrases with little real meaning such as turning the group into "a content curation and monetization company."

"If all that baloney sounds like the work of a team with no background in journalism, then it accurately represents itself," he wrote.

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