

Astronomy in the Marketplace

by **Dennis Schatz** (Pacific Science Center)

The allure of astronomy is so strong that many companies have named products after astronomical objects. Your family may enjoy compiling a list of such products and thinking about other astronomical terms that await commercialization. You might also add songs, TV shows, and movies with astronomical words in the title to your list.

1. The family could cooperate in coming with a list to which everyone contributes, or, if the kids can hold their own (especially when it comes to music and movies), you can arrange a competition to see who comes up with the longest list. Alternatively, this could be a competition between two or more families when you have visitors.

Here are some examples to get the discussion going:

Automobiles: Ford Taurus, Mercury Comet, Dodge Aries, Ford Galaxie, GM Astrovan, Mitsubishi Eclipse, Toyota Corona, Chevy Nova, and Subaru (which means the star cluster we call the Pleiades in Japanese; the Subaru logo at the front of each car actually shows a number of the stars in the Pleiades star cluster.)

Other Products: Comet cleanser, Milky Way and Mars candy bars, Pulsar watches, Quasar televisions, and Galaxy carpets (with a spiral galaxy as a logo).

2. After generating a short first list, ask everyone to spend the next few days looking around their homes, in local stores and advertising, and in magazines and newspapers for as many astronomically inspired product and business names as they can find.

3. Now have the kids devise their own astronomically named product. They can even write and illustrate an ad for the new product. Or better yet, have them actually produce a package or sample of the new product using common household materials. Obviously, this will be easier for "Supernova Breakfast Cereal" than for a new "Miranda Sports Coupe".) Kids can also be asked to write a paragraph extolling the virtues of their product (with emphasis on astronomical terms and images) and to give a brief presentation, ad, or video about the product.

You might note that astronomers themselves have chuckled about these product names over the years. Years ago, when a small, previously unseen galaxy was discovered relatively near our Milky Way, it was nicknamed "Snickers" because, compared to our Galaxy, it was just a peanut.

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