



Signal Processing: Is it Time to Change the Society's Name?

On 10 April 2014, I received an e-mail from Petar M. Djurić that was sent to all members of the IEEE Signal Processing Society (SPS), with the subject title, “The Power of a Name” [1]. The message provides a brief description of the evolution of the Society before suggesting that the time has come for another Society name change.

At the Board of Governors meeting in December 2013, a committee was formed (Philip Chou, Walter Kellermann, Anthony Kuh, Anna Scaglione, and Petar M. Djurić) to explore the possibility of changing the Society's name, an issue that has been a topic of discussion for quite a long time. But what is the motivation for such a change?

There has been a series of columns and editorials published in *IEEE Signal Processing Magazine (SPM)* over the last decade that have addressed the important issue of what signal processing conveys for a layperson [2], [3]. More recently, in the new *SPM* column, “Reflections,” José M.F. Moura et al. shared their “reflections” on this thought-provoking topic, i.e., signal processing inside [4].

There is no doubt in my mind that we must do something to increase awareness about our profession among the public at large. The fundamental question we should ask is whether a name change alone would achieve this goal. Clearly, a change of name would help, but to what? The e-mail Petar M. Djurić sent on behalf of the committee can be found in [1]. It invites all SPS members to provide feed-

back on this topic and offers suggestions for some new names.

I took the time to read the many comments made by colleagues, and I found the exercise worthwhile. Some of the critics provide good arguments as to why the Society should stick with the name “Signal Processing.” One strong argument against a name change is that “The public (as a whole) has little awareness of what most professions really involve, or what they're called. That is no reflection on the names or the crafts involved, and very clearly doesn't matter...” The many in favor of a name change argue that they are “in favor of changing the name if the name chosen is broadening the domain of interest of SPS members in the sense of representing current (and eventually future) research and professional activities...”

The page is still available for comments, and we are interested in receiving feedback. So far, there seems to be interest in adding the word “Information” to “Signal.” It is the committee's responsibility to evaluate the many comments provided and to draw conclusions.

My personal view is that a name change would help, indeed. More importantly, however, is to raise awareness about our profession among the laypeople. In my editorial in the May 2013 issue of *SPM* [5], I wrote, “My personal view is that we have to be more active in disseminating success stories of signal processing, not only to the decision makers, but also to the public at large.” One of the commentators in [1] wrote, “When people ask ‘What is SP?’ I say it is everything that goes on inside a smart-phone and their eyes suddenly light up.”

Our mandate is to increase awareness to the point where the public no longer questions what signal processing is. If we

were to change the name, and the public still does not know what our profession involves, it would solidify what the observer before wrote, “The public (as a whole) has little awareness of what most professions really involve.” This would not help the Society, and we would start the very same exercise years down the road. The real challenge is to actively promote our discipline so that just the mention of signal processing without any explanation would cause the public's eyes to light up.

SPM is an outstanding vehicle to raise awareness among professionals in signal processing and among professionals in cognate areas through columns, forum, and the eNewsletter. It gives me great pleasure to introduce the new area editor (eNewsletter), Dr.-Ing. Christian Debes, whose mandate is to reshape the eNewsletter in this new area of communication. He will replace Z. Jane Wang, whom I thank for her hard work as area editor and who will support *SPM* in her new role as a member of the Senior Editorial Board.

REFERENCES

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