



Stock



Ticker's Tale

by Bill Dickneider

Lots of people look for me but can't find me. Sometimes they even confuse me with someone else. But I'm not hiding out, and I'm not a lost cause. Who am I? My name is Ticker, and I'd like to tell you my story.

Tick, Tick, Tick ...

My story begins a long time ago when I was a kid in the '60s. No, not the 1960s. The 1860s. In those days, we had no telephones or televisions, but we did have a "tele-something" that had just been invented. It was the telegraph.

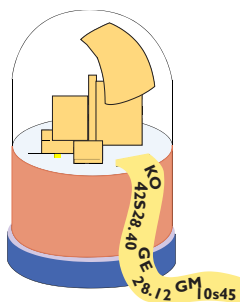
The telegraph may seem like a weakling compared with cell phones and e-mail today, but it was the Internet of the nineteenth century. Consider how it changed the stock market after Thomas Edison and others perfected a little machine called the stock ticker. Suddenly, stock prices on the New York Stock Exchange could be telegraphed across many miles and printed out by these machines ticking away at their task.

But sending information on a telegraph was awkward. Someone had to use special code to enter stock prices on a telegraph, so it made

sense to shorten stock names into special symbols. Here's where I came in because I represent all these symbols. As we ticked our way out of these little machines, people began calling us ticker symbols. That's how I got my name, Ticker.

Of course, the telegraph and stock tickers eventually went the way of the dinosaur. But we ticker symbols are still here doing our job. Even with computers and fiber optic cables, we still make it easier to communicate stock quotes.

Today, there is an electronic ticker tape that streams information about stock trades during the open hours of the stock market. Maybe you've seen one of these at the bottom of your TV screen. We symbols make this electronic reporting much simpler and faster because we communicate information with only a few letters. How many letters depends on the stock exchange. The New York



The New York Stock Exchange began using stock tickers in 1867. Why were there no stock symbols before that date?

Stock Exchange uses one to three letters in its symbols. The Nasdaq Stock Market uses four.

We symbols try to help investors by making ourselves easy to find. But people still have trouble locating us. Sometimes they confuse us with the names and abbreviations that newspapers put in their stock tables. I don't like being confused with a newspaper name, but a ticked off Ticker I'm not.

No Newspaper Names

For example, some newspapers list Dell Computer as DellCptr, which investors often think is the company's stock symbol. But the company, which is listed on the Nasdaq Stock Market, has the ticker symbol DELL. This confusion doesn't occur when a newspaper like *The Wall Street Journal* presents ticker symbols along with companies' full names. But limited space prevents most newspapers from doing this. So they ignore us symbols and list only company names, which are often abbreviated. Still, listing company names is better for investors than listing only us stock symbols. After all, if stock tables gave symbols but no company names, investors would never find a company in the table if they didn't know its symbol.

On the web, however, people can look us up by typing in the company's name and searching for its ticker symbol. Many newspapers offer this service at their web sites. You can find symbol searches at many other sites too. The Stock Market Game has a research section at its web site where you can look up symbols. Here are a few other sites too:

The Nasdaq Stock Market — www.nasdaq.com
The New York Stock Exchange — www.nyse.com
Hoovers Online — www.hoovers.com
Yahoo!Finance — <http://finance.yahoo.com>



Searching the Web

Even on the web you might still have trouble finding us. There are two reasons why. First, the business you're searching for might own other companies (called subsidiaries) with similar names. So when you type in a company name and click on "symbol lookup," you could end up with a list of possibilities. How do you know which one to pick?

Let me give you an example. Not long ago an investor went to a web site to find the stock symbol for Ford Motor Company. The investor typed in Ford Motor and clicked on "symbol

lookup." What appeared on the screen looked something like this:

There are four symbols here, but the second

SYMBOL	NAME	MARKET	TYPE
F	Ford Motor Co.	NYSE	Stock
FCJ	Ford Motor Credit Co.	NYSE	Stock
FCZ	Ford Motor Credit Co.	NYSE	Stock
F_pb	Ford Motor Co.	NYSE	Stock

and third ones are for Ford Motor Credit Corporation. This company is a subsidiary of Ford Motor Company, so neither is the right one. You can always click on the symbol to see if the company is a subsidiary.

There's a second reason why investors might have trouble finding a symbol on the web. A company may also have other stocks besides the **common stock** you're trying to find. These other stocks would be various kinds of **preferred stock**. What's a preferred stock? Here's a brief explanation:

STOCK (A share of ownership in a company)

COMMON STOCK - Most stock is common stock, which is the basic ownership of a company. Common stockholders own most of the company's profits and bear most of its losses. They usually have voting rights.

PREFERRED STOCK - A preferred stock receives a fixed share of a company's profits as a dividend. Payment of dividends on this stock come before any dividends on common stock, so it gets preferred treatment. This stock has no voting rights, and does not share most of the company's profits (or losses).



If you see a symbol with lines, odd characters, or more than four letters, it's probably a preferred stock, not the common stock you're searching for. That's true for the last symbol above, "F_pb." The first symbol, "F," is the correct one. It represents the common stock of the Ford Motor Company. What if your search yields no symbols at all? If so, try a company name search at the Hoover.com site above.

Write Now

Pick one of the following and write a paragraph to explain your answer.

Choose a web site and search for Coca-Cola's common stock. Explain how you found the correct symbol for the stock.

Pick two companies and find their listings in a newspaper. Then use a web site to find their symbols. How do the symbols differ from the