



THE GUIDE TO NAMING BRANDS

fizzbuzz

Imagine your future business as a tall skyscraper. Your brand is the foundation on which you will build a relationship with your customers and grow your business. Just like a building, any weakness or misalignment in the foundation becomes amplified and exaggerated the higher you go. The name you choose to express your brand's core values, forms an essential part of this foundation.

A brand name is not a magic wand. In terms of business growth, there's no substitute for time, and sustained and determined marketing, but a unique and well thought-out brand name has the potential to help awareness of a brand grow far more quickly than a bland name, or one whose values are misaligned with customers.

A brand *name* is also not a brand *strategy*. Only once a brand strategy is 100% clear, is it possible to consider the name. When you have an unambiguous picture of your audience and how you fit with them, then you can begin to develop ideas for names that make you sound like you will deliver on your proposition.

CHOOSE YOUR TEAM

A popular method of brand name brainstorming is to involve everyone in the organisation, be expansive and invite as many thoughts as possible.

If you open up the challenge to allow everyone in the company or department to have input, remember that in the end, you will only choose *one* name, so you'll run the risk of alienating most of the people you sought to include.

Or worse, you'll try to incorporate elements from a large group of ideas and end up with a bland, unfocused, committee-pleasing name that consumers may find forgettable or confusing.

Whilst it's great to be seen to involve as many team members as possible, you need to choose carefully the people who will be involved in the naming process. And generally speaking, **the fewer, the better.**

Pick a *small* team of people who'll really understand the objective. Make it clear from the outset that the project is not about gaining personal recognition, but defining a brand for business growth. In other words, don't pick any overbearing egos for the naming team.

PLAN THE ARCHITECTURE

Looking at the business strategy, will this new brand represent the entirety of the business, or a specific operational offshoot?

Some businesses create a single brand which represents their activities in a range of different areas. Apple for example, is active in a range of technology related markets: computing, mobile phones, music streaming. It successfully pushes its brand into these different areas because the company's promise remains consistent and the Apple name ties it only to a broad concept and not a specific product.

Some multi-brand businesses curate a portfolio of brands over time, each of which has no real relation to the others. In this instance, the individual brands are mostly independent of one another (although to a limited extent, they borrow from the owning company's reputation). Unilever for example, owns brands as diverse as Domestos, Flora and Vaseline.

In order to leverage the success of already established brands, it might be advantageous to create an ecosystem which clearly relates brands to one another. This allows the brand some autonomy to operate in a particular market, yet at the same time lets consumers know that it comes from a reputable family of brands. In this scenario, the brand name will need to lock-in and relate to other brands in the 'family.' Examples include the Nickelodeon TV channel network with Nickelodeon, NickJr, NickToons, NickMusic and so on.

DIFFERENTIATION

A cleverly conceived brand name can help with both differentiation and positioning.

You should strive to be different because your brand represents why customers should choose *you* over your competitors. Don't choose a name that's similar to your competitors or that's too plain and unmemorable. How successful would Google have been with a bland metaphor of a name, like 'Apex Search?'

During the naming idea phase, always be mindful of the purpose of the brand, what makes it different and what gives it a competitive advantage.

On the other side of the coin, don't end up bamboozling customers with a name that's ridiculous, confusing, sounds awkward or misses the point.

Aside from the communicative aspect of your naming choice, you also need to be mindful of its ability to be registered as a trade mark. Legally protecting your brand in a globalised market is a very important consideration. Successful trade mark registrations are those which are unique in their area of business. That means that everyday words could pose some issues, whereas blended words or neologisms (newly invented words) are much more likely to be unique and therefore easy to register.

TYPES OF BRAND NAMES

Evocative names - these are brand names that are designed to associate the brand with distinct characteristics:

Jaguar, Amazon.

Note: choosing a name that is first and foremost an everyday word can create challenges with Google rankings and be incredibly difficult to trade mark. You might need to have a generous budget to make this approach work.

Descriptive names - these are usually all about communication, not so much about characteristics:

Booking.com, Cartoon Network.

Note: If you're in a highly specialised or very technical market, sometimes plain speaking is beneficial, and it may be worth sacrificing some flavour for greater clarity of communication, e.g. Cambridge Antibody Technology. If you're *not* in an unusual niche, a more expressive approach might suit you better.

Conjoined words - these use word combinations to create brands which can combine characteristics, positioning and/or description:

Snapchat, Mastercard.

Note: conjoined words can be highly successful naming solutions, but bear in mind the long-term strategy. Names which contain a specific reference to the product can make future diversification difficult.

Blended words - these follow the same principle as conjoined names, but create the name by combining parts of words:

Microsoft, Duracell.

Note: blended words, chosen carefully, have the possibility to be descriptive, positional and convey character. Their unique nature also helps with successful trade marking.

Geographical names - these, as the name suggests, associate a brand with its place of origin:

Credit Suisse, Outback Jack's.

Note: The country association is beneficial where it supports the essence of the brand. In other circumstances, it can impose limits, which is why Kentucky Fried Chicken ultimately rebranded as KFC.

Founder names - these can convey a sense of tradition, heritage, family and a personal or craftsman-like touch:

Ralph Lauren, Bang & Olufsen.

Note: it takes time to create a heritage brand and a long, sustained and carefully managed marketing effort. Conveying a personal approach or a family business feel can be a good strategy, providing this continues to work for the brand long-term.

Onomatopoeic names - these names add another dimension - the association of sound - to differentiate the brand:

Swiffer, Kaboom.

Note: used carefully, onomatopoeic names can create a deep psychological association with what it's like to experience the product, as well as serving as an excellent memory trigger.

Alliterative names - these are normally short and sweet and easy to remember:

KitKat, Krispy-Kreme.

Note: the alliteration is an excellent memory trigger, and their nature tends to make these names highly individual and therefore easy to establish as trade marks.

The above examples may help to guide you towards the types of brand names you could consider, not forgetting that you can combine different styles to create the final solution.

Ultimately though, never lose sight of your customer. Your name search should always be driven by the characteristics of your brand and how those will appeal to people who will buy it.

For example, the nature of an alliterative name is fun - great for snack foods, but not appropriate for a premium cookware brand. Similarly, if you are a manufacturer of mass market electricals, you might need to consider something more dynamic than a founder name.

LANGUAGE TRANSLATION

Depending on your current market and your future business plans, you might have to consider how your brand name translates across international boundaries. Even if your brand name is a conjoined word or a neologism, never assume that it will 'just work' in translation.

Mistakes in this area have been made, even by the biggest brands. The Chevrolet Nova didn't sell very well in Latin America because in Spanish, "no va" means "won't go." Clairol launched a curling iron called "Mist Stick" in Germany, unaware that "mist" is German slang for manure.

When you have arrived at a working brand name for your main market, be certain to check its viability for other markets you may be targeting. Coca Cola applied some intelligent thinking in this area. The Chinese translation of the name means "bite the wax tadpole." So Coca Cola transliterated the brand for the Chinese market as "ke kou ke le," which can be broadly translated as "happiness in the mouth."

TECHNIQUES

There are many ways to brainstorm a brand name. The key thing is to keep a picture of your target customer in your head at all times. This will help to stop you straying into the woods and getting lost.

If you want to take this a step further, tack a large picture of your target onto a board and around them, tack images of their lifestyle choices - the type of car they drive, the house they live in, the tv they watch etc... You will be able to see immediately if the words you are thinking of fit or don't fit.

The most obvious first step is for everyone to write a long list of relevant thoughts. Put the lists together and eliminate the weakest ones, again, picturing your target customer as you evaluate each of the options.

It helps to get inside the everyday experiences of your targeted consumer - read their social media pages to see what popular phrases, words or abbreviations they're using. What's their 'style' of communication?

Read the magazines that are targeted at your audience.

Writers and editors of successful magazines will have already developed a communication style and language that resonates with your customers.

Tear words out of magazines or print them from your list and play around with them: try shortening them, combining them, tearing them in half, mixing them up and reassembling them in twos or threes.

If you believe a geographic reference will be a benefit, open a map, look at places and think of objects and colloquialisms that have a strong association with the location.

Use pictures and symbols as a shorthand for words as well. These can often trigger lateral thoughts that might result in a truly unique name.

There are no hard and fast rules to produce the ultimate brand name, with one exception:

never lose sight of your customer.

WATCH OUT!

When you have distilled all of your thoughts down to a final shortlist, it's time to run some checks, which might help to eliminate the last few and help 'the one' rise to the surface.

Even if your shortlist only consists of one name, you need to consider the following:

- If it doesn't make any sense when *you* say it, it won't make sense to your customers either.
- If it sounds stupid or awkward when you say it, it'll sound stupid or awkward to your customers as well.
- If it seems plain or bland... forget it and think again.
- If it's just an over-used metaphor, like apex or summit, it *will* make your brand forgettable.
- Bear in mind that if you use a deliberate misspelling, e.g. a "K" in place of a "C" or an "F" in place of a "Ph," it might be a barrier to being easily found on internet searches.
- Check on the government's IP website that your name is not already in use as a trade mark in your area of business.

ENJOY...

If you don't enjoy the process, you won't come up with a great name. People think better and more creatively when they are happy and having fun with a task. Stay focused, but don't turn the project into a chore.

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