

What your brand name says about you

Whether branding or rebranding, creating a name for your brand that is appropriate, available and enduring is a challenging task



Where brands come true.

We're a national design company on a mission to help brands transform what is — to what could be.

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A lot goes into a name...

If you could pick your own name, what would it be? Did you have one already in mind, a name you've admired and wished was your own? Or would you have to think about it for a day – or a couple of weeks? Why do we name children when they are babies? Wouldn't it be better to wait and see if they were really meant to be a Bob or a Cathy, or if Reginald or Shakira better fits their personality? Are some people limited by their name? Are some empowered by it?

Naming a tiny person is not easy. It is usually a decision that will last the rest of his or her life. Naming a brand is not easy, either. A lot has to go into a name. It needs to be appropriate. Some brands aim for clever. Others are more interested in distinction. It also has to be enduring: something that will not be outdated in a year or two. And it has to be available: a name that is not trademarked and already in use. That is not as easy to find as you might think.

Let's examine a few that are already taken – and from them learn about the categories they fit.

Fun by another name...



Light-hearted in a sort of lyrical way, these names conjure a mental image while just being fun to say. Including certain sounds can be fun, too. The goal is to choose a name that will at least give some idea of the product or target audience. Golf Galaxy offers consumers everything in the golf world – and beyond. Sea-Do and its winter cousin, Ski-Do is an invitation to excitement. Nutella is odd but it sounds like it would be fun to try. A name that hints at amusement or pleasure will draw consumers to your brand.

Speaking of odd names...



There are names that are so original they sound as though they came from another planet. Some actually have a meaning in another language (Etsy, for example, means “Oh, yes!” in Italian). Some are simply made up when the original name is too long or technical. Skype started as the “Sky peer-to-peer” project, which was shortened to Skyper, then simply, Skype.

It stands for...

DSW
DESIGNER SHOE WAREHOUSE

CVS

3M

Some brands aren't words, they are just initials or acronyms. Designer Shoe Warehouse isn't quite as classy or hip as DSW. CVS originally stood for Consumer Value Stores. How complicated would it be to walk into a CVS store today and ask for Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing transparent tape instead of 3M? We are also fans of initials you say instead of spell, like IMAX.

Cheers for the playfully literal...

bigsexyhair.



KitchenAid

Upbeat and to the point, some brand names indicate products or services that are useful and that achieve a desired effect. When branding or rebranding, the goal is to find the right mix of wit and wisdom, fun and function. KitchenAid is like the extra pair of hands you want when you are cooking or baking. Big Sexy Hair is what you want when you're not spending the evening cooking and baking.

For a stroll down memory lane...



Some brands are already legendary, thanks to their names. Those names do more than identify, they tell a story, often a combination of a time-honored legacy and a tradition of high quality. Others indicate innovation in technology and manufacturing (Ford), or high fashion (Chanel). Names like these may be hard to come by today, but not impossible. Tesla Motors (a nod to inventor, futurist, electrical engineer and physicist Nikola Tesla) is a fine example.

Take us to a place...



Few things help consumers visualize a brand's personality like a name that draws upon an exotic, romantic or rugged locale. Timberland says outdoors and instills an image of where it needs to be worn. Outback Steakhouse says Australia with an accent. And it also says sizzling grills and Bloomin' Onions. Old El Paso says flavor with a Spanish accent. Carnival Cruises sounds like a floating party. Your brand personality helps consumers feel something. Selecting a place, real or imagined, can spark that feeling.

It is what it is...

hayneedle 



 fitbit

Consumers are drawn to brand names that find a witty way of explaining their purpose. Hayneedle is the place where you can easily find that needle you're looking for. Aleve takes that pain away – all day. Fitbit is a tiny gadget that helps you stay fit. Though the brand name is arguably dated and somewhat sexist, Craftsman tools are still perceived as some of the best-made hand and power tools – and they have kept that reputation since 1927.

Rev us up...



Steppenwolf's classic "Born to be Wild" is a song that could literally "Get your motor runnin' . . ." Brand names can do that, too. A bull sees red and its adrenaline surges. A Jaguar is a predator that races to the top of the food chain. Brand names can trigger excitement and passion. The right name satisfies the need to make the most of each day, whether it is an all-nighter at work or a fast ride home.

Like we speak another language...

VON MAUR®



When founder Nick Swinmurn in 1999 needed a name for his first-ever online shoe retail business, he chose Zappos.com. It is a catchy brand based on the word “zapatos,” which is Spanish for “shoes.” And it was better than using his last name. Say the words “Von Maur” and it even sounds like a swanky store. Foreign words can instill elegance, sophistication and status – even mystery.

We were meant to be together...



Some brand names are a new version of two words combined; a fusion of words and their meanings also known as a portmanteau. Like smog is a combination of smoke and fog. Amtrak, for example, is the common brand name for National Railroad Passenger Corporation. It combines America (actually North America, because it operates in the United States and Canada) and a version of track, indicating a railroad. Ziploc bags zip to lock. Reddi Wip is whipped cream that is ready to be squirted anywhere, including directly into your mouth if you’d like. Or Nesquik, which in 1948 began as Nestlé’s “Quik” Chocolate Powder.

And, finally: they are real if we think they are...



Despite their physical similarities, the Pillsbury Doughboy is not the son of the Michelin Man. How could he be? The Michelin Man is 118 years old! OK, so neither one is real. Both, however, have succeeded where many real people have failed: they have created instant recognition for their respective brands. Needing a likeable face and image to go with their General Mills brand, home economist and businesswoman Marjorie Husted, along with advertiser Bruce Barton, created Betty Crocker. The mythical home cook turned out baking mixes, cookbooks – even radio and television programs, all with the help of writers, real chefs and an actress or two. Some brands find real personality in a person's name and face – even if that person is fake.

Accepting the challenge

Brands have personalities. The brand name, logo, the color of the package, the theme song, background music, slogan, even the typeface are individual aspects that add up to personality. It is what attracts you to a brand – and what keeps you coming back for more.

Brand personalities are most successful when they are distinctive, and that starts with the name.

It is not easy to find a name that is appropriate, available (that can be a huge challenge) and enduring. There are many ways to classify and categorize a name once it is developed (like the examples we have given), but arriving there in an efficient manner is the challenge. It is a skill best suited to an experienced branding and rebranding consultant.

Rebranding is the most effective way for leaders to signal significant change.

Considering a rebrand?

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