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Choosing the right name

8 keys to choosing a name that will form the basis of a successful brand or service

by Laura Ries (guest editor)*



* About Laura Ries, this month's guest editor

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This article is adapted from her blog, <http://www.originofbrands.com>

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Names play a crucial role in establishing a successful brand. The right name helps a brand immediately grab a position in the consumer's mind. A poor name makes it much harder to get into the consumer's mind.

A single name will rarely satisfy all of the following criteria, but if a name satisfies *more than a few*, you're well on your way to success.

Key #1: Short

In general, the shorter the better. Longer and more complicated names are harder to remember. Longer names are also easily misspelled, making them poorer choices for web site addresses.

Examples of short names: Tide, Apple, Crest, Nike, Gap, TiVo, Rolex. *Examples of less successful longer names:* Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, Deloitte & Touche, Bausch & Lomb, TIAA-CREF.

Key #2: Simple

Simple is not the same as short. Simplicity has to do with the alphabetical construction of a brand name. A simple word uses only a few letters of the alphabet and arranges them in a combination that repeats itself.

Schwab is *short* (six letters), but *not simple*. This is because it uses six different letters of the alphabet. As a result, it is not particularly easy to spell.

Effective simple names include: Google, Coca-Cola, Nissan, Hennessy.

Key #3: Suggest the category

Choosing a name that suggests the category helps consumers identify what your brand stands for. You can do this by *shortening the generic term for the category*. This creates a proper name that is short and easy to remember.

- *Soy milk* became the brand name Silk.
- *Vanilla cookies* became the brand name Nilla.

Or, use a word that *suggests the category out of context*: i.e., Blockbuster Video, Curves, Roller Blade, SnackWell's, Palm, PlayStation.

Customers must be able to spell your name to visit your web site

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Key #4: Unique

A unique name must be created from scratch. The best ones follow some of the other keys, like being short, simple, and speakable.

Unique brand names include: Lexus, Xerox, Kodak, Kleenex, Sony, Kinko's.

Key #5: Alliteration

The mind works with the sound of words, not with their shapes. This is why the sound of a brand name is more important than how it looks. This is also why funny capitalizations and punctuations do not make good brand names.

Successful alliterative names include: Gold's Gym, Dunkin' Donuts, Jelly Belly, Weight Watchers, Bed, Bath & Beyond, Volvo, BlackBerry, Grey Goose.

Key #6: Easily spoken

Word of mouth is the most effective medium for building a brand. Having friends, family, neighbors, or co-workers tell you about a new brand is much more powerful than any advertisement you might be exposed to.

But how do you get the first mouth moving? *You first have to give the mouth something to work with;* hopefully a name that is easy to say and remember. A name that is difficult to pronounce is a recipe for disaster.

Some speakable brand names: Target, Subway, Polo, iPod, Wonderbra. *Some unspeakable brand names:* Chipolte, Isaac Mizrahi, Hoechst, Dasani, HSBC.

Key #7: Spellable

An easy-to-say name usually translates into an easy to spell name, *but not always.* Avoid using a combination of letters and numbers, upper and lowercase characters, or adding symbols. These make a name hard to spell.

Remember: if your customers don't spell your name perfectly, they won't be able to reach your website!

Some easy to spell names: Target, Amazon, Old Navy. *Difficult to spell names:* Daewoo, Hyundai, Abercrombie & Fitch.

Key #8: Shocking

Strong brand names often have an element of shock or surprise, which gets attention and is more memorable.

Some great shocking names: DieHard, Yahoo, Monster, Woot, Virgin, Yellow Tail, Red Bull, Starbucks.

For more information

Each month, Roger C. Parker's GUERRILLA MARKETING & DESIGN brings you useful ideas, techniques, and tips to help you promote your expertise. Learn more at www.newentrepreneur.com.