

Just name it

catchword

Just name it.

**the naming guide
for company executives,
marketing managers,
entrepreneurs
—and everyone else**

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Why we wrote this naming guide

People are often surprised to hear what we do for a living. “You mean companies actually pay you to name things?” they say (or think). The perception of brand naming as something that anyone can do if they really put their mind to it—as opposed to a highly specialized, rigorous craft—is widespread in our culture. Because who hasn’t named something at some point in their lives? So how hard can it be?

Even companies that pay us good money to create brand names don’t always realize the complexities and challenges of the process. Fact is, brand naming—good brand naming—can be very hard in today’s marketplace. It needs to do a lot of things well. And avoid doing other things (like stepping on someone else’s brand name—also known as trademark infringement). What’s more, the stakes are really high. For while a great name can’t guarantee your company’s or product’s success, it can go a long way towards telegraphing what makes your brand great and attracting customers.

Despite its vital importance, few people (and we’re including marketing professionals here) understand all that goes into a successful brand naming process and a great brand name.

Which is why we wrote this naming guide. (And why we think you should read it.)

If you have a naming challenge on your horizon and are thinking of hiring naming consultants, this guide is for you.

We’re going to give you a concise but complete overview of the entire naming process, from brand naming strategy to domain acquisition and trademarking, and beyond. Along the way we’ll share tips and information we’ve gleaned from nearly 15 years in this exciting, challenging business.

This guide will help you figure out if you need to hire a naming agency, and how to go about it if you do. It’ll show you how get the most out of your naming agency or internal naming process. Develop appropriate naming strategies. Recognize winning names. And avoid common corporate mistakes when evaluating names and attempting to get internal consensus.

It’ll show you that yes, there is a method to this madness; it’s not just about scribbling ideas on cocktail napkins (we wish!). And it’ll show you just what that method is.

If you’re going to try to name something on your own, this guide will help you, too. It’s full of insights into every stage of the naming process, and ideas for opening out your creative explorations.

Finally, if you just happen to be curious about that mysterious entity known as the naming business, well, this is your chance to get a peek behind the curtain, and witness this highly specialized craft where art meets science.

So let’s get started.

Why a brand name is important

Your brand name is the foundation for all your other marketing efforts. It's part of your customers' very first experience of your brand—and likely, every experience thereafter. It's the verbal trigger that conjures up your brand in your customers' minds. When customers see or hear your brand name for the first time, the associations and reactions they have will start to define your brand in their minds, for better or worse.

A good brand name can go a long way toward:

- **engaging your customers emotionally**
- **identifying what sort of product or service you're offering**
- **differentiating you from competitors**
- **positioning your brand as the solution for a customer need or desire**
- **piquing their curiosity and interest**
- **helping your customers remember your brand**

Good brand names will do at least three of these things—even before you've spent a penny on marketing!

On the other hand, a bad name will provoke little, if any, positive interest among your audience. It may even mislead them about the nature of your offering and how great it is. You'll have lost a golden opportunity.

Now don't get us wrong. A great brand name can't salvage a misconceived or ill-executed product or idea. Or convey every relevant marketing message. That's why you have a logo, and packaging design, and copy, and a website, and all your other marketing communications. But if you want to build a great brand, a good name—one that captures the essence of your brand in a memorable way—is the foundation.

What's the difference between a brand and a brand name?

We're glad you asked.

People can be very promiscuous with the word brand. Even some marketing types. They bandy the word about when what they're really referring to is the brand name. And vice versa. It drives us crazy.

So what's the difference between the two?

A “brand” encompasses all of the experiences and expectations that have come to be associated with a company or product line in the customer's mind.

A brand name is ... just that.

One way to look at it is that the brand name is a trigger. Say the word, and you call up all of those associations in the public mind that collectively define the brand and what it stands for.

Say the word Apple, for instance, and chances are you think of the iPod and the iMac and the iPad. Of stores that broke all sorts of high-tech retail conventions with their light-filled designer showrooms and hands-on displays. Of cool geniuses at their cool genius bars. Of videotaping your kid's birthday party or getting the latest ETA on your flight on your iPhone. Of Steve Jobs and MacWorld extravaganzas. Right?

That's the Apple brand for you.

On the other hand, the brand name is simply ... Apple.

Types of brand names

Despite the proliferation of number of brand names out there, they all fall into certain basic categories. You probably haven't given them much thought (unless you're in the naming business). But if you're going to be naming something, it can be very helpful to identify—and employ—different naming constructions and strategies.

Here's a guide to them all.

Descriptive Names

These are names that clearly describe the goods or services being offered. (Think Toys R Us, PayPal, Architectural Digest, Best Buy, Monistat's Soothing Care, and Schwab's Real Life Retirement.) Descriptive names often work best when you want to:

- **reinforce a strong master or parent brand rather than launch a new brand**
- **reach a B2B audience who just wants to know what the darn thing does**
- **name products with short lifecycles and low marketing budgets.**

On the other hand, purely descriptive names are difficult to trademark, because they use common, everyday language. So if having a legally protectable name is a big concern, a less descriptive name is probably a better bet for you.

Suggestive Names

Like descriptive names, suggestive names allude to the features and benefits of the goods and services being offered, only less directly. For instance, vSafe (Wells Fargo's virtual safety deposit box), mPower (Cornerstone's debit card), Quisitive (a trademark search service) and Target are all examples of suggestive names. Suggestive names are the middle ground in naming. They're more evocative

and memorable than descriptive names, and more communicative than fanciful names (which we'll get to in a moment). For these reasons, suggestive names are the most popular kind of brand name.

Fanciful Names

Fanciful names can either be completely made-up words with no inherent meaning (like Kodak or Exxon) or real words used out of context, such as Orange bank, Adobe software, and Shell gasoline.

Fanciful names are the easiest to trademark because of their distinctiveness, and can attract a lot of attention if done well. But they can require serious marketing to help consumers make the connection with the goods or services they brand.

Language Origins

Names derived from different languages—whether a Germanic language (like English), a Romance language (like French or Italian), or an entirely non-Indo-European language (like Chinese or Swahili)—can help create a different tone or feel for your brand

Exploring other languages when naming is an obvious approach when the target market includes many non-English speakers. But non-English names can also be appealing to native English speakers, especially when they're familiar foreign words. For example, Tao (“the way” in Mandarin), is the name of an XM receiver, while Boku (from the French “beaucoup” meaning “much” or “many”), is the name of an online payment service, and Asana (both a yoga pose and Sanskrit for “sitting down”), is the name of a shared task list for managing business projects.

Acronyms

We usually recommend against acronyms, as they're often forced or confusing, and customers almost always end up using just the acronym and not the expanded form. Occasionally, though, an acronym makes sense. For example, CORA is an agency that helps victims of domestic violence. The name expands to Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse, which provides important information to the target audience. At the same time, the shortened form CORA is a woman's name that allows the agency to leave a discreet message on an answering machine. MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) is another example of an acronym that works both in its abbreviated and extended form, to powerful effect.

Numbers

Numbers can be an intriguing addition to a name, and also provide visual interest. Cases in point: Key2 (medical diagnostic software), North of Nine (an edgy public relations firm), Gear6 (a website solutions company), Crazy 8 (Gymboree clothing stores), HP Store360 (scale-out software), and 37 Signals (collaboration apps for small business).

Be careful, though; numbers can be tricky. The meaning or sound may not translate across languages, and you can run into cultural or numerology issues. For example, the word for the number "4" sounds like "death" in Mandarin.

Construction

Names can be comprised of:

- **real words** — like Dash, Posit, Lingo, and Infusion
- **truncated real words** — like Daptiv (from adaptive), Quintess (from quintessence), and Promptu (from impromptu)
- **coined words** — like Zippity, Extensa, Sentilla, and Sezmi
- **compounds** — like LiveScribe, ClickStart, TeaLeaf, and FireEye

What's a naming architecture?

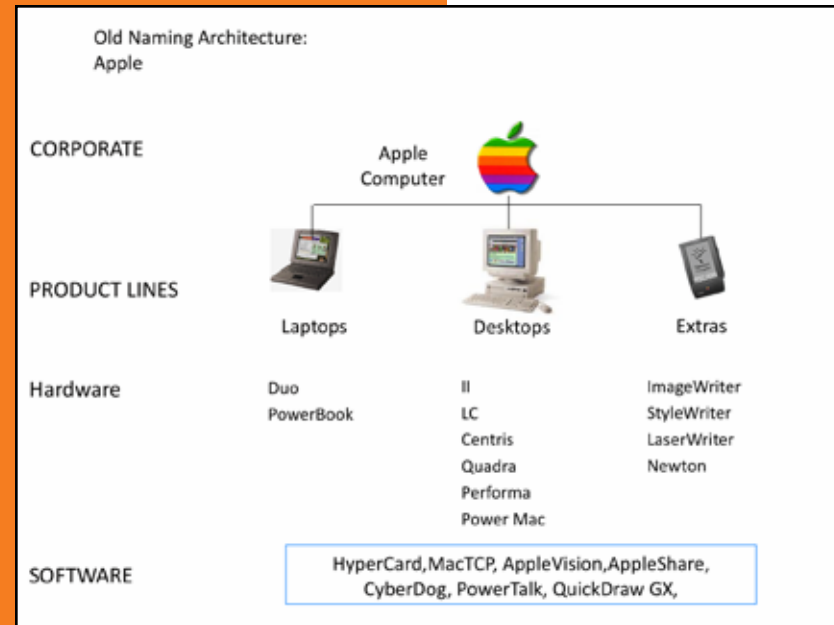
Naming architecture is the way the brand names in your portfolio are organized. (Or disorganized, as the case may be.) When it's done properly, a naming architecture structures all of your company's brand names so they make sense in relation to each other. It also provides rules and recommendations for determining what kinds of new products and services (or companies and subsidiaries) get named, and how.

Your naming architecture should address such typical questions as:

- **What naming conventions should an individual company or one of its divisions follow?**
- **Should a new product name be a generic descriptor or a proprietary name?**
- **Should three or more related products fit under one umbrella name or should each have its own trademark?**
- **Should all names incorporate a certain word part or structure?**

There are lots of ways to establish relationships between your brands through naming architecture. For instance, you can create a family of product names by incorporating numbers or letters (or both), as in the Audi A3, A4, A5, etc. You can use the same first letter for a family of brand names, such as Ford's Escape, Explorer and Expedition (all SUVs). You can link brands by using the same prefix for each name, as in Nestle, Nescafe, and Nestea. Or you can use the same suffix, as in the Kyocera family of cellphones with names like Tempo, Lingo, and Deco. You can even use a metaphorical theme, like Apple did with its Mac OSX Version 10 operating systems: Cheetah, Puma, Jaguar, Panther, Tiger, etc.

Creating a sound naming architecture may not be as sexy as coming up with a great name, but it's just as important. (Maybe more so, because it affects the success of so many brands.) Without structure and a big picture perspective, your naming architecture can become a maze: confusing to your internal audiences, and off-putting to would-be customers who want to buy your stuff.

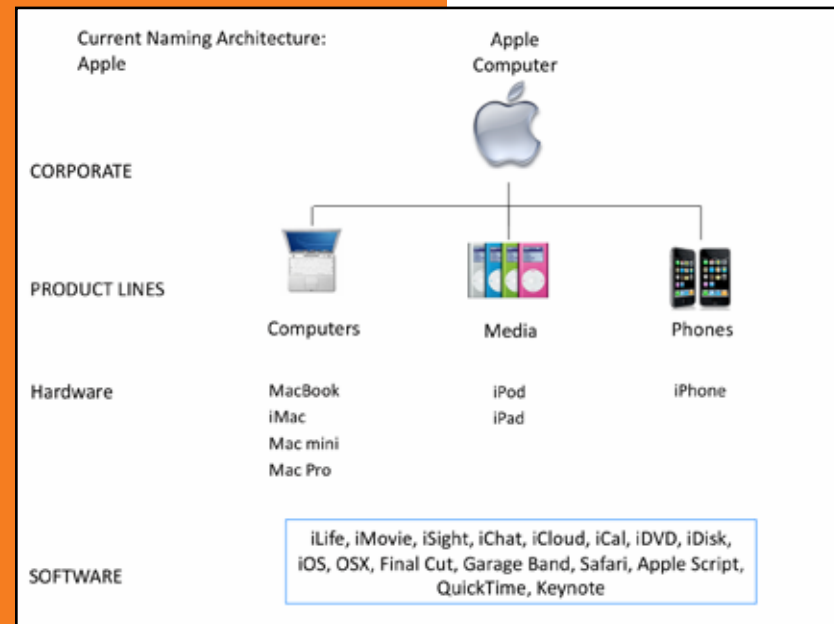


Often, we're asked to create a brand name for a new product when what's needed is a naming architecture that groups related products under an existing brand name. An effective naming architecture can help customers find what they're looking for—and save companies millions in marketing dollars they'd otherwise spend trying to build brand recognition for each new product.

The history of Apple's brand naming provides a classic example of the difference good naming architecture can make. During John Sculley's tenure at Apple, the types of proprietary brand names (even within the same product category) were all over the map. This all changed when Steve Jobs returned to the company.

Today, Apple's naming architecture is as streamlined and intuitive as the products themselves. For hardware, the word part "i" is the anchorpoint for all offerings, and it's paired with a transparently descriptive noun (e.g., iMac, iPhone, iPad, iPod...). So the Apple masterbrand stays front and center: a smart move when you have as much going for you as Apple.

If you have lots of longstanding product or company names in your portfolio, it's easy to develop blind spots about what's working and what isn't. This is one area where it can really help to hire a naming company with experience developing naming architecture. They'll be able to bring a rigor and objectivity to your portfolio that's hard to manage when you're looking at your own babies.



Taglines (aka straplines, if you're a Brit)

A tagline or branding slogan goes straight to the heart of your brand and what you want people to remember about it. Typically, you'll see a tagline paired with the brand name (or logo) in marketing communications.

A tagline may serve to communicate:

- a call to action (“Just do it”)
- the essence of your brand (“The ultimate driving machine”)
- a key benefit (“Can you hear me now?”)
- the driving force behind an advertising campaign (“Got milk?”)

Technically, tagline development isn't part of naming. But because the tagline is so intimately connected to the brand name and requires many of the same competencies, some naming firms offer it as a service. (We happen to be one of them.) We recommend developing a tagline after the name has been chosen, so that they work with each other seamlessly.

A tagline will complement your brand name and fill in other parts of your brand story. It will also flesh out the personality of your brand. For instance:

- Droid: “Droid Does.” (powerful and a little edgy)
- Ketel One: “Gentlemen, this is vodka.” (confident, serious, upscale)
- DeBeers: “A diamond is forever.” (Formal and a bit snooty)
- Red Cross: “Do more than cross your fingers.” (pragmatic)
- McDonald's: “I'm lovin' it.” (casual and energetic)
- Chevy: “Like a rock.” (macho, solid)

Sometimes a tagline captures the zeitgeist so well it becomes a rallying cry not only for a brand, but for an entire subculture. Apple's “Think different” is a great example.

When do you need a naming firm?

First, full disclosure: naming services don't come cheap, and not everyone will be able to afford to work with a professional naming firm (even if they could use one). You'll get the most out of a naming firm if your situation matches one of these:

- **you have a large customer base and the budget to market your brand names**
- **you're a medium-sized organization looking to differentiate your products or services in a cluttered category**
- **you need a name with broad appeal to reach different target audiences**
- **you really, really (really) want an exact domain, and for good reason (for instance, you have a large e-commerce site).**

Other good reasons to hire a naming firm include:

- **a need for a globally appropriate name (legally and linguistically)**
- **internal creative burnout**
- **critical deadlines, such as a product launch or trade show announcement**
- **disparate internal opinions (this is where an objective third party can really help achieve consensus)**

That said, a powerful brand name is a tremendous marketing tool for any company. So if you think your company or organization isn't getting the kind of attention or market share you deserve, you might consider hiring a naming firm, even if it's going to be a stretch. Chances are you'll wind up with a much better name—and one that's legally available.

What to look for in a naming firm

Okay, so you've decided to hire a naming firm. How do you go about choosing one?

The first step is to review a naming firm's portfolio. Take a look at some of the names they've created (you'll usually find them featured on their website). Don't focus exclusively on the most famous brand names, as they're often not the best measure of a company's naming ability. Besides, you'll probably have a hard time being objective, since success has a way of conferring greatness on even the most awful brand names.

Instead, look for expertise (much experience do they have within your industry?), versatility (how varied are their naming styles and portfolio in general?), and yes, sheer creativity (how fun/distinctive/interesting/memorable are their names?). You should admire the names that a naming company has created, even if you don't recognize the brands. And the firm should have experience across many industries, as well as long-standing relationships with clients.

Once you have a shortlist of naming companies whose work you like, it's time to talk to them.

Here are some questions to keep in mind:

- **Are they dedicated to naming as a branding discipline?**
Many advertising agencies, for instance, don't pass that bar.
- **What's their process like? It should be rigorous and fine-tuned.**
- **Do they have legal and linguistic screening capabilities?**
This is an absolute must.
- **Who'll be working on your project? A tight-knit team with a long history of working together is far better than a collection of freelancers.**
- **What are the deliverables? Get as much detail as you can**
—from rounds of creative to number of names you can expect to see.

Finally, your experience interviewing a prospective naming firm can tell you a lot about what it will be like partnering with them. So pay attention. Do you have easy access to the people you want to be working with? Are you comfortable asking questions—and do you get answers that make sense to you? Having a good rapport with your naming company can play a huge role in getting results you're happy with.

Who should be part of your naming team

Anyone who'll play a part in choosing the name. In the case of a small product launch, this might just include a brand manager and VP of marketing. For a company name change, however, it probably includes your boss. Several VPs. The CEO. And even the Board of Directors, if they have veto power.

Don't expect to waltz into your boss's office or the boardroom at the end of the naming process with your chosen name in hand and have your decision rubber-stamped. We can't tell you how many times a client has assured us that their boss has given them full authority to choose a name—and that they know exactly what their boss wants—only to discover that their boss hasn't and they don't. The result is that after weeks of painstaking creative development and consensus-building, you're back to square one. Don't let this happen to you. Figure out how to keep everyone in the loop, and be sure they sign off on each stage of the process.

Beyond decision-makers, it can also be useful to involve others who'll be spearheading marketing efforts: people from your design team, for instance, or product developers or engineers familiar with your new offering. Just be clear about who the decision-makers will be.

Who shouldn't be part of your naming team

Your husband. Your wife. Your kids. Your hiking buddy. Your administrative assistant. Your nine best friends. You get the idea.

Sometimes testing name ideas with a focus group can have value, if it's done rigorously and strategically (more on that later).

But just canvassing people you know for their opinions—and then allowing yourself to be swayed by those opinions—is asking for trouble. Generally people need to understand the naming strategy and hurdles, and see the names contextualized, as they would in the marketplace, before they can recognize the best choices. And it's a rare person who can appreciate a truly distinctive name right off the bat, without having some time to warm up to it.

An overview of what to expect

If you're anything like our clients, you're probably wondering how long the process of naming your product or company will take, and exactly what's involved.

While every naming company's different, most firms will want about six weeks to complete a naming project. (Give or take a little, depending on the project's scope.) And remember: this doesn't include the final legal vetting, which your own legal counsel must do after your favorites are selected.

Naming processes vary from firm to firm, but they all have certain things in common. We'll start with the general overview and then delve into more specifics.

Discovery

First, your naming partner learns all about you and your naming challenge. They should begin by immersing themselves in all relevant marketing materials, including positioning documents, information about your audiences and competitive set (including competitors' brand names), and previously considered name candidates, if any.

Typically, there's then a briefing meeting for further discussion. Together, you'll strategize and determine key parameters for your naming project, including your naming objectives, desired messages, preferred naming styles and constructions, and any legal issues. (In our briefing sessions, we often use special tools and exercises to help us determine where a client's naming sweet spot might lie.)

Creative Brief

The result of all this research and discussion will be a document your naming firm prepares known as the creative brief. The brief should synthesize and distill insights and objectives gleaned from the discovery process, and outline a proposed naming strategy for creative explorations.

Creative Exploration

Once you approve the creative brief, you should expect the naming company to develop an extensive list of name ideas (ours typically run in the thousands). They'll then shortlist a subset to screen for trademark availability.

Presentation(s)

If your schedule permits, a good agency will present multiple rounds of creative work to you, so they can better gauge and respond to your name style preferences and progressively refine thematic directions for naming explorations. Often, agencies will present names in some kind of context (whether it's a tagline or other marketing copy, or a visual context like a billboard or package). This helps give you a more realistic sense of the total impact a brand name will have when first seen.

Legal and Linguistic Evaluations

Any good naming firm will preliminarily screen naming candidates before presenting them to you for consideration. (Sadly, this is when many wonderful naming ideas bite the dust.) However, this should only be the first step in your vetting process. After you've selected your favorite names (never just one name), it's time to vet them with your own legal counsel. You may also want the screened by global linguistic experts. (Often naming companies will offer this service, as we do.)

Focus Groups (optional)

Sometimes companies want to test a few of their favorite name ideas in focus groups. If you're one of them, it's important to find a market research agency that specializes in naming and understands how to conduct research in this area. (We have some tips on page __ of this guide.) [ADD PAGE #](#)

Final Selection and Launch

After you see what makes it through the gauntlet, it's time for the big decision. Most naming companies will be happy to help you evaluate your options, and socialize your final choice with your key constituencies. There are also a number of practical steps required to launch a new name, including the purchase of a domain name, if you need one. See page 30 of this guide for a checklist.

Now that we've given you the 10,000 foot view, let's drill down into specific elements of the name process.

Naming strategy and creative brief

Any naming firm worth its salt won't begin creative explorations without a creative brief. The foundation for all naming efforts, the creative brief is a strategic document that distills key aspects of your name strategy and provides guiderails for naming explorations. You may have already developed a creative brief for your naming project but typically, your naming firm will want to develop their own, after researching your brand and your industry.

Here are some of the questions such a brief should answer.

What are you naming?

This is not always as straightforward as it sounds. For instance: are you naming a totally new type of product (which could be worthy of a proprietary, branded name) or merely a line extension?

How will the name be used?

This should cover all types of marketing contexts (websites, brochures, telephone cold call or ordering situations, etc.), as well as any qualifying language that might

surround the name in print (for instance, will it always be appended by another word or words?).

What arena are you competing in?

Sounds simple, but the best answers might not be immediately obvious. For instance, if you're introducing a coffee-infused bottled health drink, your competition might include makers of everything from health drinks to coffee drinks to energy drinks. Or you might narrow the field of your focus. It's your strategic decision as to where your product fits best, and what categories you want to take on.

Who are your competitors and what sorts of names are they using?

If you assemble a fairly complete list, often you can discern naming patterns within your industry space. This will help identify areas of opportunity; the types of names that aren't being used in your category will stand the best chance of distinguishing you.

Who are your customers?

Are you selling to mainstream consumers, or business customers? Tweens or teens? Fortune 500 companies or mom-and-pop stores? The more focused and clear your target audience is, the easier it will be to reach them.

What's different about you that your customers will care about?

Lots of companies get so involved touting all the things their brand embodies that they wind up standing for nothing in particular. A good brief will highlight those things you do well that your competitors don't—that are important to the people you want to reach.

What do you want the name to communicate?

Is speed one of the key attributes of your brand? Accuracy? Maybe your product has a really unusual shape. Or perhaps you see your company as forging a path through uncharted territory, in the manner of mythical heroes. While messaging themes may change once the creative process begins, you always want to have some ideas at the outset that are relevant to your brand and its audiences.

What tonalities and constructions seem most appropriate?

Names that are real words or composed of meaningful word parts communicate certain things overtly through their meanings and associations. But there are other ways that a name communicates, too. The sound of a word (what we call tonality), its construction, its rhythm: all of these influence the impression your audience takes away. (Razr, for instance, with its buzzy “z” and dynamic rhythm, has an energetic, aggressive tonality. And the compressed, dropped-letter construction conveyed a certain edginess back when the cellphone first launched.)

Are you open to words derived from other languages?

For example, French can convey a certain cachet (witness Pureau). Swahili is playful and lively (take Jamba Juice). Latinate words tend to sound stable and traditional (Altegrity, for instance).

Any legal or linguistic constraints?

This includes any words you might not be able to use for legal reasons. Or countries in which your name will need to fly.

Will a domain name be needed?

If the answer’s yes, consider whether you’ll need the exact domain name.

You can often do just fine by simply appending a descriptor of some sort to the actual name, or adding a word before the name, for domain purposes. For instance, you’ll find Method cleaning products at methodhome.com, and Nordstrom at shopnordstrom.com.

Getting creative

People often ask us how we come up with names. Are they computer generated? Do we sit around drinking wine and jotting down thoughts on cocktail napkins? Or maybe we shuffle Scrabble tiles around till we find that perfect combination of letters?

If only.

Maybe once upon a time these methods worked. But today, with all the hurdles faced by potential naming candidates, you need to develop an enormous pool of names just to have a few good choices at the end of the day. (To give you an idea, at Catchword we typically develop around 2000 names for a project.) So creativity isn’t enough; one needs a very methodical process for exploring all kinds of relevant ideas, in depth and in quantity.

No doubt every naming firm approaches the challenge a little differently. Here are some of the phases in our creative process.

Project Vocabulary

For all but the most abstract projects, it’s a good idea to begin by creating a project vocabulary. We start by looking at the naming messages in the creative brief, and putting together as many synonyms as possible for different words in these messaging buckets. This is a great starting point for getting some naming ideas down and free-associating with other words and metaphors.

Selection is perhaps the most important stage in the naming process, and it's critical not to let knee-jerk reactions or idiosyncratic associations rule the day. (Just because Cody is the name of an ex who dumped you doesn't mean it's a bad name for your latest perfume.)

Beyond just mixing and matching vocabulary words to form compound or blended forms, we might take key vocabulary words and translate them into Latin, Sanskrit, Italian, Hawaiian — whatever languages suit the communication and tonality needs.

Or we might take interesting prefixes and suffixes and add them to different words. Or play around with word endings or truncations of words.

Blue-Sky Territory

After exploring all the obvious ideas — what we call “due-diligence creative”—it's time to take off into blue-sky territory. This might involve pairing a short, expected word from our project vocabulary with something completely unexpected. Or looking at different types of metaphors, arbitrary (but interesting) words that have the right sound, song titles, magazine articles and videos. We might play with ideas that springboard off the personal interests and hobbies of a company founder. Truly, anything goes. At this stage in brainstorming, the more ideas, the merrier. At Catchword, we also make sure that several people work on each project so we can brainstorm and bounce ideas off each other.

When there's a substantial amount of creative (for us, well over a thousand names), it's time to combine all of our ideas and look at the naming list as a whole. After we do, we'll continue to play around to create new names: modifying spellings, combining different roots, and just generally looking beyond the obvious and letting our imaginations roam.

Evaluating name candidates

Once we're satisfied we've explored every possibility and have a vast pool of name ideas, it's time to narrow down the list (what we call shortlisting). This is an iterative process that can continue over several days, as we hone and re-hone the list until only the very best candidates remain.

Selection is perhaps the most important stage in the naming process, and it's critical not to let knee-jerk reactions or idiosyncratic associations rule the day. (Just because Cody is the name of an ex who dumped you doesn't mean it's a bad name for your latest perfume.) In addition to the objectives set out in the creative brief, we've listed below some of the criteria we use when evaluating name candidates. We suggest you use them when selecting your favorites, too. They'll help ensure that you evaluate name candidates with some measure of objectivity. Your naming firm should also be able to provide a clear-headed perspective.

1. Distinctiveness

Does the name stand out from the competition? A really distinctive or edgy name can be a little scary at first. That's okay. A name that everyone's comfortable with is often the name that's so bland or meaningless it stirs up little reaction. Hardly the way to make a splash.

2. Messaging

How well does the name map to your desired messaging? This is rarely a literal equation. Besides semantics, factors like sound, rhythm, tonality—even construction—convey messaging indirectly, and often even more effectively. Remember: an evocative name is usually a much smarter play than a drily descriptive one. (Would Amazon have been better off named Books & More?) Besides, no brand name lives in a vacuum. There will always be contextualizing messaging (whether it's a logo, website, package design and copy, whatever) to convey what your name doesn't.

3. Construction

Does a name go against the grain of the industry's naming conventions? Great. This is one good way to gain visibility. For instance, if competitors' names are all highly coined, consider giving more weight to real-word names. Or if two-word compounds are common in the space, single-word names might be especially interesting.

4. Sound

When said aloud, is a name pleasing to the ear? For example, alliteration (Best Buy) or assonance (the repetition of vowels but not consonants, as in Hulu) is almost always a plus. Ditto rhyming.

5. Pronunciation

Related to sound, how intuitive is the name to pronounce, and how smoothly does it roll off the tongue? (Verizon, for instance, is easy enough to say, thanks to its consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel construction, but consumers needed the benefit of expensive marketing to know they were supposed to pronounce it “Ver-RIZE-un” rather than “Very-zon.”)

6. Tonality

How closely does the tonality of a name match the desired personality for the brand name? How different does it sound from competitors’ names? If competitive names sound “techy,” for example, a friendly, fun name could really separate the brand from the pack.

7. Appearance

A name that’s visually distinctive has a built-in edge. That’s why we always like to get a designer’s perspective when evaluating names. Some words are inherently more graphically appealing, due to their unusual construction. (For instance, Volvo doesn’t have any low-hanging letters, while Xerox has the same letter repeated at the beginning and end. And the dots in the word Kijiji, which is an online classifieds community, make the letters look like a collection of people.

8. Fit with Positioning

How closely does a name map to the brand’s positioning? “Virgin” must have rubbed a lot of people the wrong way at first, but paired with a positioning that speaks to being daringly different and provocative, the name works perfectly.

9. Name Length

If there are packaging restrictions, name length may be a serious consideration. Otherwise, not.

10. Trademark and Domain Availability

Are there any obvious trademark or domain conflicts? While initial screening can never substitute for full legal evaluation by an attorney down the line, it helps keep attention focused on names that have a reasonable chance of being available.

Finding a good domain name

Back in the good old days of naming, before the Internet was invented, if you found a product or company name you liked, all you had to worry about was whether it was legally available. If it was, you trademarked it. And that was that.

Then along came the Internet circa 1985. Now anybody who wanted an online presence needed an available domain name, too.

At first, there were three domain extensions:

- .com for commercial enterprises
- .net for internet service providers
- .org for non-profit organizations

Choosing a name is not for the faint of heart.

Once you’ve made your final selection, don’t be surprised, or thrown off course, if some folks aren’t initially enthusiastic about your name selection. (We can just imagine some of the early conversations about Google.)

A really distinctive name can be a little scary at first.

That’s okay. In time, and with the addition of a visual identity and other marketing communications, others will warm to your naming choice.

Remember
Murphy's Law of
Domain Naming:
The more you like a
name, the less available
it's likely to be.

(Actually, that's
Catchword's Law
of Domain Naming,
but it might as well
be Murphy's.)

(Actually, there were three more: .mil, .edu, and .gov, but they weren't relevant unless you were starting your own university or country.)

As the years went by and domain names got scarcer, new domain extensions were brought out to expand Internet real estate. For instance, there was .biz (for business), and extensions like .co.uk, .fr, .jp, and .us (for different countries). But none of these made a dent in the ubiquity of .com.

Today, after more than a quarter of a century, .com is still the most desirable option for businesses. Even those who have a country domain would love to have the .com too. And that's just the way it is.

Recently, ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers) approved the extension of top-level domain names. This means that for the first time, you can basically have any website address you can dream up—provided you have \$185,000 to get started and \$75,000 each year after that. The long-term effect of this decision remains to be seen, but in the short-term, we predict that .com will remain supreme.

So your naming firm will have to be very creative—and prolific—to find a good .com domain name. The awful truth is that almost any domain you want has already been registered. In fact, every word in a typical dictionary has already been registered! (That's why Catchword often screens 200+ names when domain availability is required.)

But even if a name's taken, all's not necessarily lost. Many registered domains are potentially purchasable—either because they're listed for sale or the owner is willing to negotiate. Your naming firm will usually be happy to handle those negotiations for you.

By the way, there are no hard and fast rules for figuring out a domain name's value. (Sorry.) In general, real word domains are worth more than coined words, and short words are more valuable than long ones, since they're easier to type and remember.

But in the final analysis, a domain name, like a piece of art, is worth as much as you're willing to pay for it.

If you don't have the money to buy a domain outright, consider modifying your chosen brand with an intuitive descriptor. (The domain name catchword.com, for example, is owned by another party, so we decided to go with catchwordbranding.com.) Having the exact domain isn't critical unless you're marketing directly to consumers online. And even then there are clever workarounds. (Method sells its cleaning products at methodhome.com, and they're doing just fine.) Don't let the tail wag the dog by choosing your company or product name based on exact-domain availability. Usually it's far better to modify a memorable name than to settle for a mediocre one just because the domain's available.

Once you've registered your domain at a reputable domain registrar like BulkRegister, be sure to set it for auto-renewal. You don't want to lose your domain because you forgot to renew. (You'd be surprised how often companies, even big ones, forget to renew. Symantec forgot to renew its norton.com domain, and Microsoft once forgot to renew passport.com. Even Google forgot to renew its German domain, google.de, in 2007!)

Finally, remember: registering a domain doesn't give you rights to the name as a trademark. Nor will trademarking a name give you rights to the domain, in most cases. (The exception would be if you were to trademark a name and then someone else registered that name as a domain and tried to sell it to you for an exorbitant price. In that case, you might be deemed the rightful owner of that domain.) In general, even if you really, really (and we mean really) want an already registered domain, you can't force someone to sell it or give it up to you.

The ins and outs of trademarks

No matter how diligent your naming company has been in their initial screening of name candidates for trademark conflicts, they are not lawyers. What's more, everyone has a different tolerance for risk and trademark law is notoriously open to interpretation.

So any name you're seriously considering will need to be further evaluated by a qualified intellectual property attorney. No exceptions.

Here are some of the things legal evaluation of each name candidate will involve.

Relevant trademark classes

The first step in the legal vetting process is determining in which trademark class(es) your name will need to be registered. Trademarks are grouped into 45 different international trademark classes (or descriptive categories)—34 for products and 11 for services. In general, to protect your trademark, you only have to register your name in the class or classes that are relevant to your company, product, or service.

At the same time, you also want to look as far into the future as possible and anticipate likely extensions of your brand to determine other relevant trademark classes—so you're not stymied when you're ready to expand your offerings.

Likelihood of confusion

If legal review turns up other names similar to yours in relevant trademark classes, the question will be whether there's a likelihood of confusion. That is, are the two names so similar as to potentially confuse a customer? If two names share very similar looks, sounds and associations—and they're in the same industry space—the answer is probably yes, and the name should be axed.

On the other hand, a name can be identical with yours and as long as it's not in your industry space, it can be fine. For instance, No one's going to confuse O magazine with Safeway's O line of organic food products. Or the Ford Explorer with the Internet Explorer web browser.

Other factors the courts consider before finding a likelihood of confusion include:

- **Distribution channels**
- **Whether the products or services compete directly**
- **How distinctive the marks are**
- **Similarity of customers**
- **How similar pricing is**

When assessing names for availability, the key question is: would a customer be likely to confuse this product with another existing product in the market and potentially buy the wrong thing? If so, out it goes. (Unless you have really deep pockets, and aren't fazed by the possibility of a lawsuit.)

Strength of a mark

Let's assume your attorneys have reviewed a name, and it's legally available and clear.

Now your major worry isn't mistakenly using someone else's mark, but making sure that name is a strong mark itself. You want to be able to protect your name and prevent other marketers from using the name for similar (or even dissimilar) products.

The key will lie in how distinctive the name is. The more distinctive, the stronger and more legally protectable it will be. (Remember what we said about being brave when you choose your name?)

A word to the wise: brand names face enormous legal hurdles these days, and not every name you like will be available. So set expectations accordingly with your team. And rather than falling in love with a single name (which then falls by the wayside during legal screening), be sure to choose several candidates for vetting. You'll stand a much better chance of emerging with a viable name the first time around.

The courts use a number of factors to gauge a name's distinctiveness, including whether:

- the name is coined (e.g., Snapple)
- the combination of word parts is creative (e.g., Whole Foods)
- the name carries other meaning (e.g., Pea In The Pod maternity clothing)
- the visual identity is unconventional (e.g., Yahoo!)
- the name is arbitrary in nature (e.g., Orange for a bank)

If you want to be unique in your space and preclude others from using your name, choosing a name that incorporates some of these approaches can give you a big edge.

Launching a new company name

Congratulations, you've chosen a name! But you're not done yet.

There are special considerations when launching a company name or rename. Here's a checklist to guide you through the key steps of your name launch, so nothing slips through the cracks.

Legal and Administrative

- Have your attorney submit an application for trademark registration to the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and foreign equivalents, if appropriate.
- File for a name change with the Secretary of State and appropriate city/county authorities.
- Check with your tax attorney for any name-change filing issues related to subsidiaries, divisions, sister companies, etc.

- Update bank accounts, checks, and other financial paperwork.
- Update your listing in the Yellow Pages, White Pages, and other print and online directories.

Marketing and Identity

- Conduct an audit of how your logo appears across all of your communications.
- Engage a graphic designer (or design team) to create/update your logo and other elements of your new visual identity.
- Create/update business cards, letterhead, envelopes, and other stationery.
- Create/update brochures, pamphlets, and other marketing collateral.
- Engage a web designer (or design team) to create/update your website.
- Establish a plan for how to phase out the old name, if applicable (e.g., use transitional copy, such as "NewName — formerly known as OldName").
- Decide when to debut the new name and identity change.

Internal Communications

- Solicit ideas from the internal team for the best ways to announce the new name and visual identity. Possible vehicles could be an email from the president, an employee gathering, an outside party, or an internal blog where difficult questions can be addressed openly.
- Announce the new name internally (and be sure it's before you do so externally.)

- ❑ Roll out new business cards early (ideally at the announcement) to get employees on-board. Consider giving out some kind of promotional “swag” (hats, t-shirts, water bottles, etc.) with the new name and logo.
- ❑ Ask HR to familiarize employees with the new name and understand the rationale for the change. Use this as an opportunity to galvanize your organization to “live the brand.”
- ❑ Recognize that not everyone may be on board with the name change. Identify the naysayers and engage them by asking them take an active role in the announcement.

External Communications

- ❑ Develop a plan to communicate the name change with customers, analysts, and other key external influencers.
- ❑ Send customers and partners a letter or postcard announcing the name change (e.g., “We’d like to announce our new identity... same great company, new name.”)
- ❑ Anticipate and address questions such as whether service contracts will be affected.
- ❑ Call key customers to advise them of the name change.
- ❑ Send out a press release announcing the new name. Be sure to include the rationale for the name change — and how it supports your company’s vision. (And feel free to mention your naming company!)
- ❑ Create a page/link on your company website with rationale for the name change.

Technology

- ❑ Register the new domain name with your company’s registrar (e.g., Network Solutions, GoDaddy, Register.com, etc.).
- ❑ Register close variants and potential misspellings of the new domain name and re-direct them automatically to the new site.
- ❑ Change your website domain and update your website content, as needed.
- ❑ Forward your old domain to your new domain.
- ❑ Update email addresses to reflect the new domain name, and make sure all emails sent to legacy addresses are automatically forwarded.
- ❑ Update email signatures.

The 10 most important naming rules

1. No name is an island.

Whether it's packaging, advertising, web copy, whatever: there will always be context that helps tell your brand's story. So don't strain to make your company or product name say it all. It will only make your name awkward and dull.

2. Trust your audience's intelligence.

Most interesting words acquire layers of meaning and association over time. That's how language evolves. But just because a word has a potential negative meaning or one that doesn't fit with your brand doesn't mean it wouldn't be a fine brand name, as long as its other meanings fit. You wouldn't reject Freestyle as a name for your product because you were afraid people would think it was being offered free of charge, would you?

3. Don't get hung up on dot-com availability.

A memorable name that needs to be modified with a descriptor for domain purposes is usually a better marketing choice than a less distinctive name that's available as an exact dot-com domain. Unless your sales are generated predominantly online, don't squander one of your biggest branding opportunities out of concern for how people will find you online. (Especially now that search engines have become the consumer's best friend.)

4. Few names are virgins.

Don't get mired in hunting for a name that's never been used before. Most names have been around the block a few times, in different industries or contexts. That's okay. You can usually adopt a name that's similar (or even identical) to a name being used in an unrelated consumer space—as long as it's not in your space.

Think Ford Explorer and Internet Explorer. O Organics and O Magazine. These brands co-exist quite happily. So use common sense. Many a great name is rejected out of an excess of caution, or a misunderstanding of marketing differentiation.

5. Don't rush it.

A thoughtful naming process usually takes at least six weeks. (More, if focus group research or global linguistic screening is involved). And that's before your lawyers get their hands on your naming candidates to vet them. So sit back, relax, and let your naming company do its job. You've heard that old saying, "never enough time to do it right, always enough time to do it over"? There's a reason that adage is so popular.

6. You are not your audience.

It doesn't matter if a name candidate reminds you of the cousin you don't get along with or the particularly scruffy area in Michigan where you grew up. These are personal, idiosyncratic associations that few others on the planet are going to share. Look beyond them. Otherwise, you may reject a name that would really resonate with your target audience for something that only matters to you.

7. Play the field.

We know, we know. You heard a name, and it was the biggest epiphany since you saw your future spouse across a crowded room. There's no other name like it in the whole world and...Wait. Just hold on. Before you get hitched there's a little detail known as legal screening. And when you submit this name you're so smitten with to legal counsel, you may discover it's already taken. So do yourself a favor and shop around. Select at least a couple of other names you could live with, and have them all screened together. It could save you a lot of time and grief. And prevent you from getting wedded to any name prematurely.

8. Don't decide by committee.

Rarely is a name embraced by everyone involved in the naming process. If it's any good at all, it's bound to make someone uncomfortable. (Although they'll have a very "rational" reason for why they don't like it.) So don't look for a name that no one objects to. And structure your decision-making process so that only those with veto power get to play—and they're involved as early in the naming process as possible. Otherwise you'll wind up with a lowest-common-denominator name. Bo-ring.

9. The best names are a little different.

You want your brand to stand out in the marketplace, right? So don't shy away from ideas that may seem a little strange at first. Sure, it's only natural to be more comfortable with ideas you've seen before in some form. But if you've seen them before, so has your audience, and they'll be much less likely to take notice of your brand. Would CoffeeWorld have gotten the same traction as Starbucks?

10. Every name has downsides.

It's okay to want a name that's short, easy to pronounce, original, totally cool-sounding, relevant in meaning, with few negative associations—and that's available as a domain name. (Most of us would like to win the lottery, too.) But prioritize your wish list, and be prepared to go with a name that only meets your top criteria. Because no name has it all. Imagine the objections raised when Häagen-Dazs was first proposed. ("How do you pronounce that?") Or Wii. (What's it mean?") And let's not get started on Virgin. The point is, no name's perfect.

So be clear about what matters most.

How to use focus groups

Focus groups are a way to gather opinions about something from a diverse group of people in your target audience. They can be extremely useful for figuring out if a new cereal tastes good to a lot of people, or if a new mobile phone is easy to use. But should you use focus groups to help evaluate naming candidates?

Well, it depends.

For some things, naming research—whether through focus groups or online surveys—can be useful. For instance, it can be an excellent way to:

- find out if a name has damaging associations in slang or regional varieties of English
- convince your CEO that certain name candidates are acceptable to your target audience
- help determine what messages a name effectively communicates

But it's important to remember that naming research is simply one data point among many. And unless it's kept in perspective and handled with care, it can steer you away from the very names that stand the best chance of distinguishing your brand. People are used to seeing brand names in marketing contexts where a lot of the heavy lifting of marketing is being done by packaging, ad copy, or even product placement in the store. Without that kind of context, it's usually the most familiar or literal names (read: boring) that often do the best in groups.

So if you have to do research, here are some tips on how to do it right.

First, limit the number of names you test. Because of the cost and effort involved, you'll only want to research a small group of names that have passed legal screening and are serious finalists.

Next, determine if your research needs to be quantitative (surveying a lot of people for a short time), or qualitative (interviewing a few people for a long time, and getting in-depth feedback). Qualitative interviews can allow for more open-ended explorations and probing, while quantitative research is often best when you're only testing a few names and looking for discrete responses to simple questions. Also, quantitative research is much quicker and cheaper.

For quantitative research, which is often done online, you'll want to test no more than five or six names at a time (more, and people tend to get bored or confused). You'll also want to keep the questions short and simple (usually with multiple choice answers). You might ask if names are easy to pronounce, or if they have any negative meanings. You could try to gauge how well a certain name conveys a desired message. (For instance, if speed is an important message in the name, you could ask which of several names seems "fastest.") You could reveal your product's description or company's mission and ask which name seems most appropriate.

With qualitative research, you can test more names and dig deeper into how a name's messaging or tonality comes across. Using a carefully selected group and a skilled moderator who knows how to ask the right questions, you can gather a lot of information about what kinds of images or emotions each name evokes, and even whether a name works in its proposed context. Also, a moderator should be able to respond quickly to the flow of conversation and to probe if people in the group aren't communicating their impressions clearly.

Whether you decide to use quantitative or qualitative research, there are great firms that specialize in naming research and can locate exactly the audience you want to survey.

And regardless of which type of research you use, remember—and this is the main rule of naming research:

Don't just ask people which name they like best.

The members of a focus group are in no position to gauge how effective a name will be when properly contextualized and marketed. That's the job of your naming firm—and you. Also, asking if people like a name will inevitably yield a lot of personal preferences, especially for names that seem familiar. And you'll end up with a bland, inoffensive name that no one hates, but no one really loves either. Innovative, bold names—the kind that represent strong brands—consistently rank at the bottom in naming research. What's more, people tend to think they're being helpful if they can find flaws. There will always be that one guy in the back who hates everything and will probably skew all your data.

In addition to choosing the type of research you want to conduct and what questions you'll ask, you'll need to prepare your chosen names for focus group testing. There are different ways to present names, and all of them work. You can show name candidates on their own, or with logos, or in contexts like mocked-up websites. You can even show them as words on a page in black and white. The important thing is to present each name in exactly the same way, rather than customizing each name with its own logo or other distinguishing graphic elements. Otherwise, the customized elements will influence respondents' feedback in ways that have nothing to do with the name itself.

After you've conducted your focus groups, perhaps the most difficult part of naming research begins: figuring out what it all means. Separating relevant feedback from more idiosyncratic responses is rarely clear-cut. (Although if 90% of the people surveyed say that a particular name is the slang word for "crack," you can safely eliminate it.) This is where a professional research or naming firm can add the most value.

Naming research is a data point, not a decision point.

As long as a name doesn't carry overtly negative associations and reflects your brand promise, it need not win any focus group popularity contests.

Taking your name global

It's easy enough to weed out name candidates in your native tongue that are unpronounceable or freighted with negative connotations. But what do you do if your name is headed for countries—or audiences—whose languages you don't speak?

For your own peace of mind, your best bet is to hire a global linguistic analysis service. Make sure that they only use native speakers who live in the target country or countries, are knowledgeable about naming and marketing—and speak excellent English. (Thankfully, when we vet a name that has to work in other countries, we can draw from a network of native speakers with these qualifications who speak virtually every language and dialect in the world.)

A thorough global linguistic analysis should include feedback on ease of pronunciation, meanings evoked, brand fit, and existing brand names that are similar to your name candidates and may cause confusion. To avert disaster, you'll want to test name candidates with native speakers of each language or dialect your target audience is likely to speak.

Here are some examples of names we've nixed because of their associations outside the US:

COZM: Sounds like “kotzen,” which means “to vomit” in Germany

REEGO: Too close to “rego,” a Mexican Spanish word for “he screwed up” (not the best association for an educational toy)

KIZMO: Associated with “kizumono,” meaning “defective gadget” in Japanese

If you don't have the budget to hire a global linguistic analysis service, you can try vetting a name internationally yourself, if you follow these caveats:

- Only ask native speakers who've lived in the target countries for a long time
- Make sure they're in your target audience
- Always ask more than one person or your results are likely to be skewed by personal preferences

Also, don't hesitate to probe if you don't understand a response. For instance, one respondent told us a name didn't “sound popular.” What does that mean? Does it mean “I've never heard of this name before”? If so, that could be a good thing! So if you don't understand a response, ask questions until you do.

Once you've gathered all your feedback, interpret the results with care. For instance, if two or more respondents flag a competitive brand, this indicates a likely problem. But if only one person mentions that brand, you'll want to dig around online to see if the brand's really relevant. As with any kind of marketing research, it's important to distinguish patterns from idiosyncratic responses—and not to be put off by personal preferences.

Tips for code-naming your project

If your naming project has been in the works for a while, it's quite likely that you've developed a code name for it.

Uh-oh.

Don't get us wrong; we know that you need some kind of shorthand for referring to that super-secret project you've been working on. The problem is people often pick semantically relevant code names to generate internal excitement. And then ... they fall in love with them.

So every time you refer to that cool new product of yours as Revolution, it starts to become Revolution in your mind. Which wouldn't be a problem except that Revolution is unavailable. (Of course.)

Murphy's Rule of Code Names:

Familiarity breeds
attachment
(not contempt).

But you want it. You really want it. Which leads to the following dilemma...

"Ring ring. Hi, naming firm? Yes, please create a new name that we'll love more than the code name we've been living with and loving for the past six months. It should be just like our code name only legally available. Kthanksbye."

Then whatever names your naming firm suggests are never quite right because they're not the code name.

There's a simple way to avoid this problem. Only use code names that are totally unrelated and unsuited to your project. (Companies who've been around the naming block a few times already do this.) You might consider, for instance, code-naming your project after:

- **Unglamorous farm animals (Chicken or Pig, anyone?)**
- **Cheeses (think Havarti, Gouda, Provolone, Paneer)**
- **The conference rooms in your building**

Remember: the perfect code name is a name you can't wait to replace with the real name, when it's finally chosen. If a code name provokes a nose-wrinkling reaction of "Say what?" it's a good code name! If it makes you think "Say, actually that's not a bad name" ... you need to start over.

Naming glossary

Some familiar (and unfamiliar) terms from the world of naming.

Abbreviation The shortened form of a written word or phrase (see Acronym and Nickname). Inc. magazine is an abbreviation which actually outdoes its full form by conveying an insider image.

Acronym A word or word-like entity formed from the initial letters of a series of words in a phrase or name. BART is the acronym for Bay Area Rapid Transit system; MADD is the acronym for Mothers Against Drunk Driving; LASER is the acronym for Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation. (See Initialism.)

Agentive A noun denoting the agent or doer of an action, typically formed by adding the suffix "-er" to the verb. As a type of name, it can be very active-sounding: for instance, The Ford Explorer.

Alliteration The repetition of the same sound at the beginning of a series of words. BlackBerry and Dreyer's Dreamery both use alliteration.

Alphanumeric A name made up of a combination of letters and numbers. WD-40 lubricant, Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet software, and Lexus ES 300 are examples.

Amalgam The blending of two or more meanings into one name. Livescribe, for instance.

Analogy The process of creating or modifying a particular name on the basis of an existing name or pattern in the language. For example, the Mrs. Tea teamaker is analogous to the Mr. Coffee coffeemaker.

Arbitrary Name A name bearing no logical relationship to the object it's branding. Orange (the telecom company), Cadillac (originally the name of a Native American chieftain), Exxon, and Kodak are all examples of arbitrary names.

Assonance The repetition in a name of vowels without the repetition of consonants (Hulu, for instance, or Togo's restaurants).

Back Formation The creation of a new word from an existing form assumed, incorrectly, to be its derivative. For example, the word edit was actually formed by dropping the suffix "-or" from editor, not the other way around. Other examples: to bus (from busboy), diagnose (from diagnosis), process (from procession), and televise (from television).

Backronym [compound of back + acronym] A word re-interpreted as an acronym. For instance, at one time Yahoo! was jokingly said to stand for Yet Another Hierarchical Official Oracle.

Blending Creating a new word by combining the first part of one word with the last of another (see Portmanteau). For instance: smog (smoke + fog); Petopia (pet and utopia). Although rare in English, blending is a common means of word formation in several language families.

Borrowing Adopting a word from one language into the lexicon of another (see Calque). The name of eBay's online classified service, Kijiji, is a borrowing of the Swahili word for "village."

Brand (Often confused with brand name). The collection of attributes and experiences—from name and logo to marketing, reputation and other consumer perceptions—that constitute a product's or company's public persona.

Brand name The name of a product or company.

Brand Slogan A pithy phrase or sentence usually intended to be paired with the brand name or logo in marketing communications and drive home a desired message about the brand. Also known as a tagline.

Calque The literal translation of a word from one language into the lexicon of another (see Borrowing). The Mandarin Chinese term nan pengyou—a direct translation of the English word boyfriend—is a calque.

Coinage The creation of a new artificial name through the alteration of an existing word. mPower (from empower), Google (from googol), Altegrity (from intergrity) and Lego (from the Danish "leg godt," meaning play well) are examples of coinage.

Connotation A word's associated, suggestive sense, including its overtones and shades of meaning (see Denotation). For example, the word travel can connote different things—some may think of driving in a car; others, of journeying to exotic locations; and still others, the hassle of getting from airport to airport.

Consonance The repetition of a consonant sound. Cracker Jack is a perfect example of consonance in naming.

Denotation A word's direct, explicit sense, excluding its overtones and shades of meaning. For instance, while there are various connotations of travel (see Connotation above), the denotation (from Webster's Dictionary) is "to go from one place to another; to make a journey or journeys."

Descriptive name A name that plainly describes a feature or benefit of a company or product. Toys R Us, Best Buy, and Pop-Tarts are descriptive names.

Descriptor A word or words describing a product or service in very literal fashion (often used with a fanciful, arbitrary, or suggestive name). With Kleenex Facial Tissue, facial tissue is a descriptor.

Diminutive A suffix which denotes smallness, youth, familiarity, or affection. Think Huggies diapers or Wheaties breakfast cereal.

Dissonance A harsh or disagreeable combination of sounds. Some native English speakers consider various Southeast Asian languages dissonant, based on their unfamiliar tones and consonant combinations; the reverse is also true.

Eponym A brand name derived from a person, whether real, fictitious or legendary. Aunt Jemima, Betty Crocker, Michael Jordan, and Barbie are eponymous trade names.

Euphemism [Greek eu, good + pHEME, speech] An inoffensive substitute for a term considered offensive or inappropriate. Bathroom tissue is a euphemism for toilet paper.

Fanciful Name A name invented without apparent reference to any other word in the lexicon. Kodak and Exxon are the archetypes of this category (see Arbitrary Name).

Genericide When a trademark becomes synonymous with its product and is no longer legally protectable. Aspirin, escalator, kerosene, thermos, yo-yo, zipper—even heroin—were all trademarks at one time that were legally protected in the U.S., and have now become generic terms.

Iconicity The likelihood that a name will be readily visualized by its intended audience. The name of the computer company Apple lends itself to easy iconicity.

Initialism A name formed by combining the first letters of several words, like IBM (International Business Machines) or BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke) and pronounced as its individual letters. Often initialisms develop after a longer name has been in use for a while. Unlike acronyms, initialisms cannot be pronounced as words (see Acronym).

Invented Spelling The practice of using non-standard spelling in a name to achieve a desired effect or acquire a domain. Cingular is an intentionally altered spelling of singular.

Lexicon The inventory of words in a given language. The English lexicon can be found in a complete dictionary.

Linguistics The science and study of language, especially the nature and structure of human speech.

Metaphor A figure of speech in which one object or concept is likened to another. Fruit of the Loom is a metaphorical brand name.

Metonymy The substitution of one word for another of similar meaning. Referring to the US government as Washington is an example of metonymy.

Mimetic Word A word formed in imitation of another word: for instance, litterbug is a mimetic play on jitterbug.

Morpheme A meaningful word or word part which cannot be subdivided into smaller meaningful parts. In English, the letter “s” at the end of a word is a morpheme indicating plurality.

Naming Architecture The way a company’s existing names are organized, and a set of rules for which future products or subsidiaries get named and how (see Nomenclature).

Nickname The familiar form of a proper name. For example, Bud for Budweiser, T-bird for Thunderbird, and Sunny D for Sunny Delight. The wise company considers likely nicknames before settling on a product name.

Nomenclature The protocols for naming a particular group of products. A line of General Mills’ cereals, for instance, is based on monsters’ names: Count Chocula, Frankenberry, Boo Berry, and the sadly departed Fruit Brute and Yummy Mummy.

Onomastics The study of names and naming practices.

Onomatopoeia The creation of a name that sounds like what it refers to. The Rice Krispies' cartoon characters Snap, Crackle, and Pop are famous examples. (The fourth elf, Pow, was fired after inappropriate behavior in a New York nightclub.)

Personification A type of name that gives human form to a product (see Eponym). Mr. Clean and the Nintendo Game Boy are examples of personification.

Phoneme The smallest unit of speech which distinguishes one word from another in a given language. In bat and mat, the sounds "b" and "m" are phonemes.

Polysemy The proliferation of words that share a single ancestral root. The creation of English words derived from the Latin root *procedere*—such as *process*, *processional*, and *proceeding*—is an example of polysemy.

Portmanteau A word that's a blend of two or more others, like *smog* (smoke + fog), or *Snapple* (snap + apple).

Proprietary Name A name that's distinctive enough to be trademarked (unlike a purely descriptive name).

Reduplication The repetition of syllables within a name, such as the initial two syllables of *Boboli* Italian bread crust.

Rhyme A mnemonic naming device in which two or more words or word parts end with the same sound. The brand name *Vudu* uses rhyme.

Root The semantic kernel from which a set of words is derived through phonetic changes and/or extensions. For example, *child* is the root of a number of words: *childlike*, *childish*, *childproof*, *children*, etc.

Semantics The study of meaning in language, including the relationship between language, thought, and behavior.

Sound Symbolism The semantic qualities that a sound suggests in and of itself. Many linguists have theorized that the high vowel /i/, as in the word *pea*, connotes smallness and that the low vowel /a/, as in the word *father*, connotes largeness, although many exceptions to this rule exist.

Spoonerism The transposition of the consonants or sounds from two or more words: for example, *Article Pract* (a play on *Practical Art*).

Suggestive Name A name which suggests or refers to a product indirectly, without actually describing it. *Spalding Infusion* (ball-pump technology) and *BlueArc* (high-speed data storage) are two examples.

Synecdoche A word or words representing a part of the whole that's used as a stand-in for the whole. *Staples* and *Wall Street* are good examples.

Synonym A word having the same meaning as another. *Nice* and *pleasing* are synonyms.

Tagline A branding slogan, usually paired with the brand name or logo in marketing communications. "*Droid Does*" is a tagline.

Toponym A name derived from a place or geographic feature: for example, *Shasta* soft drinks, the *Chevy Tahoe* SUV, and *Farallon's Timbuktu* remote control software.

Credits and Other Good Stuff Like Company Contact Information

We've been in business since 1998. We have offices in the San Francisco Bay Area and New York, and a network of naming partners throughout the world.

We specialize in all aspects of brand name development, including product and company naming, brand strategy, initial legal screening, and linguistic analysis.

Our mission is to help clients connect with their customers through brand names that are memorable, engaging, and rich in meaning. We do that for companies like McDonald's, ConAgra, Gap, Cisco, Wells Fargo, Adobe, and all manner of start-ups. Catchword's partners are industry leaders, and at least one of them is actively involved in every naming project.

We're often asked, "What sets Catchword apart from other naming companies?" To which we reply, "The experience." Even though naming is a complex and highly specialized business, we believe that it should also be fun and inspiring from beginning to end. We've built our business model and all of our processes around that belief.

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