



What's in a Name?

By Lisa Anthony Toller

“That which we call a rose by any other word would smell as sweet.” Shakespeare may have been a great playwright but he would have failed Branding 101. A powerful name is a key component to a brand’s success and especially critical in today’s densely crowded marketplace. A rose by any other name would perhaps smell as sweet but more importantly, would it sell?

An effective brand name must be memorable, meaningful, timeless, simple, positive, visual, and protectable. Alina Wheeler, author of *Designing Brand Identity*, writes that “Consumers today experience some three thousand messages a day– from the medicine cabinet to the refrigerator; from the mailbox brimming with magazines and credit card offers, from cell phones and PDAs, to the clothes we wear.” In all the clutter, how can you create a name that will make your brand stand out?

Consider the brands that have succeeded in achieving name recognition. For the most part, these names fall into several categories or a combination thereof:

- **Founder** (Merrill Lynch, John Deere, Charles Schwab)
- **Descriptive** (Toys R Us, Federal Express)
- **Fabricated** (Xerox, Agilent, IKEA)
- **Metaphor** (Oracle, Nike, Sprint,)
- **Acronym** (GE, IBM, CNN)

There are many scenarios requiring a new name from starting a business or re-naming an existing one, to launching a new product or creating a brand line extension. Although the questions will vary slightly depending upon the scenario, the process remains the same. Equal parts art and science, naming requires thorough research, a good dose of creativity, extensive legal review, and audience testing.

In the case of a new product launch, the procedure that we employ is to start with in-depth interviews of key brand stakeholders including a sampling of top executives, board members, industry influencers, core clients, referral sources, and employees (don’t forget the first person your clients interact with – the receptionist!) I ask the interviewees to imagine their brand as a person. What does he/she look like? What are their distinguishing characteristics? Can you

picture the brand's clothing, cars, interests, manner of speech, etc.? The answers to these questions will help us flesh out the brand's "personality".

"In today's competitive world, a name must function as a total messenger."

Naseem Javed, author, *Naming for Power*

With the help of an appointed brand team with decision-making authority, we identify 3 to 6 key brand attributes – a list of adjectives that describe the ideal tone, positioning, and personality of the brand. Once the brand attributes are determined, we conduct market research which might include a competitive analysis, target audience segmentation, and consideration of sales and distribution channels. The brand strategy and positioning is developed based upon the learnings from this discovery phase.

Upon completion of the research and strategy, the creative process begins with name brainstorming using random-association techniques, synonym directories, and other methods. A short list of potential candidates is developed and measured against the brand criteria. Test the names in context by saying them aloud, leaving a voice mail, emailing the name, mocking it up in a business card, on a website, and in an ad headline. Imagine the name twenty feet high on a billboard: Do you still like it?

Before beginning the name testing with an audience sample, an initial screening should be undertaken to make sure the name is legally viable. Working with an attorney who specializes in trademark and copyright law is essential to finding a brand name that is protectable. According to Katja Loeffelholz, a trademark attorney with Napa law firm, Gaw Van Male,

"Trademarks are often a business' most valuable asset, often times exceeding the value of a company's tangible assets. Every advertising dollar a company spends increases a trademark's value. Protecting a brand at the outset is relatively inexpensive and can prevent costly legal entanglements in the future. "

Audience testing can be as limited or as extensive as the budget allows. If the new product is to be launched in numerous markets across the country (or the world), then extensive testing should be undertaken – an upfront investment that could save millions of dollars should the product go to market and fail. However, on a limited budget, a relatively simple test is to ask the stakeholders who were originally interviewed to share their reactions to the name.

The next step is to bring the name to life with a logo. A graphic designer creates two or three design concepts for a logo – also referred to as a brandmark, trademark, symbol, or mark. The logo incorporates font styles, images, and colors that evoke the brand attributes. Again, it is important that the decision-making team use objective criteria with which to judge the concepts.

After following a systematic process, a logo is derived that meets all of your criteria, tests well with your target audience, and is legally protectable. Hopefully, the new name and logo will stand the test of time alongside other successful brands.