

Introduction

Three golden rules of naming:

Don't lean under someone else's umbrella, you'll still get wet.

Don't be a copycat. It is very bad to copy or borrow from an established identity. A look-alike, sound-alike name, resembling the personality of a powerful, established, legendary name will be fruitless in the long run.

Stay clear of legendary names.

Creativity is a spark of genius.
Over-creativity can cause fire and damage.

Don't get too creative. Do not twist, bend, stretch, exaggerate, corrupt or modify alpha-structures to their extremes in naming. It may result in difficult, confusing, unpronounceable and only silly names.

Avoid overly creative solutions

Work locally, name globally.

Do not short-change. No matter how small or local the project, think of the future and think of this small planet. A name is only good when it is free and clear to travel around the globe, without encountering translation problems or trademark conflicts.

Think globally.

“Just five years ago there were only 5,000 domain names,” said Naseem Javed, “Today there are 11,000 new ones a day.”

“Naming expert Naseem Javed is a notoriously harsh critic of the ‘sloppy and repetitive’ way that technology companies identify themselves and their products. He insists that ‘less than one percent of business names or product names are good, clean, and workable.’ The rest ‘are in serious trouble’, typically because they overuse a small number of generic name elements, which leads to ‘diluted and confused market recognition.’”

“Remember, names are not for a group of people. They are for the masses,” says Javed.

I. Making Names

Each name development project begins with an input meeting at which we agree on an input statement...a ranked list of messages to be expressed in potential names.

Like all English nouns, product, service, and company names are constructed of linguistic elements called ‘morphemes’... small semantic units like the ‘van’ denoting ‘front’ or ‘top’ in words like ‘advantage’.

By combining the selected morphemes, we construct every word or short phrase possible in English to express combinations of the input messages...by denotation, connotation, simile, idiom, or metaphor. These are candidate names.

II. Structure

Unlike natural language, a proprietary name derives much of its effect from the consumer's experience of the names of similar things.

Internet

Pattern-setting name structure helps an early (and substantial) venture to become the archetype of a new category...the referred to standard by which others are defined.

Yahoo.com and webvan.com are archetypes in their categories that are absolute referential standards for names like excite.com and grocery.com.

In the search-engine portal category for example, names like altavista.com, ask.com, excite.com, goto.com and infoseek.com which ignore the structural pattern defined by yahoo.com have proven to be vastly more expensive to propagate among internet users than a structurally appositional name like google.com.

Potential names can be screened against this set of rules to eliminate those which are structurally incorrect.

Packaged Goods

New products are suggestively positioned by name structure along a continuum of values (like cosmetic-to-antiseptic for hand soaps or safe-to-potent for analgesics) defined by milestones (Dove-Ivory-Zest or Bufferin-Anacin-Excedrin) that are brand names of existing products.

Write a formal analysis of the names of related products to form a set of rules of legitimacy (an effective proprietary name must be perceived to be "a soap" or "an analgesic" without argument) and position (on a continuum of values) through patterns of name structure in the category.

Candidate names are screened against this set of rules, eliminating those which are structurally mis-symbolic...yielding a shorter list of major candidates expressing the input statement messages in a form which is legitimate and accurately positional.

III. Function

During the name development process, candidates may be modified to enhance linguistic performance ...speechstream visibility, notational visibility, phonetic transparency, and multilingual function.

Speechstream visibility is the probability that a word will be recognized in a normal spoken stream of English speech.

Notational visibility is the probability that a word will be deciphered from typeset text like the columns of a newspaper.

A phonetically transparent name is spoken-as-spelled...easily pronounced from alphabetic notation. Because you learn to speak five years before you learn to read, language is phonetic in the brain. Because you think and remember in sounds (rather than alphabet), phonetic transparency affects memorability.

Even where international marketing is not contemplated, it often makes sense to eliminate candidates which incorporate phonetic sequences which are uncomfortable to large groups of Americans whose native language isn't English.

IV. World Names

Because most western languages stem from a single linguistic source (Indo-European), it is possible to construct proprietary names which are similarly meaningful in most western nations and Japan (roughly 10% of urban Japanese derives from English).

Screening out phonemes difficult for speakers of languages of primary commercial interest yields proprietary names that are functional across linguistic borders.

Words that are obviously constructed for international function (Sony, Kodak, Acura) are less likely to convey cultural bias than natural words suggestively based in a particular language.

Because translated equivalence is a legal issue, neologisms are more likely to prove registerable in many nations than natural words in any language.

V. Intellectual Property

At the beginning of the construction process, morphemes which are diluted (overused in the category) are set aside to minimize time wasted on unavailable name candidates.

Constructional linguistics process can be directed at creating meaningful new words. Genuine neologisms (rather than fusions of word fragments like 'Beautybath' or adjectival phrases like 'Lite & Natural') provide stronger trademark rights and create fewer intellectual property issues.