

# Product naming

---

**Product naming** is the discipline of deciding what a product will be called, and is very similar in concept and approach to the process of deciding on a name for a company or organization. Product naming is considered a critical part of the branding process, which includes all of the marketing activities that affect the brand image, such as positioning and the design of logo, packaging and the product itself. Product naming involves the application of creative and linguistic strategy and results in a brand name that becomes a product's shorthand.

The process involved in product naming can take months or years to complete. Some key steps include specifying the objectives of the branding, developing the product name itself, evaluating names through target market testing and focus groups, choosing a final product name, and finally identifying it as a trademark for protection.<sup>[1]</sup>

## Principles

A key ingredient in launching a successful company is the selection of its name.<sup>[2]</sup> Product names that are considered generally sound have several qualities in common.

- They strategically distinguish the product from its competitors by conveying its unique positioning
- They hold appeal for the product's target audience
- They imply the brand's benefit
- They are available for legal protection.
- They allow companies to bond with their customers to create loyalty.
- They have a symbolic association that fortifies the image of a company or a product to the consumers.
- They help motivate customers to buy the product.
- They can buy a product image and name.

## Types of names

Brand names typically fall into several different categories<sup>[3]</sup>.

### Acronyms and Initials

Names created from the initials of longer names: AFLAC, IBM, M&M (for Forrest Mars and Bruce Murrie).

### Amalgam

Names created by taking parts of words and putting them together: Nabisco (National Biscuit Company).

### Alliteration and Rhyme

Fun to say, and particularly memorable: Nutter Butter, YouTube, Piggly Wiggly.

### Appropriation

Use the idea for one thing and apply it to another: Caterpillar, Reebok.

---

**Descriptive**

Descriptive names ascribe to the product a characteristic: Toys R Us, General Motors.

**Evocative**

Invoke a vivid image that alludes to a brand benefit: London Fog, Amazon.

**Neologism**

A completely new made-up word: Kodak, Verizon.

**Foreign Word**

Use a foreign word or phrase as a brand name: Volvo for "I roll".

**Founders' Names**

Use the name of a founder of founder family member: Hewlett-Packard, Wendy's.

**Nickname**

Use a founder's nickname: Adidas aka Adolf Dassler, Kinkos.

**Ingredients**

Base the name on ingredients: Clorox for chlorine plus sodium hydroxide, Pepsi for the digestive enzyme pepsin.

**Geography**

Chose a name associated with company/product location: eBay for East Bay, Fuji for the tallest mountain in Japan.

**Humor/Slang**

For a name with personality: Yahoo!, Cracker Jack.

**Merged**

When two companies merge into one, sometimes both names are kept: ExxonMobil, Rolls Royce.

**Mimetics**

Use alternative spellings for common sounds: 2(x)ist, Krispy Kreme.

**Personification**

Create a character or adopt an existing personage: Green Giant, Midas Mufflers.

**Onomatopoeia**

Use a sound associated with a product function or other brand idea: Twitter, Meow Mix.

**Clever Statement**

Names don't have to be just a word or two: Seven for All Mankind, I Can't Believe It's Not Butter.

**Product naming techniques**

---

Linguistically, names are developed by combining morphemes, phonemes and syntax to create a desired representation of a product.

Morphemes differ from words in that many morphemes may not be able to stand alone. The Sprint name is composed of a single word and a single morpheme. Conversely, a brand like Acuvue is composed of two morphemes, each with a distinct meaning. While "vue" may be able to stand as its own word, "acu" is seen as a prefix or a bound morpheme that must connect to a free morpheme like "vue."<sup>[4]</sup>

Phonemes are minimal units of sound. Depending on the speaker's accent, the English language has about 44 phonemes.<sup>[5]</sup> In product naming, names that are phonetically easy to pronounce and that are well balanced with vowels and consonants have an advantage over those that are not. Likewise, names that begin with or stress plosive consonant sounds B, hard C, D, G, K, P or T are often used because of their attention-getting quality.<sup>[6]</sup> Some phoneme sounds in English, for example L, V, F and W are thought of as feminine, while others such as X, M and Z are viewed as masculine.<sup>[7]</sup>

Syntax, or word order, is key to consumers' perceptions of a product name. Banana Republic would not carry the same meaning were it changed to "Republic Banana." Syntax also has significant implications for the naming of global products, because syntax has been argued to cross the barrier from one language to another.<sup>[8]</sup> (See the pioneering work on Universal Grammar by Noam Chomsky)

Some specific product naming techniques, including a combination of morphemes, phonemes and syntax are shown in the graph below.

Method	Brand
Alliteration	Coca-Cola
Oxymoron	Krispy Kreme
Combination	Walkman
Tautology	Crown Royal
Theronym	Mustang
Mimetics	Google
Eponym	Trump Tower
Description	Cinnamon Toast Crunch
Synecdoche	Staples
Poetics	USA Today
Metonymy	Starbucks
Allusion	London Fog
Haplology	Land O'Lakes
Clipping	Fed Ex
Morphological borrowing	Nikon
Omission	RAZR
Acronym adaptation	BMW
Acronym	KFC
Founder's name	Ferrari
Classical roots	Pentium
Arbitrary	Apple
Reduplication	Spic and Span

## Owning a Name: Trademarks, URLs and beyond

A consideration companies find important in developing a product name is its "trademarkability." Product name trademarks may be established in a number of ways:

- In many countries, including the United States, names can be used as trademarks without formal registration through first use or common law—simply to protect an established product's name and reputation.
- Product names can be formally registered within a state, with protection limited to that state's borders.
- In the United States, a federal trademark registration is filed with the USPTO and offered protection for as long as the mark is in use.
- The preeminent system for registering international trademarks in multiple jurisdictions is the Madrid system.

In addition, protecting a trademark is just as important as the initial process of registration. Trademark rights are maintained through actual use of the trademark, and will diminish over time if a trademark is not actively used.

Companies need to consider whether they can own a name in the digital realm. Owning a dotcom is critical for some companies, as is owning a brand name on Facebook, Twitter, and other types of sites. In modern communication, the trademark is just the start of owning a name.

## International considerations

Because English is widely viewed as a global language, with over 380 million native speakers, many international trademarks are created in English. Still, language differences present difficulties when using a trademark internationally.

## Product naming faux pas

Many companies have stumbled across the importance of considering language differences in marketing new products.

- Mitsubishi Pajero is called Montero in Spanish speaking countries because Pajero means wanker
- Reebok named a women's sneaker Incubus.<sup>[9]</sup> In medieval folklore, an incubus was a demon who ravished women in their sleep.
- The Honda Fitta was, according to a popular urban legend, renamed Jazz after discovering that *fitta* is Norwegian and Swedish slang for the female genitals.<sup>[10]</sup>
- A drink in Japan called Calpis, when pronounced, sounds exactly like *cow piss*. The product is marketed in North America under the Calpico brand.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Bimbo is a Mexican baking conglomerate;<sup>[12]</sup> in English the term describes a woman who is physically attractive but is perceived to have a low intelligence or poor education.

## Notable naming companies

- A Hundred Monkeys
  - Catchword Branding
  - Endmark
  - Interbrand (Omnicom)
  - Landor (WPP)
  - Lippincott
  - Master-McNeil
  - Namebase
  - The Naming Group
  - Siegel+Gale (Omnicom)
  - Strategic Name Development
-

## References

- [1] Kohli, C., & LaBahn, D.W. (1997). *Observations: Creating effective brand names: a study of the naming process*. Journal of Advertising Research, 37.
- [2] Fred Barrett, "Names That Sell: How to create Great Names for Your Company, Product, or Service", 1995
- [3] <http://merriamassociates.com/2009/02/styles-and-types-of-company-and-product-names/>
- [4] Bloomfield, L. (1984). *Language*, University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-06067-5
- [5] Sousa, D. (2004). *How the brain learns to read*, Corwin Press. ISBN 1-4129-0601-6
- [6] Guth, D.W. "A Few Words on Words." (<http://people.ku.edu/~dguth/Words.html>)
- [7] Snyder Bulik, B. (2006). What's in a name? More than you might think, study says. "Ad Age" (<http://www.namedevelopment.com/articles/adage-study.html>).
- [8] Cook, V.J., & Newson, M. (1996). *Chomsky's Universal Grammar: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Publishing. ISBN 0-631-19556-4
- [9] The Journal Record (Oklahoma City). February 20, 1997. Reebok has devil of a time with demonic shoe name. ([http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4182/is\\_19970220/ai\\_n10104158](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4182/is_19970220/ai_n10104158))
- [10] "Error: no `|title=` specified when using `{{|Template:Cite web|Cite web (http://sv.bab.la/lexikon/svensk-engelsk/fitta)}}`". .
- [11] [http://smt.blogs.com/mari\\_diary/2004/07/calpico\\_calpis\\_.html](http://smt.blogs.com/mari_diary/2004/07/calpico_calpis_.html)
- [12] <http://merriamassociates.com/2010/10/funny-brand-names-this-bimbo-isnt-stupid/>

## External links

- What Entrepreneurs Need to Know About ... Naming Your Company, *Innovation Magazine*, October 2006. (<http://www.innovation-america.org/archive.php?articleID=186>)
- Choosing a Company Name, *The Sideroad*, 2006. ([http://www.sideroad.com/Branding/company\\_names.html](http://www.sideroad.com/Branding/company_names.html))
- 8 Mistakes to Avoid When Naming Your Business, Entrepreneur.com 07 April, 2005 (<http://www.entrepreneur.com/startingabusiness/startupbasics/namingyourbusiness/article76958.html>)
- Venture Capital: Renaming company entails risks, by JOHN COOK, SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, February 28, 2003 ([http://www.seattlepi.com/venture/110452\\_vc28.shtml](http://www.seattlepi.com/venture/110452_vc28.shtml))
- Monday name change for PwC, BBC NEWS, 10 June, 2002 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2035803.stm>)
- "What's in a name? For the pros, big bucks", U.S. News and World Report, 10/13/97 (<http://naming.com/assets/news/usnews.html>)
- Change your business' name? 7 issues," Microsoft Small Business Center (<http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/marketing/advertising-branding/change-your-business-name-7-issues.aspx#Changeyourbusinessnameissues>)
- In the name of the brand, m+a report 2008 ([http://www.endmark.de/fileadmin/endmark/PDF-Dokumente/Endmark\\_Presse\\_Name\\_of\\_Brand.pdf](http://www.endmark.de/fileadmin/endmark/PDF-Dokumente/Endmark_Presse_Name_of_Brand.pdf))

# Article Sources and Contributors

**Product naming** *Source:* <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=491057474> *Contributors:* Alex Usoltsev, Andr00ster, Andrusjaak, Anetode, Antedater, Appella, Atholf, Auric, BD2412, Bensin, Bolddeciever, Brandanswer, Britt425, C2morrow, CliffC, Cloudydaze615, Devinliddell, Diopera, Dj stone, Dmodedirt, Drgeert, Ewlyahoocom, Fluffernutter, Gareth T Lewis, Garfieldplace, Gogo Dodo, Graham87, Gregbard, JPHoepner, Jakehancock, Jimsing2, Kalisti, Kcmcclary, Kintetsubuffalo, LDMerriam, Lathama, Ldmerriam, Likelighting, Lockesdonkey, Loftwyr, Mandarax, Marjmandi, Mattgirling, Mattkesler, Mean as custard, Michael Hardy, Mild Bill Hiccup, Moberg63, Monsterbob234, Ohnoitsjamie, Pdavis1, Ponyo, ProhibitOnions, R'n'B, RHaworth, Rlene, Rocketsam, Seudo, Snarkosis, SyreX, Tamfang, Violetriga, Wavelength, 62 anonymous edits

## License

---

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported  
[//creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)