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How to Pick the Perfect Name for Your Business

A great name can make all the difference in the world when it comes to your brand. And taking the time to craft said name might be your most important first step.

But you see naming as a mystical practice. Something you're not so capable of.

The truth is there's nothing mystical about it. Anyone can use the steps below to come up with a spot-on name that's catchy, unforgettable, and enduring.

Today, that's what I'm going to show you how to do.

But before you take another step, first work on a short paragraph that describes your business. If you haven't, follow the details here and get busy.

What makes a name great?...

First it's important to understand what a great name will do for you:

A great name will bring you brand recognition.

(You want that, right?)

It's the first point of contact with your potential customers and a rock-solid name will stay top of mind and make your brand super-sticky.

A great name should ...

Easily roll of the tongue.

Be short and sweet, catchy, and unique.

Communicate what you do.

And be easy to remember.

So, let's make this fun.

I'm a fan of getting away from the computer and using pen and paper to generate ideas. With naming it's no different and will actually be enjoyable.

(Trust me.)

This exercise assumes you have a Positioning Statement written. If not, that's a hint to get busy.

Okay, let's kick this off with a fun exercise ...

1. Think hard about key words. Rack your brain hard.

Kick around words that convey the meaning of your business. Descriptive words that truly express what you offer.

Exhaust the possibilities, then come back for more.

Don't stop. Keep writing, then expand on those words ...

How?

Find synonyms.

Dig into Wikipedia for word history or try etymonline.

Lose some inhibitions [here](#). (It's good fun.)

Spend time on this recipe:

- A. Think of descriptive words;
- B. Then expand on them using the tools above;
- C. Have fun and grow your list (then go onto step 2).

Note about the URL: When it comes to domains, the generic are usually taken and a domain name search will kill half your ideas. So focus on the creative exercises here to avoid this futile search process AND a boring name.

Lesson: Cool the SEO jets and think creatively.

2. This is the fun part.

Now start thinking about words that represent what you do in the form of symbols and analogies. Scibble down whatever comes to mind, just be inventive and use metaphorical language. Anything that pops into your noggin is fair game.

Think of compound words: Duckweed, Stopwatch, Grasshopper, ... ZenHabits.

Combine two or more separate words to create a new one e.g. Lewis Carroll's "chortle." (Chuckle + Snort = Chortle). (Zen + Garden = Gardzen) ... I didn't say they had to be great. Just experiment at this point.

And phrases work too StumbleUpon, anyone?

Tack on prefixes: ThinkZen, DailyZen, NeoZen.

Or suffixes: ZenGarden, ZenBeat, ZenCamp.

3. Now ...

Break words up and combine them. The literal with the figurative.

Mix words within phrases. Think about names that can be used in multiple parts of speech: adjective, noun, verb.

Intentionally misspell, ala Flickr. Think Feedly and "ly"

State something in the form of a phrase like GoToMeeting.

Or be weird and say, Squidoo.

Just have fun and see where it gets you.

And if you want to have more fun work to sketch your favorites as a logo or logotype. This visualization process will help flesh a name. Think like a designer and see where it leads. It doesn't matter if you can't draw a lick, just do it.

4. Then review ...

Why? Well ...

A name that conveys exactly what you do ...

- Can sound so commonplace and characterless.
- The domain name is almost always taken.
- And generic is so, so limiting.

A crazy and unique name. Can be fun, make you super cool, build buzz, but can often ...

- Be hard to decipher.
- Dilute your message.
- And confuse for the sake of uniqueness.

It's all about balance, my friends. You need clarity of message AND personality...

An offbeat name can create meaning around your brand, but also confuse.

A generic name can describe *brand you* perfectly, but get lost in the Google shuffle.

A great name is part science and part intuition. The sound of the words. The image(s) they convey. The uniqueness and structure. And the look of the letters and the ease of pronunciation. Just like any creative exercise this is not a purely linear 1-2-3 process. Have fun, experiment, try and draw out your favorite names as logos.

You might be asking what about my name? You know, ... www.JethroBobSmith.com? The “www.me.com” thing?

Well, if the site is going to be all about you—branding consultant, personal trainer, aspiring novelist—www.You.com kinda rocks.

Or if you are still a wee bit indecisive on your direction, your name followed by (dot) com is probably THE way to go.

So YourName.com means you can roll out different brands and never get stuck. Your name always works.

And whether to use your name or not is another reason why you DON'T skip the positioning exercise. It helps you clarify your niche, product or business and hone a long-term vision that rocks.

And even if you are dead-set on using your name only ... I still think the naming exercises above are worth the effort. They might help clarify your vision and lead to something unexpected. (I think you'll like that ;))

So go back to the top, get out that good old piece of paper and get busy.

[A version of this post originally appeared on the McBreen Media blog.](#)

About Craig McBreen

Craig is Principal of McBreen Media. A Seattle Branding and Design firm which helps small companies bring their purpose to life with brand strategy, award-winning graphic design, and web design services. If you want top-notch creative work with a personalized approach, look no further.