

The Naming Guide

7 Steps to a New Name.

Branding For The People.



Step 01

Decide what's important for your name!

Before embarking on the naming selection process, you must get familiar with what is important in a name. Above all else, it must be memorable! There are all sorts of components that can make a name memorable. Single words, such as Subway, Bass & Apple are most memorable, even though they have nothing to do with the products they sell.

**Ask yourself
these questions:**

Is it memorable?
Is it short &
succinct? Does it
help tell a story?

Does it sound local
or global? Which
should it sound
like?

Is the .com
available? If not
available, is it for
sale?

Can it be confused
with another
company in your
category?

Does it work
within languages
other than
English?

Is it easy to
pronounce?

Can you protect it
and trademark it?

Does it have
any negative
connotations or
associations?

Does it adhere to
your overall brand
strategy?

Can it serve as
an “umbrella” for
other brands or
products?

Step 02

Pick the types of names that will work for your audience!

Of the following 11 options, which style of name do you think will work for you and your audience? Pick a few, and then head to step three!

Real Words

Names like this are quite simply words from the dictionary. They are sometimes descriptive of the company, and sometimes simply chosen because they are distinctive.

Pros: Such names are usually succinct, and have associations from history already attached.

Cons: These names can be expensive domain names (in the Millions) if they are common, if they are uncommon, then they might be too uncommon or downright wacky.

Examples: Yahoo!, Yelp

Misspelled Words

If you are looking for a distinctive word as described above, but can't afford the domain or trademark? Misspell it!

Pros: This group is certainly memorable and has distinction built in.

Cons: You'll be driving traffic to someone else's company that owns the correct spelling of your word, inevitably. Although, this form of naming is so common these days, that people usually ask... "How do you spell it?"

Examples: flickr (flicker), Google (googol), Tumblr (tumbler), Consmr (consumer), Flud (flood), Etsy (etc.), Yext (next), Gyft(gift), Lyst (list), Fotopedia (photopedia), Scribd (scribed), Zynga (Zinga), Digg (dig), Google(googol), Xoom (zoom), Reddit (read it)





Foreign Words

If your company is foreign and looking to make inroads in America, this is an obvious choice, because you've probably got a foreign name already going for you! If you are looking to associate your company with a foreign culture, or a foreign take on a particular product, this type can also work toward your advantage.

Pros: Easily Trademarkable and protectable, with lots of .Com's available.

Cons: Often hard to pronounce and remember, these names are also often meaningless outside of the native speakers' language. If the name sounds distinctly Japanese, and you are selling a Japanese product or service, you are probably in the clear.

Examples: Hyundai, Toyota, Santander, Lufthansa

Compound Words

Take two entire words and mash them together, it's that simple! If you like each on their own, you might like their combined connotation.

Pros: Your imagination is your limitation. These names are trademarkable, and the URL's are endlessly available.

Cons: Sometimes compound words can get a little long or unwieldy on the tongue, but other than that, they don't have many drawbacks, which is why they are so popular.

Examples: BlueDot, Facebook, Wordpress, Coca-Cola, YouTube, Infusionsoft, Birchbox, SendGrid, Skillshare, Milewise, Timehop, Betaworks, Sailthru, Fitbit, CardMunch, GetAround, Geeklist, Foursquare, LaunchRock

Phrases

This group is much like the previous group, only it is comprised of less original entrants, and that is on purpose. Our agency's own name: BRANDING FOR THE PEOPLE falls into the margins of this category, as a blended phrase, combining Branding with the common phrase "For The People."

Pros: Phrases are usually well known, so they carry whatever cache society associates with them.

Cons: These names are LONG, and if they are long, they are harder to remember! You are best off using a phrase that currently exists within the public consciousness rather than making up your own, as that will make it even more difficult for your customers to wrap their heads around.

Examples: BRANDING FOR THE PEOPLE, Bed Bath & Beyond, The Container Store

Blended Words

As you read above, blending is an art for the smart ones among us, and it is a path that should be approached with caution. If your audience appreciates riddles, this is the naming convention for you. (Also known as portmanteau)

Pros: When done correctly, blended words are short, sweet and two the point. They can serve to tell a story in just a few syllables.

Cons: Blended word names are unwieldy, overcomplicated, impossible to remember and pronounce, and hard to spell. Each of these things on its own is a death blow for a company, when put together, the results are nothing less than catastrophic for your brand.

Examples: Microsoft (microcomputer + software), Zillow (zillions + pillow, with overlap of -ill-), Expedia (Escape + Encyclopedia + an X for good measure), Panasonic (Pan + Sonic), Comcast (Communications + Broadcast), Pinterest (Pin + Interest), Mixel (mix + pixel), Codecademy (code + academy), Rentenna (rent + antenna)

Tools: WerdMerge generates portmanteaus based on one root, provided it's at least 5 characters long. DaGraeve's Invent-a-Word also generates portmanteaus.





Tweaked Words

Many names are simply slight modifications of common words. Companies in the digital space tend to use the letters 'i' or 'e' to evoke interconnectedness and electronics. If a company is going for a younger audience, they might even consider 'x' to invoke the appreciation of generation x!

Pros: If people know the root word, your company can easily benefit from the definition of the word in concert with whatever you mean to combine it with.

Cons: If people don't immediately recognize the intended meaning of your tweaked word, you've lost a major branding opportunity!

Examples: ebay, iTunes, Intuit (abbreviation of Intuition), Zune (tune), xFinity (by Comcast, a combo of x & infinity)

Affixed Words

A subset of blended words, these handy combos serve to retain the meaning of the root word while adding a bit of action.

Pros: Keeping things short is a definite pro with regard to memorability.

Cons: These words can often read as a bit meaningless when they aren't executed properly, as the affixed portion of the word can diminish the definition of the word that they are affixed to.

Examples: Friendster, Napster, Mashable, Spotify

Made up Words, or Words With Obscure Origins

If you have a sense of whimsy in your brand, a made up word can hit the mark. If you don't have awe or wonder built into your branding, then tread lightly.

Pros: Often fast off of the tongue, and memorable.

Cons: There isn't usually any meaning associated with a made up word, so you are going to need to rely on the other aspect of your brand to carry the weight of your message.

Examples: Bebo, Garmin, Plaxo, Mattel, Tropicana

People's Names (Real & Fake)

Companies are often named for their creators, or made up mascots. If you have a big ego, an outsized personality, or are just plain famous, this is a great direction to capitalize on your qualities.

Pros: Short, easily protected/trademarked, and easy to use when capitalizing on a founder's renown.

Cons: If the name isn't known, you are going to have a lot of work to do to define it, and create a proper perception within the minds of your clients.

Examples: Jenny Craig, Mary Kay, Ford, Chanel, Disney



Initials & Acronyms

Is the name you founded your company with farr tooo longgg? Then take the first letters of each word, and build a brand around them!

Pros: Memorability. If your acronym rolls off of the tongue in a way that your words behind it do not, you are probably better off.

Cons: If you haven't created a big business with a bad name in need of an acronym, then odds are you aren't going to be able to build a brand around initials, they are, on their own, meaningless.

Examples: AOL (America On Line), IBM (International Business Machines), GEICO (Government Employees Insurance Company), AFLAC (American Family Life Assurance Company)

The IBM logo, consisting of the letters 'IBM' in a bold, sans-serif font with horizontal stripes through each letter.The Disney logo, featuring the word 'Disney' in a stylized, cursive script font.The Microsoft logo, consisting of a square divided into four smaller squares (the Windows logo) followed by the word 'Microsoft' in a sans-serif font.The Lufthansa logo, featuring a crane in flight inside a circle followed by the word 'Lufthansa' in a sans-serif font.The iTunes logo, featuring the Apple logo followed by the word 'iTunes' in a sans-serif font.The tumblr. logo, featuring the word 'tumblr.' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font.The Mattel logo, featuring the word 'MATTEL' in a bold, sans-serif font inside a circular shape with a serrated edge.The Napster logo, featuring a stylized face icon followed by the word 'napster' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.The Pinterest logo, featuring a circular icon with a stylized 'P' followed by the word 'Pinterest' in a sans-serif font.

Step 03

Decide on the root words that you would like in your name.

Names are comprised of words (99% of the time). So, it is important to put together a list of about 20 to 50 words that you could imagine having in your company's name. Use the following 5 pointers to help you on your way! We call this "making a word cloud," and the sky is truly the limit!

Develop Literal Concepts

Develop literal concepts. Be literal, describe core aspects of the business. Include the product category (travel, music, fashion) as well as the product function (discovery, sharing, tracking).

Examples: A family oriented business brings to mind words like ancestry (genealogy, lineage, roots), relatives (mother, parents), storytelling (narrative, news), home (nest, hut) and sharing (bond, tie).

Develop Figurative Concepts

Develop figurative concepts. Get past the obvious, extend your list of roots to names, objects, phrases, moments and feelings that are loosely related to the business, or orbit around it near-by. Be as experimental as you can be: focus on one detail, then extrapolate. Don't hold yourself back, go ahead and get goofy. Figurative ideas are more original than literal counterparts, and their domains are more widely available..

Examples: What sorts of words are more loosely associated with a family? fam, bunch, collection, kin. Which objects are commonly found around a family? photo frame, fireplace, family records Phrases typical associated with family: call me, i love you, goodnight Feelings that family elicits: happiness, joy, trust, safety Moments spent with family: dinner, living room, weekend

Look up Synonyms

You can easily multiply your output by adding a list of synonyms to the roots you already developed.

Examples: Family has many synonyms, including ancestors, blood, clan, descendants, folk, kin, lineage and tribe.

Tools: Thesaurus.Com helps you find synonyms, we use it all the time





Find Visual Inspiration

Pictures are worth a thousand words. To generate more names for your startups, search google images for your root word selections and browse until something strikes you. Pinterest is also a great tool for this.

Tools: Pinterest, Etsy product search, Google image search

Use Foreign Words

Foreign words often sound a lot like their english counterparts. Words from Spanish, Italian, French, Portuguese, German, Japanese and Hawaiian can all be very helpful.

Examples: Tree translates to arbol, albero, arbre and arvore. The startup Casahop uses the word 'casa' (Spanish/Italian/Portuguese for house) in a smart way.

Step 04

Get creative & namestorm!

Develop a list of 30 to 60 names, let your mind wander. Combine your root words from the previous step in different and interesting ways. If you get stumped, look at all of the previous examples of company names within step 2 , and see if there is a third type of name that you could be open to. Don't stop until you have 30 to 60 names! If you get really stumped, try any of the following ideas...

Add Prefixes & Suffixes

Add prefixes & suffixes (use the table on the next page for help). A common idea in namestorming is to add prefixes and suffixes to your root word, (like the done-to-death -ly). Pick a few that work for you and try them with your root word(s).

Examples: onSwipe, inDinero, Alltuition, Mycityway, Nestio, Goodsie, Spotify, Shopify, Posterous, bitly, Huntsy, Rootsy

Common Prefixes: my-, our-, the-, all-, in-, on-, un-
Common Suffixes: -ly, -sy, -er, -it, -ie, -io, -am, -ia, -ora, -ero, -ist, -ism, -ium, -ble, -ify, -ous, -ing

Resources: See the appendix on the last page of this guide!

Tools: MixNomer lets you make new words from prefixes, suffixes and roots. Wordoid, NameVine and Lean Domain Search make new words by adding their own prefixes and suffixes to your root word from your word cloud.

Add Numbers

Although numbers aren't high on the list of "must have's" in a name, they can make root words new again, and original to you.

Examples: 1000memories (a lot of memories), 10gen (rhymes), Lot18 (short), 37signals (37 radio telescope signals to find aliens)

Use Smart Domain Extensions

Com is almost always preferable. However, other domain extensions can still be memorable if used creatively. As a continuation of the word this appra.ch is often quite memorable and innovati.ve.

Examples: Art.sy, Visual.ly, Reclip.it, News.me, About.me, Last.fm, Shelby.tv, Chart.io, Trigger.i, Betali.st, Brit.co, Angel.co, del.icio.us

Write the Word Backwards

Write the word backwards. This is hard to pull off, but it might just work. Words spelled backwards are a last resort.

Examples: Xobni (inbox), Harpo (Oprah), Aneres (Serena)



Step 05

Narrow down your list.

Narrow down your list by checking .Com availability and Trademark availability. We love <http://godaddy.com> for domain availability (they also give great suggestions if the domain you want isn't available) and <http://tmsearch.uspto.gov> for trademark search tools.



A close-up photograph of a steering wheel. The steering wheel is black with a textured surface. In the center, there is a circular airbag cover with a silver Volkswagen logo. Below the logo, the word "AIRBAG" is embossed in capital letters. A person's hand is visible on the left side, gripping the steering wheel. The background is blurred, showing parts of the car's interior.

Step 06

Narrow down your list even further to 7 of your *most memorable* options.

Remember to take into consideration what an ideal client would love! Ferrari's ideal clients and Mini's ideal clients want different things, even though they are all buying transportation. If you are having a hard time deciding, start to play with the capitalization and spacing of your top name options. After all, PayPal has a very different look and feel than Paypal, so too does FedEx in comparison to Fedex.



Step 07

Last, and most importantly, evaluate the pros and cons.

We love to do this in spreadsheets just to keep everything organized. Refer to step one and rank each name against the criteria of what is important in a name! Pick the name with the most pro's and the least damaging con's. Now, you are ready to *make it rain* with a name!

PS. Don't forget that a name is only one component of a brand, you'll now need to add complementary and consistent architecture, fonts, sounds, colors, shapes, images, smells, textures and so on!



Appendix A: Suffixes & Appendages

- Able
- Acity
- Adox
- Aholic
- All
- Archy
- Ate
- Ation
- Bit
- Book
- Box
- Bunch
- Clan
- Cycle
- Dom
- Ectomy
- Ematics
- Ency
- Fam
- Ful
- Grid
- Hop
- Icide
- Ification
- Ing
- Ink
- Interest
- Ious
- Iphile
- Ish
- Istan
- Itopia
- Ize
- Joy
- List
- Love
- Mania
- Me
- Nest
- Night
- Ocity
- Ology
- Ometry
- Ophile
- Ory
- Rock
- Safe
- Scope
- Share
- Ship
- Square
- Ster
- Terest
- Topia
- Tribe
- Trust
- Ward
- Way
- Wise
- Wise
- Works

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brand to the next level?**

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