



MARKETING INSIGHTS

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Please contact
TECHNOLEDGE.

T +61 2 9909 0246
E info@technoledge.com.au
W www.technoledge.com.au

The Dos and Donts of Branding

Part 4 - ART versus PROCESS

1. The Theory of Collective Creativity

Branding or Naming agencies go through elaborate processes to come up with the goods. It starts with brainstorming sessions involving the management team, overseen by a moderator from outside the company, a strategic thinker who provides a context and a process that gives the best ideas every chance to emerge.

Suggestions from employees are often invited and this can be an eye-opening experience, as you may discover that not all of your employees have the same understanding of your company's unique attributes. In that sense, the branding process presents an opportunity to reinforce the company's core values and culture in every member of the team.

Management brainstorming sessions and employee feedback will generate a long list of suggestions. What follows is a second process of pairing down the long list down to a shortlist of promising names or taglines. Sometimes it can be as simple as changing a word or taking one away or swapping words around. Japanese tire maker Shojiro Ishibashi's surname translates to 'stone bridge', but changing it to Bridgestone made all the difference.

As we've seen in [Branding – A Minefield of Names](#), the more elaborate the process and the more participants it involves, the less likely it is to produce the goods. More often than not, the promise of collective creativity stimulated and harnessed by a strategic thinker is not fulfilled.

Why is this so?

The more egos participate in the process, the more likely the process will turn into a fierce battle with no agreement possible. The moderator has to earn his money here and restore harmony somehow, find a way out that's acceptable to everyone. Let's not confuse diplomacy with creativity though - like the treaties hammered out by diplomats, the result is almost always a wishy-washy compromise designed to please everybody.

More often than not, the result is an insipid name like Agilent, Avanade or Lucent. Insipid names have one outstanding quality: they offend no one, but that's not what we're looking for in a brand name or a tagline. We want impact, we want heads turning, we want people to take notice.

Here's where the creative process kicks in. It's not suited to group therapy, so this is where your marketer or branding consultant has to earn her money. It's hard to come up with a good name and strong tagline, but it's easy for most people to tell a good one as soon as they hear it. No careful explanation is needed, no long and involved stories about the processes that led to success are necessary.

2. Simple rules for Company Names

The ones that don't work are vague, bland, non-specific kinds of names. Made-up ones are more than suspect as we've seen, so are words bolted to favourites like Summit, Apex, Pinnacle, Peak or Quali-.

The best names are simple ones people can relate to, names that don't trip them up and make them scratch their heads. **Canon** is a great name derived from a colloquial term for camera. **Verbatim** is a terrific name for disks that people use for backing up data. **Nero** is a leading brand of CD/DVD burning software, named after Nero burning Rome. Risky, but it worked for them. Roxio's **Toast** is another great name.

Lotus has no connection with PC software and perhaps it's memorable for that reason, like **Apple**. Another name with lasting impact is **Adobe**, which also has nothing to do with PC software. Think outside the box is good advice when it comes to names.

Some names work simply because they're unusual or catchy: **amazon.com**, **Google**, **Yahoo**, **Oracle**. The rules aren't watertight here. Google has become a verb like Xerox and Hoover did years ago, a classic sign of a great name.

Ford's **Mustang** is a good example of a strong brand name while Nissan's **Tiida** is a shocker (why change an okay name like Pulsar for one that makes your customers wince?)

With the **Grandeur**, Hyundai followed in the footsteps of the Honda **Legend**, oblivious to that brand's decade-long failure. And Holden's computer has just cranked out yet another made-up name for the latest Korean-sourced model: **Epica**. Perhaps car makers should stick to model numbers. We still remember the Leyland P76, if not for the right reasons.

3. Where Process Matters

Process is crucial in the preparation and research needed to tease out the defining attributes of a company or a product. The first step is positioning your company's brand, that is to define what is uncommon about your company, your products, services, people and your core values. What sets your company apart from your competitors? What do you offer that they don't? What is your unique value proposition?

The same applies to products. Large companies have multiple brands with their own brand managers, but each brand has to be positioned just the same. As they say in Real Estate: Position is Everything. Logos, taglines and slogans are the house, the garden and the front gate on the block of land your company has staked out. Your house should fit in with your environment too. You might love Tudor style houses but they don't look good by the beach - your message to the market needs to be aimed at the right audience.

Positioning a brand correctly is essential. You can aim to be the best or the cheapest, the most aggressive company or the easiest to deal with in your street, but you must know which of these you are. If you don't, you must decide what you want to be and work hard to get there.

The company's managers have to be very clear on these fundamentals, and so have all its employees. This is where focus sessions pay off by clarifying and reinforcing what the company stands for, what makes it different and what its value proposition is.

Often you know what you are but you want to be more, or different or bigger or better. Your tagline can be a guiding light in that quest. *Good with Money, Good with People*. Every employee of that bank strives to fulfil that simple credo every day (or should do). It's written on the signs outside their branches (or should be), on the cars the loans officers drive, on the documents they hand to customers, and it's the first thing you see on the bank's website.

4. The Marketer's Role

Research into competitive brand names, taglines and slogans is essential. You don't want to end up with a name or a tagline that is too close to that of a competitor. On the positive side, this research can uncover useful gaps in the market and generate fresh ideas.

Once the company's or the product's unique attributes have been crystallized, it's time to update the key messages, images and themes on the website and in the marketing and sales material. Every aspect of presentation must be consistent with others and all of them have to work together to convey what is special about the company's brand.

Once a name and tagline are agreed on, it's essential to test reaction with people outside the company, who may have a different reaction to those on the inside. Some names have negative connotations that aren't immediately obvious, and translation into other markets or languages can produce cultural and religious affronts. John Steinbeck once said: words are strange things – they can take on odours like butter in the refrigerator.

A few years ago, Hyundai spent a lot of advertising dollars to change the way Australians pronounced the brand name – the initial pronunciation was apparently offensive to Koreans. Creating a different name for overseas markets would've made things a lot easier for the company. General Motors changed its Chevy Nova to 'Caribe' in Latin America after learning that 'no va' means 'no go' in Spanish.

Some brand names are registered trademarks and choosing one that's too close for comfort could lead to legal action. There are some catchy movie titles but they're protected by copyright. Book titles are not, strange as it seems. A final check with a trademark and intellectual property lawyer is often a good idea.

5. Do SMBs need special names and fancy taglines?

The answer is: more so than the biggest enterprise. A name change or great tagline would have little impact on Telstra's or Westpac's fortunes, unless they turned their business upside down as well. The die is cast for them.

SMBs with ambition for growth should get the basics in place as early as possible. That's when they're more likely to make a difference. And if you've chosen a poor name, the sooner you take a deep breath and change it, the better. Re-branding is far less costly early in a company's or product's life cycle.

When we look for a pool builder or a new kitchen, we tend to grab the Yellow Pages. The fine print is hard on the eyes so we focus on the picture ads. There are many of them, so we scan the pages hoping for one ad to grab our attention. They all say the same things: We build quality pools, or kitchens. Our prices are reasonable. We've won awards. A punchy name and tagline combo would really leap off the yellow pages.

6. Brand Names and the Internet

You may have a great name but find it's already taken. Don't try an obscure spelling so that you can register it – your potential customers may never find it and search engines may get confused. Try Cirrus – for some reason, clouds are popular choices for company names – and you'll find the most obscure spelling will drag up domain names on the Net.

It's best to accept that your favourite name isn't going to fly, and come up with a different name for the Internet. Sure it's nice to have matching names but your website should be clearly marked on all your communications, so it shouldn't be hard to find. You can get an instant check here <http://instantdomainsearch.com/>

Typing an address straight into your browser isn't a good way of ascertaining ownership since about 85% of all domain names currently registered are not in use. All the obvious ones have been snavelled up by smart people who will happily sell them to the highest bidder.

Here's where more creative thinking is needed. Let's say you sell virtual office software and find that all names with virtual office or online office are taken (.com, .org, .net). There's always .au or .va or .tv (Vanuatu and Tuvalu if you're game).

Or you can think of an original. Officeanywhereyougo.com is open to all variations (.com, .net, .org). The only problem is that it looks too long. It's not if it's an easy, short sentence that describes what you do – it could even be your tagline doing double duty.

7. Summary

Branding doesn't have to be a long and expensive process. Good graphic artists can create original logos for relatively little money (see [Logo Logic](#)). A good brand name can come from one of your kids at the breakfast table – that was the case with a Melbourne company called **Baddog**, which sells gaming PCs. One of the owner's kids came up with that one, and it's just the kind of name gamers are fond of.

In Part 1—[A Minefield of Names](#), we examine brand names from successes and disasters.

In Part 2—[Logo Logic](#), we examine why some logos stand out and others don't.

In Part 3—[Taglines and Fault Lines](#), we look at why some are brilliant and others flop.