

## Ten Most Common Naming Mistakes

By Julie Cottineau

*Most companies wait too long to begin the naming process.* Finding an available trademark today can be very difficult. If you want a global name the task can be even more challenging. Most companies underestimate the necessary time needed and then they are faced with a mad scramble when the product is about to launch. This often results in higher legal fees and sometimes settling for a second choice name.

*Naming is often treated as an afterthought when it is arguably one of the most important elements of the brand proposition.* No serious product manager would approach a new product launch without a systematic and clearly defined critical path for product development, concept development, package design, advertising, PR and distribution. However, many take a very haphazard approach to naming. This reflects a failure to recognize that the name is actually the first act of public branding. It establishes an aspirational tone for the product or service.

*Many companies hold onto the brand names that they suspect may no longer be relevant or may actually be limiting because they are afraid to alienate their current user base even if it is relatively small and stagnant.* This is often a very shortsighted approach. At Interbrand we help many of our clients to go through the discovery process researching the fit and stretch of their current brand name against their longer-term objectives. If they do decide to change the name we offer advice on migration strategies so the transition can be smooth.

*Potential Names are often abandoned when corresponding URL Sites are found to be unavailable.* What at first appears unattainable is very often available for purchase. At Interbrand, we help many of our clients efficiently negotiate for domain names by offering third party intermediaries to make initial inquiries and often even helping to close the deal.

*Executives fall into the subjectivity trap and fail to get key target audience feedback as part of their decision-making process.* Naming can be very subjective. Think about choosing a first name for your kids. Have you ever turned down a suggestion of a perfectly good name because it reminded you of someone you personally knew? Perhaps that bully from second grade? At Interbrand, we urge our clients to get impartial feedback from the people who are ultimately going to determine the success of the product or service...the target market consumers. Our proprietary Nometrics™ research methodology gets consumer input on both a pre and post concept basis on such important measures as associations, attribute ratings, fit to overall concept, and pronunciation.

*Naming is more than just about creativity, it's about strategy.* Many companies don't spend enough time upfront defining and agreeing to the strategic role of the name. In order to have consensus when selecting a final name, you must also have consensus on strategic naming objectives. What are the most important attributes/benefits to communicate? How the name helps in differentiating the offering from competition? What are the emotions I want to tap into? At Interbrand, we offer a very thorough approach to naming strategy creation. We offer exercises to help identify the most salient benefits, taking into account multiple target audiences and the competitive set.

*Focusing on product attributes in names can be constraining in the long term because they are easily de-positioned and can be limiting as the brand promise stretches and evolves. At Interbrand, we believe that the strongest brands transcend the physical attributes of a product or service to form an emotional connection with the consumer. We subscribe to a philosophy and a practice of Destination Branding™. Destination Branding looks at the higher order benefits of an offering and also considers the envisioned brand stretch. This enables us to create names that can help take brands further, setting an aspirational target and remaining flexible into the future. These Destination Brand Names also have the advantage of being more readily available from a trademark perspective since they go beyond the common category descriptors into fresher territory. Also since Destination Brand Names strive to define and own the higher order category benefits they help de-position the competition.*

*The global implications of names are often overlooked. Even if the product or service is not intended for global distribution today, the advances and global commerce facilitated by the Internet may mean that this will be the case in the near future. A product sold on the Internet in New Jersey can pop up in the search of a potential consumer in Japan. At Interbrand, we offer a complete system for thorough global linguistic evaluation through our Lang-guage™ technique. Using impartial linguists, we can search potential names in up to 40 languages and uncover any issues with negative associations and pronunciation.*

*Not every product or service needs to be named. Quite a few companies overlook the benefits of one strong umbrella brand name and descriptive generics for the variety of products and services. At Interbrand, we help our clients organize their multitude of sub-offerings through brand architecture and corresponding nomenclature systems. This can lead to increased efficiency and a clearer idea of the offerings from a customer perspective. It can also help insure that efforts are focused on continuing to build value for the Masterbrand. In addition to organizing the products we also provide naming guidelines, decision-making trees, and internal naming seminars.*

*Naming can appear deceptively easy. But in fact, it is a very challenging discipline that is most effectively performed by a specialist. Many of our clients come to us having tried unsuccessfully to name the product in-house. Often after a lot of time, effort and money has been wasted and with no agreed to or available names to show for it. At Interbrand naming is our game. We actually invented the practice 25 years ago and have created more names than any other company. Our qualified team of naming consultants is so sure of our ability to find you a strategically appropriate and ownable trademark, that we actually *guarantee* it.*

*Many clients fail to assemble the proper project team. At Interbrand, we emphasize the importance of establishing a well-represented client project team from the outset, made up of experienced marketing and legal personnel, as well as the key executive decision makers.*

*Clients that choose to forego using a naming specialist like Interbrand to create names often fail to realize the importance of subsequently testing those names they create internally. Terrible naming blunders have been committed by clients simply because they failed to perform the proper research on their own internally created names.*

*Because of our breadth of services and experiences, Interbrand develops names in light of larger branding considerations. It's not just a name, it's a brand, and too many clients fail to appreciate the inherent link between the two. Because Interbrand is an integrated naming, corporate identity, design and valuation firm, our naming consultants approach all projects from an elevated vantage point.*

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