The right name is timeless, is tireless, is easy to say and remember, stands for something, and facilitates brand extensions. Its sound has rhythm. It looks great in the text of an email and in the logo. A well-chosen name is an essential brand asset, as well as a 24/7 workhorse. A name is transmitted day in and day out, in conversations, emails, voice mails, websites, on the product, on business cards, and in presentations.

The wrong name for a company, product, or service can hinder marketing efforts, through miscommunication or because people cannot pronounce it or remember it. It can subject a company to unnecessary legal risks or alienate a market segment. Finding the right name that is legally available is a gargantuan challenge. Naming requires a creative, disciplined, strategic approach.

In today’s competitive world, a name must function as a total messenger.

Naseem Javed
Naming for Power

Just by naming a process, a level of service, or a new service feature, you are creating a valuable asset that can add to the worth of your business.

Jim Bitetto
Partner
Keusey Tutanjian & Bitetto, PC

Companies miss a huge opportunity when they fail to communicate the meaning of a new name. Audiences will better remember a name if they understand its rationale.

Lori Kapner
Principal
Kapner Consulting

Naming myths
Naming a company is easy, like naming a baby.

Naming is a rigorous and exhaustive process. Frequently hundreds of names are reviewed prior to finding one that is legally available and works.

I will know it when I hear it.
People often indicate that they will be able to make a decision after hearing a name once. In fact, good names are strategies and need to be examined, tested, sold, and proven.

We will just do the search ourselves.
Intellectual property lawyers need to conduct extensive searches to ensure that there are no conflicting names and to make recorded similar names. It is too large a risk—names need to last over time.

We cannot afford to test the name.
Various thoughtful techniques must be utilized to analyze the effectiveness of a name to ensure that its connotations are positive in the markets served.
Qualities of an effective name

Meaningful
It communicates something about the essence of the brand. It supports the image that the company wants to convey.

Distinctive
It is unique, as well as easy to remember, pronounce, and spell. It is differentiated from the competition.

Future-Oriented
It positions the company for growth, change, and success. It has sustainability and preserves possibilities.

Modular
It enables a company to build brand extensions with ease.

Protectable
It can be owned and trademarked. A domain is available.

Positive
It has positive connotations in the markets served. It has no strong negative connotations.

Visual
It lends itself well to graphic presentation in a logo, in text, and in brand architecture.

The right name has the potential to become a self-propelling publicity campaign, motivating word of mouth, reputation, recommendations, and press coverage.
Lissa Reidel
Folio One

Zoom, the PBS show, has a name with “long legs.”
Zoom brand extensions:
Zoomers
Zoomerang
ZoomNooz
Zoomzones
Zoomphenom
CafeZoom
ZoomNoodle

Types of names

Founder
Many companies are named after founders: Ben & Jerry’s, Martha Stewart, Ralph Lauren, Mrs. Fields. It might be easier to protect. It satisfies an ego. The downside is that it is inextricably tied to a real human being.

Descriptive
These names convey the nature of the business, such as Toys "R" Us, Find Great People, or E-TRADE. The benefit of a descriptive name is that it clearly communicates the intent of the company. The potential disadvantage is that as a company grows and diversifies, the name may become limiting. Some descriptive names are difficult to protect since they are so generic.

Fabricated
A made-up name, like Kodak, Xerox, or TiVo, is distinctive and might be easier to copyright. However, a company must invest a significant amount of capital into educating its market as to the nature of the business, service, or product. Häagen-Dazs is a fabricated foreign name that has been extremely effective in the consumer market.

Metaphor
Things, places, people, animals, processes, mythological names, or foreign words are used in this type of name to allude to a quality of a company. Names like Nike and Patagonia are interesting to visualize and often can tell a good story.

Acronym
These names are difficult to remember and difficult to copyright. IBM and GE became well known only after the companies established themselves with the full spelling of their names. There are so many acronyms that new ones are increasingly more difficult to learn and require a substantial investment in advertising. Other examples: USAA, AARP, DKNY, and CNN.

Magic spell
Some names alter a word’s spelling in order to create a distinctive, protectable name, like Cingular and Netflix.

Combinations of the above
Some of the best names combine name types. Some good examples are Cingular Wireless, Citibank, and Hope’s Cookies. Customers and investors like names that they can understand.