

What's in a name?

 By [Anton Ressel](#)

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Have you ever stopped to consider how much impact the name of your organisation has on its success?

While a strong and memorable name alone cannot ensure a ticket to greatness, it certainly can help catch attention and interest. Similarly, a weak, poorly defined or unpronounceable name can be a turn-off for potential customers - would you invest your life savings with Shyster & Co, for example?

Poor company names are not just the ones that sound bad, they are the ones that confuse potential customers, box in a company, and limit its growth and opportunities.

In all seriousness, just as you (hopefully) gave a lot of thought into naming your kids if you have any, it really pays to spend some time thinking about the name of your business. After all, if things go well it could be around for many years to come...

Memorable - for the right reasons

A primary goal is to have a name that is memorable, but for the right reasons. Your brand name should be on target with your company philosophy, your product or service and most importantly, your target market (who are you trying to communicate with?). Typically, sustainable brand names are short, easy to remember and have positive connotations.

It does not matter too much if your name is descriptive (eg The Bread Shop) or more abstract (Rain), what is important is that you give some thought to how your current and potential customers will respond to it. You need to take into account the age, interests, buying habits and social demographics of your target market, and develop a name that speaks to them, in their language - if you plan to sell high-end financial products into the upper end of the market for example, a name like 'Cash Cowboys' will probably not cut the mustard...

Make it resonate

A good place to start when choosing a name for your business, is to think really hard about what is important to you in terms of the ethos and philosophy of the company. Is your business all about saving the environment, or celebrating new technologies, or promoting local talent? Maybe it is about making lots of money so as to create a better future for yourself and those you employ, and that is fine too. When we start with what is important to us, it helps guide us to a place where the name we choose feels not just appropriate, but sincere as well.

Always remember that a good business name allows room for growth, and usually will not limit you to one or another specific product, medium or style, unless you are totally confident that you will never branch out into something else in the future.

Avoid at all costs...

There are certain no-go areas when it comes to selecting a company name. In general, here is a list of things to avoid:

- Very long names eg The Best Little Media Placement and Monitoring Business in all Of Saskatchewan
- Names in a language that no one except a native-tongue speaker can pronounce eg Mochochonono Wed Design, Amancwedoizingile Project (this is very common in the non-profit sector)
- Names that make people feel guilty eg The Miserable Orphan's Benefit Trust
- Names that are common or overused eg Ubuntu Crafts
- Lofty or overblown names eg Global Trading, Wall Street College

- Names that limit growth eg Lisa's Cookies (what if she starts making other foods?)
- [One should also avoid names the acronyms for which might not sound too good... Capital Regional Artisan Placement (Pty) Ltd, and suchlike - Editor]

The above examples tend to push people away, rather than bringing them closer. If someone is unsure about how to pronounce your company name, they will subconsciously avoid saying it, and this is not good for business. Things like clicks in Xhosa or specific foreign language pronunciations (La Petit Fermé, for example) are also to be avoided. In general, if you have to pronounce it or explain it all the time, it is not an appropriate company name.

It is also quite common in some sectors to name the business after the maker or creative brains behind the organisation, such as Heath Nash or Calvin Klein. This is perfectly fine, but again one must take into account factors like length and pronunciation. If your name is Munyeradzai Tareofontsheleswa or Johannes Jacobus Petrus Stefanus Kobus du Toit, it may be better to look for an alternative option...

Remember that your company name defines your business. It needs to be robust, uplifting, memorable, and able to stand the test of time. Start from a place of personal resonance, consider your target market and invest some time in getting it right, and you will come up with a name that will grow with you, and even help feed that growth.

ABOUT ANTON RESSEL

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