

recognology®

A Good Name is to be Desired Above All Else

Solomon's School of Marketing

It's probably safe to say that, for each one of us, our names are difficult to separate from our personal character. If your name is Bob and you tend to be outgoing and popular, you might expect other Bob's to be more or less the same. Until you meet a Bob that embodies just the opposite qualities, the idea that Bob could be such a bore would never enter your mind.

Names convey character and personal significance to everyone who has one and everyone who knows one. That's pretty much everybody. Names are important.

Relationships form the palette of opinions from which we associate names to personalities. So, your characterization of Bob probably differs from mine unless our relationships with Bob are identical and we are referring to the same Bob. The value we attach to our names, and the names of those we know, emanates from our assessment and synthesis of many underlying traits. Characteristics like integrity, intelligence, compassion, and love all factor in the perceptions we associate with the names we know.

Names also convey an intrinsic individuality regardless of relationships. For example, some names suggest formality: Elizabeth, Thomas, Jennifer and Louis. Other names convey a more casual character: Liz, Tom, Jenny and Lou.

Naturally, not all Bobs are outgoing and popular any more than Thomas's are always formal. Where personal names are concerned, a name can embody many groups of characteristics. The adage, "what's in a name?" is nearly impossible to answer when we apply the question to personalities.

Companies and products live and die, often because of their names. A company name or a brand must convey concise and desirable characteristics to flourish. Marketers spend fortunes eking out just the right name for their corporate personae and their offerings. A distinctive name adds value to a product or service. Not surprisingly, the US Trademark Office receives nearly a thousand trademark applications each day. For good reason, the identity business is big business.

What Makes an Extraordinary Identity?

Several qualities crystallize to create an exceptional trade name – one with persuasive meaning: Positioning, consumer values, constructional linguistics and phonetics all play a roll. Outstanding names also must differentiate and be memorable. Ideally, like personal names, a trade name has intrinsic meaning. For example, the name Acura hints at precision; VoiceStream alludes to communication and Lucent conveys clarity. Each of these names has associative qualities that, despite their synthetic nature, are familiar and attribute character to their respective brands.

Is an exceptional name a brand name just because it embodies these qualities? Not at all.

Off brands, even those with extraordinary names, must assume two added characteristics vital to their achievement of brand status: Ingredients that, even the most memorable name cannot buy. Time and trust.

Brands do not become brands just because their makers say they are brands. Neither do they become brands because of great advertising or outstanding brand man-

agement. Brands become brands for one reason, and one reason only: They deliver on the promise they extend to consumers.

Choose a brand – any one that you like. What gives your personally preferred brand brand-status is that, each time you buy the brand you are satisfied with your purchase. The reason you are satisfied is simple: You are not surprised or disappointed with your choice, even after years-or-more of repeated purchases. You receive from your branded purchase just what you expect and chances are good, when needed or wanted again, you'll buy the brand again.

Admittedly, brands with exceptional names do better than brands without and few categories of consumption have just one brand. Most categories have at least two or three top brands and split the remainder of their markets with many smaller off-brands.

In American SUV's, Chevy has the Suburban; Ford has the Expedition. The Durango and a dozen other wanna-bes squabble over the table scraps. In overnight delivery, Fedex and UPS slug it out while DHL and the regional freight companies divide the leftovers. In the personal computer industry, Dell and Hewlett-Packard are the players. What's left is split by hundreds of generics. Yet, none of these brands would be brands at all if great names were all they offered. A great sounding name is nothing in the consumer's mind without a supporting truth or reputation.

Trust: The Power Behind Brand Names

So, what constitutes a brand? Consumer confidence. It is the impetus behind every brand. Brands offer consumers something that off-brands do not. Brands offer built-in assurances; an intrinsic warranty that says to the consumer, you can count on me.

Harry Beckworth, author of *Selling the Invisible* says it best: A brand is even more important than a warranty. No warranty does enough, because no warranty compensates the warranty holder for the lost time, the frustration and the inconvenience of suffering the problem and making the claim. Harry's point is simple: Brands guarantee that the consumer will be satisfied by largely mitigating the need to right a wrong.

How then, do marketing, advertising and brand management fit into the branding equation? Frankly they do little to change consumer opinions if a brand continues to deliver its promise and competitive conditions remain static. Suggesting that these disciplines are responsible for a brand's success implies that consumers have nothing to say in the matter. Marketing, advertising and brand management are not how great brands get to be great brands, despite the ad industry's advertising to the contrary.

While marketing, advertising and brand management do play an important role in maintaining a brand's presence in the mind, remember, it's the mind that decides what satisfies and what does not. No marketing, advertising or brand management will save a product or service that lacks integrity or fails to satisfy. The ad agencies and brand managers at Enron and WorldCom will quickly attest to this fact.

Does this mean that marketing disciplines are unnecessary? Hardly. Markets, if they do stabilize, do not remain stable for long. Markets are dynamic. As consumers develop and as changes in markets occur, brands must respond aggressively to retain their share or take advantage of a competitor's weakness. The mind share that belongs to consumers is always up for grabs. Vigilant brand managers must respond forcefully. Consequently, marketing disciplines merely safeguard a brand by rein-

forcing and enhancing the values that consumers already consider as part of their personal realities.

Better Does Not Brand

Suppose your company offers what consumers might call an off-brand. How do you help your off-brand develop brand status? The choice of an exceptional name is important in building recognition, but recognition alone is not the equivalent of brand status. Neither do off-brands become brands merely by being better than their branded counterparts. By definition, brand-users usually do not experiment. More important, better is not absolute in the mind of consumers. Consumers buy brands because they view off-brands with indifference or with suspicion about improvements they perceive as incidental. Your off-brand becomes a brand only when it occupies a previously untilled patch of consumer mind share – better is not enough.

Toyota learned this lesson the hard way when it introduced the entirely new and redesigned Supra in 1993. The \$42,000 Supra was a killer sports car from every vantage point. It outperformed everything from the venerable Corvette to Nissan's then well-established 300ZX. Despite its sleek design and dazzling performance specifications, the Supra hardly registered a blip in its share of the sports car market. Why?

To understand the reason behind the Supra's dismal sales performance – in its best year its sales were roughly a fifth of that of the Corvette – one must look at the Supra's heritage. In 1979, the Supra was introduced as an upgraded variation of the Celica – Toyota's popular, although economy-oriented 4-cylinder lift-back. The Supra offered a larger engine, longer wheelbase and was slightly wider than its Celica predecessor. For early consumers, the Supra was little more than a Celica with leather seats and alloy wheels.

In the years leading up to the Supra's 1993 revamp and its introduction as a performance car, Toyota offered many improvements: Some small, some significant. Toyota delivered bigger 6-cylinder engines, a six-speed manual transmission and turbocharging. Even so, the Supra never was considered a serious contender among sports car enthusiasts, the audience that the 1993-model needed to reach.

By the time the 1993 introduction rolled around, the Supra had settled into the American consumers' mind share but not as a sports car. The Supra was a well-built, upscale two-door fastback with adequate performance. For Toyota, this was the perception the Supra owned when the redesigned model hit showroom floors.

Supra's problem would have been obvious to most first year marketing students but apparently, it was not to Toyota. Consumers could not reconcile the name Supra with killer sports car. A new name likely would have solved Toyota's problem had it been part of the car's introduction. Despite its better-than-the-rest performance, the Supra was discontinued in 1999 due to poor sales.

Exceptional Names are Visualizations

In contrast, consider Tom D's start-up consulting firm, a company that offers productivity solutions to banks. As you can imagine, consultancies catering to the financial industry are plentiful. What are the chances a new player can impress the marketplace with a name like Tom D Banking Consultants?

Tom's offering, however, is truly unique. In a word or two, what Tom brings to the banking industry, besides the obligatory thirty years of banking experience, is cultural enthusiasm. Not just his though: Corporate Enthusiasm is among the key deliverables accruable to

his clients. When Tom is finished with a bank's management team, bridges are built, new tools are in place, and productivity shoots through the roof. Bankers enjoy their vocation like never before.

What do you call a consulting firm that delivers enthusiasm? Enthusiology, what else? Tom D is the CEO of Enthusiology. He is the Chief Enthusiology Officer. From the banker's view, Tom is not a consultant. He is an Enthusiologist.

Is Enthusiology a brand name? Not yet, the company still is young – time and trust will tell. But, compare the retention value and intrinsic meaning of the name, Enthusiology with other consultancies. Think about the names of other consulting firms, especially those ending with the word "consultants." You'll notice something. In the mind, Enthusiology stands alone. Tom's clients agree.

The name Enthusiology is a first where consultancies are concerned. It occupies a unique corner of the banker's mind share. If Tom's firm continues to deliver the goods as promised and develops the intrinsic warranty accrued to names that deliver as expected, clients indeed will elevate the name Enthusiology to brand status.

Obviously, being first to mind is important in the branding process. But, being first to mind with credibility is vital. Second place is nowhere. As Navy Seals like to say, second place is just the first loser. In the minds of consumers, there is little memory available for also-rans.

Hit 'em From the Side, Not From the Front

An off-brand is unwise to compete toe-to-toe with a brand. Knocking off a brand from an established mental pier is extremely difficult – the mind tends to hold fast to its personal perceptions of truth. Unless a brand's credi-

bility is compromised, such as Firestone's was with its tread separation fiasco, brands are stout and resilient targets. The mind will not surrender them without a fight.

A better approach is the flank attack. Brands usually are known for one distinct characteristic. They deliver one thing well. So, the things your industry's brands do not deliver are workable position choices for off-brands, yours included.

Depending on your age, you may believe that America Online always has been a brand name and the online community's leader. This is not the case. As a start-up, AOL was not the first to offer subscriber-based information and communication services. When it entered the market of personal computer users in 1985, CompuServe was the big player and owned the fledgling industry's mind share. At AOL's entry point, CompuServe had been a computer timesharing service all the way back to 1969. It touted a list of innovations that today are taken for granted as staples of the online community.

For example, in 1979, CompuServe was the first online service to introduce email. CompuServe again led the market in 1980 when it pioneered online, real-time chat. Then, in 1982, it formed its Network Services Division, an offering that provided wide-area network capabilities to corporate America, much as the Internet offers today.

For a time, AOL slugged it out with CompuServe, toe-to-toe. Each provider promoted its respective, proprietary network as the standardized choice for information exchange. Then, the Internet appeared in the public mindset. It threatened the previously exclusive battlefield that together, CompuServe and AOL dominated.

At first, the two were reluctant to open their closed net-

works to the chaos the Internet represented. But, as the Internet's popularity grew, both companies acquiesced. Unlike CompuServe, AOL aggressively endorsed the Internet, stamping the name America Online all over it as the easiest way to access cyberspace. Of great significance, AOL, branded the Internet with a simple, but profoundly unique proposition that inarguably is a part of today's American mindset: You've got mail. Oh, and by the way – Mr. and Mrs. America – to get it, you need to subscribe to AOL.

Today, America Online (now part of Time Warner) boasts more than 50-million members in 30 countries and owns CompuServe. Many Americans have never seen the Internet through any other lens than that of their AOL browser. Netscape, inventor of the online browser and once the industry king, is an AOL subsidiary. As for Microsoft? MSN's 9-million members hold a distant second place, proving that even the power of the world's most valuable brand cannot compete with AOL's firmly entrenched cultural position. You may have mail at MSN, but AOL has America's mind.

Did the name America Online factor significantly in AOL's success? That Microsoft's monogram – MSN – is unable to dethrone the online champ should answer this question. Think about “EM ESS ENN” for a moment. Which name is easier for you to remember? Does the name MSN have comparable intrinsic meaning to that of America Online?

What Makes a Name Memorable?

How does your offering's name factor in your company's branding success? Are your products remembered and preferred over those offered by your competitors? To improve your position, look at your corporate monikers and determine if they include the following attributes. If

they don't embody these characteristics, name changes may be in order. Here are some suggestions:

FIRST: Consider your audience. What do they want from a company like yours? You can be sure it's much more than the products or services you sell. Positioning plays a key role in the success of a product or company name. Thus, be sure to help your prospects see your company the way you want to be perceived. An exceptional name will personify the best of these values. Depending on your company's current personality, you may need to reconcile consumer perceptions with your choice of desirable names.

SECOND: Be realistic about capturing your strengths in your name and stop short of hype. Names that overstate the truth about what you offer and who you are will be dismissed out of hand, SuperGlue's success notwithstanding. Instead, look around at your competition. If you see a genre of identities that include generic names combined with the name of your business category, think of this as an opportunity. Jack's PC's and Johnson Consultants will find it difficult to compete for mind share with companies pushing identities like Perfect Circuits and Risk Management Group. Build real meaning into the name your company selects.

THIRD: Sometimes an abstract name is advantageous. Consider an identity constructed from basic linguistic elements. You might use small and recognizable semantic units that can be combined into a synthetic, proprietary name. Hybrids like Acuvue, Macbook and Lexus communicate important values merely with mention of their names yet the individual parts of their names are nothing extraordinary.

FINALLY: Remember that, whatever choice of name you

choose, it must read well and speak well. A phonetic name usually is best because it meets these criteria. Not all words do. Perhaps you recall the 1994 movie *The Shawshank Redemption*. The movie tested well in pre-release screenings and was nominated for seven Academy Awards including Best Picture. In the end, however, it failed at the box office and didn't win an Oscar. *Shawshank* reads just fine, but say the word out-loud. Phonetically speaking, the title is sloppy and sounds objectionable. The movie's two-word title requires five clumsy syllables. Compare this with *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*: Five words, but only six syllables. Not only is the title more descriptive, it's efficient. As for *The Shawshank Redemption*, the same film with a tighter, phonetic title likely would have fared better.

So, what is in your company's name? Except for your offering's integrity, an exceptional name is the most important attribute by which your company or product is recognized and positioned. A skillfully chosen name combined with integrity provides a reliable pathway to influential perceptions and branding success. It is an axiom that dates thousands of years.

Solomon was on the right track when he wrote: A good name is more desirable than great riches (Proverbs 22:1).

Although it is true that Solomon's comments focused on humanity rather than on marketing when he penned this wisdom, his words should not go without notice among marketers today. Had marketing been Solomon's vocation rather than reigning as Israel's King, his contemporary advice might be amended to say: While a good name is more desirable than great riches, great riches often accompany a good name.

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The logo for Recognology features the word "recognology" in a lowercase, serif font. The "recogn" part is in black, and the "ology" part is in a vibrant red. A registered trademark symbol (®) is positioned at the top right of the "y".