

Brand Primer

Tips to Take the Pain Out of Naming

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Naming is a tricky proposition.

In-house teams often face two stumbling blocks: They can't devote adequate time and resources to the naming process, and they are too close to the brand to approach naming with the right balance of objectivity and creativity. Along with focused attention and creative bandwidth, good name consultants bring a unique combination of language skills, cultural awareness, business acumen and general knowledge to the naming process. Whether you select MiresBall or another resource, our biggest recommendation is to avoid the urge to tackle the naming process without the support of an outside expert.

Even with a name consultant to guide you through the process, you'll likely experience a degree of anxiety around choosing a name. Before you get started, remember: The name you select is important, but it is by no means the sole determinant of your company or product's success. **Your goal is to come up with an appropriate, ownable name—not to hit on a name with magical appeal. A good name establishes a solid foundation, but powerful brands evolve over time through smart, consistent marketing.** Sure, there are occasional naming blunders, but when you're working with an experienced name consultant, the odds of a misfire are low. So get ready for a fun, creative process, and use these tips to maximize your results:

Start early

Allow enough time to investigate a broad range of options for your name. If the exploration process is rushed, you run the risk of missing an important naming opportunity. For a single company or brand name, allot approximately six weeks for name development and internal approval, longer if you're developing a name architecture for multiple products or brands. In addition, budget time for your legal team to research conflicts and green light naming candidates. You should consult your trademark counsel for a clear timeline, but two to three weeks per finalized name is a reasonable benchmark.

Include key decision-makers

Anyone who has a voice in the final name selection, particularly senior management, should participate directly in the process at key decision-points. Without understanding the strategic thinking behind each name, it is difficult to evaluate candidates fairly, opening up the possibility that good names will be discarded and an already time-intensive process will be derailed. To ensure quick, inclusive decision-making, MiresBall recommends that you invite a cross-functional team to participate in the process—for example, representatives from marketing, research & development, sales and operations.

Establish clear naming criteria

If you're not careful, naming can become a dangerously subjective process. Establish naming criteria at the outset of the effort, and use them as an evaluation tool at each step in the process. Avoid the urge to latch on to a name that sounds good but doesn't align with your business or brand strategy. Before beginning a name exploration, MiresBall helps our clients establish clear naming criteria, considering important factors like the brand's market position, personality, target audience, key competitors and long-range business goals.

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Brainstorm inspirations, not names

To avoid undo frustration, focus on generating a list of ideas and images that will inspire the creative process, not a list of potential names. (Most names you'll come up with will be taken—that's why you've partnered with a naming consultant.) Brainstorm all the words that relate to the ideas you want to convey, and be as exhaustive as possible. Does a product remind you of a particular song, movie, painting, book or person? What was the inspiration for its development and its design? Does it remind you of existing products in other verticals? Allow for a free-flowing exchange of ideas, and don't edit your final list.

Set aside personal associations

Although it's difficult to do, try to evaluate name candidates with an open mind. Remember, the final name will take on a new, unique meaning within the context of your marketing; it will be communicated across a wide range of touch-points and through a wide range of media. **Without an approved process in place, people have a tendency to fill in the gap by connecting potential names to words and ideas that they already know and understand. Steer clear of this trap, and work as a team to judge name candidates on how well they perform against your established criteria.**

Select back-up names

To ensure you end up with an ownable name, choose two or three equally viable alternatives. Do not make the mistake of fixating on your first-choice, only to suffer disappointment when you hit a legal stumbling block. Until your trademark counsel performs due diligence, it's impossible to know if a name will stand up to trademark scrutiny. Finally, do not worry if you need to switch up a name. Before a name is publicly associated with your company, it functions as an internal and fairly interchangeable label.