

A Good Name Is Better Than Riches

Tips to consider when selecting a new brand name.

As human beings, we take great pride in naming things. From flora, fauna, and fountains to cities, canyons, and mountains, from planets, people, and pets, to cars, coliseums and computers, seems as if there is a name for practically everything. Yet each day, brand managers find themselves in a common predicament –what to call that new gizmo, service, or company.

With such a penchant for naming things, it would seem as if finding the right name to match our next product or service would come easily. For the lucky few it does, but more often than not the process requires careful planning and strategy to truly translate the goals of a business plan into a crisp articulation.

“A good name is better than riches.” So said Spanish novelist, poet, and author of Don Quixote, Miguel de Cervantes. But to get a good name takes a careful balancing act between art and science. Selecting a good name on a global scale adds the need for legal and linguistic competencies as well.

In 2002 Dow Corning Corporation went through an extensive process to develop a global brand. In our case this new brand was initially called “Brand X” until a proper marketing name could be determined. Our new brand was launched in 50 countries and has set the stage for our company’s excellent financial performance. Having recently worked on this new global brand introduction, I’m often asked about tips I’ve learned relative to the naming process.

For those brand managers contemplating creating a new brand name, here are some “Dos and Don’ts” to bear in mind.

DO:

1. Consider the long-term strategy for the name you’re developing. Consider if you want something highly descriptive to play along a narrow front (<I>*Silastic*</I> for silicone rubber), or a more generic or coined name to allow for brand expansion across categories (<I>*Virgin*</I>)
2. Consider how the new brand name will fit into your firm’s brand architecture and brand hierarchy systems. Will it be a master brand on its own? A sub brand? What type of relationship will it have to other existing brands in your portfolio?
3. Consider the real fixed and potential costs involved in creating, registering and defending a new name. These costs include legal screenings to ensure the name is available, legal registrations to protect the name in various classes, and once created and built into a valuable asset, costs associated with defending your brand against all comers, by class and by country.

4. Keep an open mind to all possible names. Generate a lot of options, hundreds if possible.
5. Set up a defined criteria as to how names will be judged in the process and stick to it. Some criteria I've used recently include:
 - a. Ability to articulate the brand's attributes
 - b. Ability to translate well into other languages
 - c. Ability to pronounce in other languages
 - d. Ability to own the name outright and define the word
 - e. Ability to be protected: domain, trademark, etc
6. Take the time to conduct native speaker linguistic checks.
 - a. Look for similar meanings that are counter to your goals.
 - b. Look for similar sounding names that run counter to your goals or worse could be embarrassing to your business. The famous example here is when Chevrolet named its car NOVA. This was fine in English speaking countries, but in Spanish speaking countries the name translated into "Does not go". Many companies have learned this lesson the hard way.
 - c. Look for slang words that are similar that could negatively impact you.
 - d. Look for any problems in pronouncing your brand name in other languages and balance against your objectives.
 - e. Consider any potential conflict with surnames in various countries in which you plan to operate. A recent example here is a Coca-Cola product to be called Urge in Sweden. Coke has been involved in a naming rights dispute due to families with the same surname who do not wish to be associated with the company's citrus drink. (Called Surge in other countries).
7. Eliminate confusion by deleting names from consideration that have negative double meanings or are unpronounceable in key languages, or contradict your brand's desired position.
8. Seek out and use one of the many specialized naming consultancies to help navigate the "land mines" and pitfalls associated with the naming process. If your product is to be of reasonable size and has the potential to be marketed in multiple countries this is particularly helpful.
9. Communicate how the name fits into the overall strategy for the business. Discuss internally how the name fits the business model and how customers will come to know and experience the name.
10. Allocate the proper amount of time and resources to adequately communicate your new brand name to your intended target audiences to build equity in your new investment.

DON'T:

1. Fall in love with any specific name early in the process. Names are constantly eliminated in the process of legal screenings, domain searches, linguistic tests, etc. If you fall in love with a name too soon, you may have a closed mind to viable and available alternatives.
2. Have too many people involved in the name selection process. Having a few empowered people with a solid understanding of the brand goals, desired branding attributes, marketing objectives, and vision for the business allows the process to move quickly and avoids selecting a name by committee. This is not to say avoid testing, but final selection of the name should be done by a smaller number of people.
3. Have the conversation again. Once the name has been selected do not communicate what the second choice or other options on the list were. This is not productive; causes debate on a decision that's already been taken, and can detract from the successful internal adoption for the selected name.
4. Short cut the process, sooner or later shortcuts will come back to bite you and could be potentially expensive and embarrassing to your company.
5. Overlook the availability of Domain URLs for the name you've chosen. If the name you've chosen is not available, it is not the end of the world. Many domain names are simply squatted on by others in an attempt to make a quick buck. Often these squatted domain names can be purchased for a reasonable fee.
6. Disclose your interest in a URL that has already been taken, but not developed. If you are part of a sizable company, and the domain name you're after is taken, do not let the current domain owner know there may be "deep pockets" looking to buy their name. Have a third party negotiate on your behalf and keep your identity to yourself until after you own the name.
7. Rule out an alternate domain name if the one you're after is already taken. If another company already has possession of a domain name in which you're interested, consider creating an alternate version. For example if you're creating a new web brand called "Channel" and Channel.com is taken you could create an alternate such as channelweb.com or other variation as appropriate.
8. Rush the process. Naming done well and on a multi-country or global scale takes time. Allow time to conduct the proper checks and balances ahead of launch, as mistakes caught after introductions are far more costly to correct.

The Story Behind our Naming Process:

It is often helpful to see how some of the key “Do’s and Don’ts” mentioned above have been applied to an actual situation. Dow Corning provides a good example.

Dow Corning, formed in 1943 as a joint venture between Dow Chemical and Corning Glass Works, now Corning Incorporated, provides performance-enhancing solutions to serve the diverse needs of more than 25,000 customers worldwide. The company is a global leader in silicon-based technology and innovation, offering more than 7,000 products and services. More than half of Dow Corning’s \$2.6 billion in annual sales are outside the United States.

Having firmly secured the premium, value-added supplier position under the Dow Corning brand, we sought to find innovative ways to develop the mature products, high quality with low service requirements segment of our business. It was this end of the business that required a new name and identity prior to launch. We started with a project code name, Brand X, and looked to develop a fully commercial name prior to launch of our new business model. The initial scope of our launch was 50 countries.

We established a defined criterion as to how names would be judged in the process and stuck to it. Some criteria we used included:

- Does the new name reflect our chosen brand’s attributes?
- Could the name be translated into other languages or at least be neutral?
- Could the name be pronounced in a wide variety of languages?
- Would we be able to protect the new name?

While not mandatory, we also considered whether we would be able to own the name outright by perhaps coining a new term.

Following feedback from the first wave of name development, we drilled deeper into the different directions that seemed promising. Names with energy, and names that helped tell the new and exciting story about our brand, rose to the top.

As part of the creative development, we explored metaphors, symbols, and fresh ways of expressing 'speed' and 'directness', two attributes that helped define our brand. These reflected both our brand values and the business model we were creating. A word that was discussed during this process was 'diameter.' A 'diameter' goes directly through a circle, bisecting it, just as Dow Corning was bisecting its own business and looking to approach the market differently. A diameter is also a straight line and a word used in scientific vocabulary. Working closely within the scientific and technical communities a scientific sounding name had added value to us. In addition, we wanted to capture the notion of 'speed.'

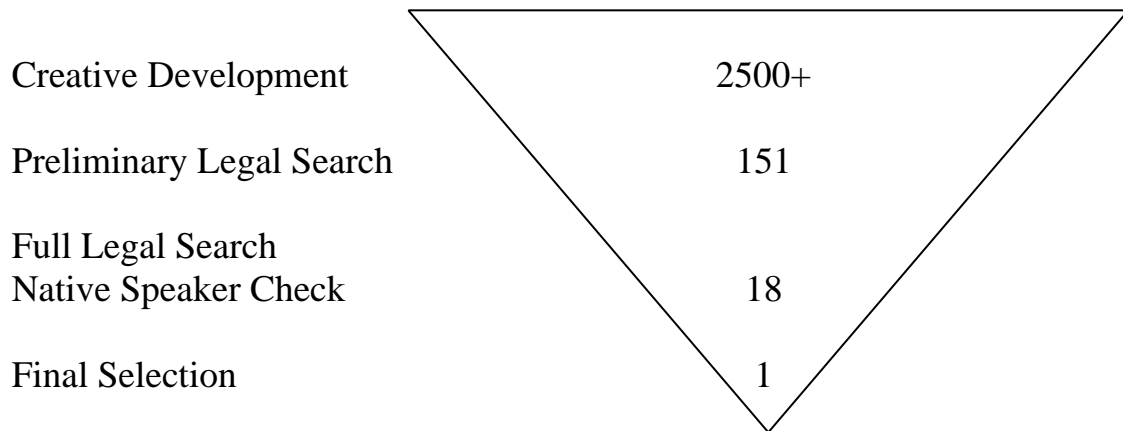
Linguistically, as a sound, the letter ‘d’ which begins ‘diameter’ is relatively slow and heavy. We changed the sound by changing the first letter to an ‘x’, which is pronounced ‘z’, as in xylophone. This gave us an entirely new word –Xiameter.

- The most direct path across a circle is a diameter
- Association with 'diameter' connotes 'direct, fast, straight/straightforward'
- Meter is used as a unit of measure
- XIAMETER* is a new word that will come to mean "the measure of value"
- Concept is unique to Dow Corning
- Associates with language of science, reinforces precision
- X adds speed, energy, technology, and trailblazing associations
- Highly distinctive and memorable compared to competitive set
- Ownable

Legal Screenings:

Before getting to the word Xiameter, we developed over 2,500 names for our naming program. More than 150 were put into preliminary legal screening using trademark databases. Of the 150 names, 41 cleared the preliminary search. Internet domain name clearance was also done at this time. Of the 41 names that cleared preliminary trademark screening, 12 domains were available. With the leading candidates now in front of our team, we selected a group of 18 finalists to go into full global legal clearance. Those without clear domains would either be sought for purchase or would be modified by adding a descriptor to the name, such as Xiameteronline.com

Naming Process



Native Speaker Check:

As many examples of poor global name choices (ex: Chevrolet NOVA) struck deep into minds of our team, significant time and resources were invested to secure a name without negative connotations either as a direct translation, as a sound alike name, or as a slang expression in any of more than a dozen prioritized languages. Therefore, at the time that the names were in full legal search, an exhaustive native speaker check across key markets was conducted.

It is important with a coined word to make sure that audiences in key global markets can pronounce it and can do so without unintended, inappropriate associations with words in other languages. We conducted an exhaustive native speaker check on leading candidate names. There were no inappropriate associations for *XIAMETER* uncovered during our process.

XIAMETER was a breakthrough name, as evidenced by rapid trademark clearance and lack of any "hits" in an Internet search on the name. In fact, before we introduced the term there were zero hits on google.com's search engine. At this writing there were well over 2000 returns to this search term.

Global marketing can bring enormous profits to an organization. It can also bring to bear many pitfalls that can, at a minimum, embarrass a company, and at its worst can bring it down. Being such a public element of global marketing, the process of naming a new product, service, or solution set needs to be approached with the utmost care and professionalism.

Thoreau said, "With a knowledge of the name comes a more distinct recognition and knowledge of the thing." Having a distinct recognition of some key do's and don't prior to engaging in the naming process helps today's brand manager use the knowledge well to improve chances for success and avoid the pitfalls that can belie the process.

RANDALL S. ROZIN is Global Manager of Branding and Marketing Communications with Dow Corning Corporation, a leading performance enhancing materials company pioneering the use of silicones, silicon-based materials and service solutions. He serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Brand Management* as well as on the Business-to-Business Marketing Communications and Global Marketing Committees of the US Association of National Advertisers. Randall holds a degree in journalism and a master's degree in international business and marketing management.

Randall S. Rozin

Global Manager, Branding and Marketing Communications,
Dow Corning Corporation,
11900 Greenwood Drive,
Oklahoma City OK 73162, USA
Tel: (405) 773 0361;
e-mail: Randall.Rozin@dowcorning.com