

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The drug-naming process is more complex and risky than it might appear to be. **Natalia Dorfman** asks naming experts how it's done and finds out how some familiar pharmaceutical brand names came about

Coming up with the right name for a pharmaceutical brand can be a complex and troublesome process, as Mollie Young, founding principal at Nametag International, can testify. The company was testing the name of a product called Soarus, and in most languages the name worked very well. "But, before distributing in Israel," says Young, "we did some linguistics screening and found that there was a Yiddish term, *tsuris*, meaning 'trouble.'" A healthcare product named trouble? The brand was renamed Soarian.

Naming brands is much more difficult than naming a dog or a child. Mark Skoultchi, a Principal at Catchword Healthcare Branding, quips. "In the abstract I think most people talk about, 'Hey, you name things for a living,' sounds ridiculous, but like anything there is always a process involved, and it is more complicated than you think." And the linguistic and cultural issues encountered in cross-cultural marketing, as illustrated by the Soarian example, tell only part of the story.

Rebecca Robins, global marketing director at Interbrand Wood Healthcare, says that while naming any corporate brand is difficult, "the pharma industry is different from other industries due to its unique dynamics and because it is regulated unlike any other."

Skoultchi agrees. "I have been doing this work for a while now," he says, "and I have to say that there is no more difficult industry or client to service than the pharmaceutical industry." These difficulties stem from multiple causes. Drug names need to be available from legal, regulatory and linguistic perspectives, meaning they must be open for

OWNING A CATEGORY NAME

Botox, Allergan's muscle spasm-reducing agent, has become one of the most recognizable pharmaceutical brands in the world. Its name, derived simply from the drug's therapeutic class (botulinum toxins), represents a classic "blocking" strategy for "owning" a category

"Botulinum"



"Toxins"



According to Michael Tharp at Lippincott Mercer, Sepracor's insomnia treatment Lunesta takes the metaphor of nighttime being the moon and "gives a nod" to rest. "Combine the two and it works quite well," he says

trademark, acceptable to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA), logical across multiple cultures and languages, and yet still creative and memorable enough to be impactful as a brand. Therefore, while naming might seem easy at first—Skoutchi estimates that about 30%–40% of Catchword's clients come to them after trying to do the work themselves—it is a lengthy and difficult process that lends itself to expert counsel.

“People have difficulty coming up with creative ideas,” he says, “and they certainly have trouble coming up with stuff that is available and acceptable to the FDA/EMA.”

Once a pharmaceutical company decides to go to the naming experts, the process is set in motion. Michael Tharp, a partner at the branding company Lippincott Mercer, likes meeting with researchers, marketing teams and trademark specialists to get a complete feel for the drug and the company's goals for its future. The initial discussion tends to focus on what makes this drug different, what gives it personality, “what we can hang your naming hat on,” Tharp says.

Robins also likes these early stages, “because you start to see people get very excited about something that until that point had been a faceless entity.” Excitement can build from various directions.

Function and aspiration

Lippincott Mercer focuses on functional benefits (“What does it do for me as a patient?”) and aspirational benefits (“What does it do for me as a human being?”). Tharp uses Avastin, an oncology drug by Genentech, as an example of a functional name. In a nutshell, the drug works by grasping onto ligands, little proteins that encourage vasculature and bring blood to the tumor, thus stopping blood flow and halting tumor growth. The name reflects that process, “you can see it has vasculature in there, so *a* being *non*, or ‘stopping vasculature.’” For all names, Tharp believes in creating a metaphor that connects to the audience while also conveying the message that “it works, but it is safe to take.”

Once determining what message they wish the name to convey, the naming team will do initial tests of potential names, which includes running interviews and building consensus, before developing brand strategy. Once some possibilities are selected, they will conduct preliminary legal and FDA screening. The names that make it through this screening will then be presented to the client, who will choose some favorites. Full legal and regulatory searches are then done, checking trademarks, performing global voice linguistic analyses and conducting name safety testing with doctors and pharmacists. The pharmaceutical client then chooses a name from these survivors, which is then sent to the FDA and EMA for final testing and clearance. Though the process could have already taken up to a year, the hardest part might still lie ahead.

According to Robins, the current rejection rate for the FDA/EMA

is around 35%–40%. The reasons for rejection vary, but are often due to the potential for misprescribing. Like most, Skoutchi has personal experience of being that one out of three. “At the end of the process, you may still have to tweak things just slightly in order to get a name that's available,” he muses. “It is sort of amazing [that you have to do that] even after a year of screening.” The regulatory agencies are strict in that a drug name can't be similarly spelled or pronounced to existing brands, can't make a claim (for example, Cureall or Superla) and shouldn't have negative connotations, though that might be due less to FDA regulations and more to common sense—prefixes and stems such as *mal*, *brev*, *vel* or *mor* are widely avoided.

To maximize chances of creating a name that will pass muster, many naming companies have well-developed techniques. Catchword has a proprietary model for naming pharmaceuticals called brand engineering, which Skoutchi describes as a “sort of an alternating creative and legal/regulatory screening process.” Before ever presenting ideas to the client, Catchword will perform some “due diligence,” looking at the names from a regulatory standpoint, doing cursory reviews, looking in various databases—“Just trying to get a sense of what's going to fly and what's not,” says Skoutchi.

Robins believes the key factors in building and maintaining a brand are credibility, differentiation and sustainability. “A brand needs to be relevant in speaking to its key stakeholders,” she says. “In increasingly crowded therapy areas it needs to stand out clearly from the crowd; it needs to be sustainable across the life cycle, from pre-launch communications to post-patent.”



Genentech's oncology drug Avastin is a good example of a functional name. The drug attacks proteins that encourage vasculature, helping stem tumor growth. The name reflects this anti-vasculature process

gives a nod to rest ... you combine the two and it works quite well.” Nametag International developed the name for the allergy drug Clarinex/Aerius. Clarinex was created to keep the prior Claritin's market share in the US, but Aerius was designed as a global brand. In the name, Young says, “you get the feeling of open and free, and you hear the concept of air. Even though it is not a real word, it is an impression created by that.” Other examples from Nametag include the diphtheria tetanus vaccine drugs Decavac and Tenivac, which encode the reminder of getting vaccinated every 10 years. Young believes this strategy “was very effective” because the company was able to “build a whole campaign around that reminder.”

Robins says that Fuzeon, Roche's HIV fusion inhibitor, leverages

Namenda[®]

Forest Laboratories' Alzheimer's medication is the first in a class of NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartate) receptor antagonists. The name encodes "NMDA" and prevents any future brands from using the class name

these blocking strategies, taking advantage of what Robins calls "the white space," are another common technique. When Interbrand developed the name Namenda for Forest Laboratories' Alzheimer's medication, it encoded "NMDA" (N-methyl-D-aspartate) into the name. Namenda, a NMDA receptor antagonist, was the first in the new class, and therefore subsequent names trying to use NMDA could potentially encounter regulatory issues. Since Interbrand was first, says Robins, "nobody else had that leverage."

Naming for longevity

Interbrand tries to reinforce with its clients the fact that "at the end of the day you face the reality of a finite patent life, but brands do have the potential to last forever." Companies are starting branding earlier, and "looking at the name no longer just as a 'getting a trademark,' but as 'developing a name that will be relevant, credible and differentiated for launch and beyond,'" says Robins. Names that are allied well with long-term branding strategy are hypertension meds Cozaar and Hyzaar. Robins points to the fact that "the encoding of the 'AA'—angiotension antagonist—in the names has been correlated through the brand graphic," which demonstrates an "integrated approach to brand building." Another example is Enbrel, originally for rheumatoid arthritis, but with potential for various indications, psoriasis being one. For Interbrand, says Robins, the challenge was "to develop something that was going to be highly relevant, appealing and credible for the primary launch indication, but at the same time would sustain the anticipated subsequent launch indications. So Enbrel speaks to a broader message of end-benefits, of 'enabling relief,' and thus was relevant for both the launch indication in RA and in other indications to come."

Skoultschi agrees with the increased importance of brand longevity and the need to look beyond the trademark. "Five years ago people were probably 75% concerned with finding a name that was available and acceptable to the FDA and EMEA and 25% concerned with finding something that was actually interesting," he says. "People are recognizing that there has to be a better balance between being available, acceptable to the regulatory bodies and also interesting as a brand."

Tharp seconds that and also points to the increasing threat of generics. "You want to start out with a very strong brand," he says, "because once it goes to generic, if there is no brand loyalty there, then people

the concept of fusion inhibition/a fusion inhibitor. "Encoding that in the prefix is a great mnemonic for the prescribing audience, but also a key to differentiation, and providing a blocking approach, which makes it very difficult for others to follow."

Since competition for market share is fierce, with new brand names continuously being created—about 1,000 drug names a month are filed for trademark at the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)—

don't care and they'll just take the generic. If they feel the brand is trusted and works, then they are going to keep requesting it." Additionally, Tharp has noticed that companies are starting branding earlier than ever by naming their therapeutic franchises—like Schering-Plough's dermatological franchise Intendis—and some are even starting to brand the clinical trials themselves. Tharp says that companies believe this strategy will be "valuable to generate buzz, generate interest and differentiate themselves from other compounds."

The shift to friendlier names

Other changes in the world of drug naming relate to increasing consumer influence. Young, who started Nametag in 1987, has definitely noticed this, stating that, "names are becoming more approachable, less scientific sounding." Although the advent of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising in 1997 might be considered the turning point, where consumer input really started to factor in, Robins believes that it started earlier. "Even before then, we were dealing with a much more enfranchised end user," she says. "More immediate and widespread access to information, as fueled by the Internet explosion, resulted in easier access to information that had previously been, for the most part, the exclusive domain of the prescriber. Suddenly, people were taking more of an interest in their health and the drugs they were taking."

The 1980s, Robins believes, saw the rise of a different type of name, in the sense of starting to move away from those linked very closely to the indication, functionality and science of the drug. She speaks to the "comfort factor" prevalent at the time and still existing today, as well as

VIAGRA[®]

Some brands are so famous they appear in the Oxford English Dictionary ...

Viagra: noun, trademark, a synthetic compound used to enhance male potency.

Origin—apparently a blend of virility and Niagara

the difficulty in moving away from the safety of sounding like everyone else, when "what you want actually is to dare to be different, because that is what is going to help signal your brand's difference." Robins points to Prozac as an "iconic example of the kind of watershed in naming" that occurred during the 1980s, when people began taking the domain of drug brands as their own. "Prozac," says Robins, "is often seen as a landmark in naming, as an emblem of how drug

names started to come out of the confines of the prescribing world and enter into the public domain—and become part of a public vocabulary."

Now all drug names to some extent are in the public property, and definitely in the public domain. Consumers see brands on television and in magazines and go into the doctor's office knowing what they want. Prozac, Viagra and Botox are all listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, effectively cemented into the English language. Yet would Prozac by any other name still be Prozac? While a particular brand name won't guarantee you a blockbuster or ruin sales, getting the best name possible can only help the drug's chances at success. After all, who wouldn't want their brand name to be able to stand up among the icons and be listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*? n