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GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING BRAND NAMES

You know the 10 Qualities of Great Brand Names and you've reviewed your naming brief, but choosing a great brand name from a list of candidates is still tough. We've got you!

1. Don't rush it

A thoughtful naming process usually takes at least 4–6 weeks, not including time for legal (trademark) vetting and possible research. Build in ample time.

2. Play the field

Fall in like with a lot of names, not in love with one. If your sector is competitive, trademark screening may knock out most of them. Pre-screen 20 or so and do full review on 3-5.

3. Don't decide by committee

Your goal is not a name that no one objects to, but a name that engagingly expresses your brand. Structure your decision-making so that only those with veto power get to play—and make sure they're involved early in the process.

4. Don't expect your name to tell the whole story

Web copy, packaging, logo, advertising, and every other audience touchpoint give context and help tell your brand's story. Don't expect your name to say it all. Names that try are usually awkward or dull. Besides, a story that begins and ends with your name isn't likely to hook customers. Leave them wanting to know more.

5. Don't get (too) hung up on .com availability

A memorable name that needs to be modified with a descriptor for domain purposes is often a better marketing choice than a less distinctive name that's available as an exact .com domain.

6. Trust your audience's intelligence

Don't be overly literal or reject a name because of an unimportant association—even if it's negative—as long as the name's other meanings work hard for you. Your audience will figure it out, and your marcom will give context. Whirlpools are dangerous, but no one makes that connection with the appliance brand.

7. Forget about “virgin” names

Don't get mired in hunting for a name that's never been used before. You can usually adopt a name that's similar to one used in an unrelated space. Think Ford *Explorer* and Internet *Explorer*, Dove soap and Dove chocolate.

8. Get past your personal associations

It doesn't matter if a name candidate reminds you of your high school ex or an 80s cult movie no one else remembers. These are idiosyncratic, personal associations that few others share. Look beyond them and stay open.

9. Embrace the unusual

Don't shy away from ideas that may seem a little strange at first. It's natural to be more comfortable with ideas you've seen before. But if you've seen them before, so has your audience. Would *SuperKicks* have gotten the same traction as *Nike*?

10. Avoid perfectionism

It's okay to want a name that's short, easy to pronounce, original, cool-sounding, meaningful, and available as a .com, but no name will check every box. Prioritize your wish list, and be prepared to choose a name that meets only your top criteria. Imagine the initial objections for *Häagen-Dazs*. (“How do I say it?”) Or *Wii*. (What's it mean?) Every name has possible downsides, and none seems perfect at the outset.