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Letter from Simon Dixon, CEO

So does “a rose by any other name smell just as sweet”? For Romeo Montague and Juliet Capulet, despite their best intentions, the wrong names did lead to tragedy. And in the world of branding there are many cases that lean toward some names being sweeter than others.

There are a few rules around naming although they have all been broken by some successful companies. Avoiding long names, generic names or acronyms are three simple rules but of course the folks at International Business Machines (IBM) broke all three of them and enjoyed more than a little success.

Rather than hard and fast rules it can be better to ask questions of the name you have or the name you’re considering.

Does your name speak to the product or direction of your company?

While so many retailers have fared poorly over the last decade, Target has gone from strength to strength. They have magnificent marketing on all fronts, but it started with a great name.

Have you taken Brand Equity into account?

A very current and not yet confirmed example of this is “Prius” which Toyota is considering stretching from one car to cover a whole family. Also, back in 1985, Consolidated Foods decided to rename the company after one of their best known brands “Sara Lee” – a move which has paid big dividends in recognition and sales.

At the other end of the scale is Nissan. Prior to 1981 Nissans sold in the US were called “Datsun”. They were extremely popular and from ‘75–’79 Nissan was within 18% of sales of Toyota and sold almost 50% more new cars than Honda. In 1981 the corporate parent of Datsun decided to change the name of cars sold in the US to “Nissan” and unleashed a tsunami of advertising to support it. Some would say the company never recovered. Customers were very confused. By the end of the decade Toyota had increased its lead over “Nissan” to almost 50% and Honda had gone from 50% below to 50% ahead! The change was driven by a desire for global brand alignment. (US and Europe used Datsun; Asia used Nissan). But each of these markets is insular – who in the US cares what the same car in Japan is called? Sure, it’s hindsight but we would have recommended against the change.

It is of course important these days to be thinking of how your on-line presence will be heralded and how your name will read as a URL.

The therapist at www.therapistfinder.com (the “what” finder?) perhaps did not think about other ways to conjugate the web address. And the graphic designers at www.speedofart.com unless they work in swimming briefs, got an unintended boost.

Sometimes a certain poetry evolves. The law firm of Morrison & Foerster’s website is www.MoFo.com. And if you want to find out who is the agent for Paris Hilton go to www.whorepresents.com.

Some companies with similar web travails had to suffer through the time, effort and embarrassment of a web address change after much mirth at their expense. And such memories can linger in search engines, blogs and the wayback machine. So ruminate before you register...

Here at Idea Engineering we’re involved in several naming projects right now. They’re very exciting, because it is the moment, along with the graphical identity, that the product or company begins to shape its personality. We put a lot of work into it. Principals are interviewed, potential and/or actual customers are talked with – we like to get the perspective of all stakeholders in the future success. Then *a lot* of thinking is done. And it really is that important, because your name, logo and colour palette are the first things people will know about you, and they *will* start forming an opinion of who you are and what you represent.

So one could throw all consensus and advice aside and name one’s airline after one’s dog (actually happened) (airline went bust). Or name one’s child Diva Thin Muffin (Frank Zappa’s unfortunate decision). But please reconsider.

For every “Target” there is a “Phartronics Engineering”; for every GoToMyPC there is an Ebone Broadband; for every “Tide” there is a Gianus Technologies.

When it comes to naming your company or product, we suggest taking the time and doing the work to get it right.