NameStormers

The Method and Process of Creating Business Names

NameStormers.

Table of Contents

"This Naming Thing Is a Lot Harder Than We Thought"

Why Great Companies Fail at Finding Great Names

At the outset, naming a business or product seems like a cinch. You gather your most creative thinkers to play with words, throw out a few puns, and see what clicks. If you prefer a more democratic route, you may hold an employee naming contest instead. Or perhaps you would rather outsource the task by turning it over to an ad agency or an online generator.

The problem? These scenarios are practically guaranteed to send you straight back to square one.

How *Not* to Create a Name

Before we share our secret sauce, let's cover the most common naming mistakes and why they waste time and resources.

✖ *DIY Strategies*

Internal brainstorming sessions and company contests initially seem like a convenient and economical way to scratch naming off the to-do list. But a lack of outside perspective and complicated company dynamics can throw a wrench in this plan. Here's why:

Employees are too close to the company or product.

Your employees arrive at the naming process armed with inside knowledge. They hold an intimate understanding of your company's culture, purpose, values, and offerings.

When your target encounters the name, they are interacting with what it represents for the first time. No matter how imaginative your employees are, they will inevitably struggle to step out of their informed perspectives and think like a customer.

Sure, pleasing your internal audience is great. But that's just a bonus, not your primary objective.

It can be hard for employees to suggest names without fear of judgment.

Brainstorming successful business names depends on sharing ideas that are good and bad. Sometimes the only way to get to the good names is to go through the bad ones. Yet when you ask your employees to let go of their inhibitions in front of their superiors and coworkers, it can make them feel uncomfortable and vulnerable. They'll be tempted to stay buttoned up, offering only "safe" ideas that will prevent fear of embarrassment — and safe ideas aren't good ideas.

A contest could negatively impact employee morale.

When a whole company gets its creative juices flowing, magic is bound to happen. Multiple heads are better than one, right? The only issue is that there can't be multiple winners. There can be only one, with a few honorable mentions. Something that was meant to be inclusive ends up feeling exclusive, which isn't great for morale.

---

the gist:
These DIY, internal approaches often result in unimaginative, narrowly focused names that only appeal to one audience: your employees. The process of producing name candidates can also negatively impact company politics.

Ad agencies are great at generating a handful of creative, thoughtful names, but they often don't have the bandwidth to devote to a thorough naming process from start to finish.

✖ *Ad Agencies*

Creating attention-grabbing, unique ideas is what ad agencies do. You are more likely to end up with a rich, envelope-pushing set of business names by approaching an ad agency than by brainstorming in-house. But there are notable downsides to working with an ad agency:

Most agencies don't have the resources or inclination to generate and screen hundreds of names.

The busy folks at ad agencies have their plates full with creative marketing projects, from pitching new clients to executing full-scale ad campaigns across a variety of mediums. With so much in the queue, they don't always have the bandwidth to rally their resources behind a naming project. They may turn over exciting name candidates, but are not always able to thoroughly vet options for trademark or linguistic issues. Their internal legal offices can get backlogged, and in some cases, they may simply perform a basic trademark check on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office website.

They may bill by the hour, or only create a handful of names for an initial fee.

There's no shortcut to naming. To get to the perfect name, you have to go through countless bad ones. However, when it comes to ad agencies, the price is proportionate to the number of names you request. The initial fee may only yield a half dozen names. If none of them are right for your company or product, what's next? You end up going over budget to get the plethora of possibilities that you should have received in the first round or two.

✖ *Name Generators*

If name generators worked, they would be the most convenient and cost-effective way to name your company or product. Unfortunately, they don't. How do we know? We helped pioneer the concept of name generators in 1986! What we've discovered over our 30-plus years of being business name makers is that generators are simply no match for human ingenuity. Here's why:

Name generators don't understand context and nuances of language.

You could assemble a team of naming amateurs who profess to lack a single creative bone in their bodies — and their suggestions would probably still be more inventive than what a name generator could provide. That's because a generator can't play around, tease out hidden meanings based on context, recognize entendres, or invent new words beyond simply mashing existing ones together. Its lexicon is limited by its lack of imagination.

There's no "story" behind the name.

A generator only takes into account a few basic facts about your business or product. It can't absorb your unique value proposition or the history of your company. This is also true of buying a list of premade business names tailored to your industry. Names that could work fine for most of the businesses in your field are too generic to be good.

When NameStormers was tasked with creating a name for low-carb Frito-Lay products, we wanted something that hinted at an exciting transition from regular to low-carb without hyperbolically touting the advantages. A name generator would have suggested trite and literal names names like LessCarbs, CarbDown, or CarbAway. But we came up with EDGE, which tells a story of transition and change and delivering an advantage.

You may have to hunt through thousands of terrible names just to find a few usable options.

Reviewing the numerous names that generators provide is like shopping at a yard sale. You have to sort through loads of junk before you find the treasures. And if you find what you suspect might be a treasure, you'll want to still want to make sure it still functions and is actually worth your money.

Even the outlier names that seem like decent options might not be right for your company or product. The bar should be perfection, not the ability to "make it work."

the gist:
Name generator suggestions are flat and obvious, and they don't communicate the most fascinating aspects of your narrative as a company.
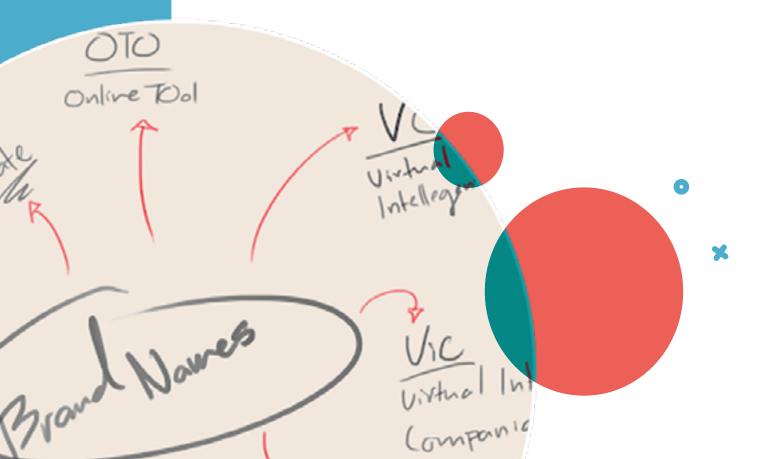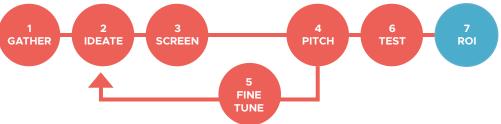
Naming Best Practices

A Good Name is Only
Seven Steps Away

So how do you sidestep these naming pitfalls? You need a process that is thorough, iterative, and conducive to creativity. Not only do you need to gather information and brainstorm ideas, you also need to vet those ideas for their memorability and screen them for availability — and you need to be willing to head back to the drawing board as many times as it takes.

Our process is unique in that it neither begins nor ends with brainstorming names. Our creatives revel in electrifying brainstorm sessions and then pass the baton to our pencil-pushing analysts and researchers.

Our Seven Steps to Success

```
1          2          3                    4          6          7
GATHER    IDEATE    SCREEN               PITCH      TEST       ROI

                              5
                            FINE
                            TUNE
```

● Step 1: Gather

Above all, our process is client-centric and is bookended by collaborative consultation. Our first meeting with you allows us to do the following:

Establish a target audience. We begin by building out a profile of your prospective customers, what you offer them, what qualities will allow them to distinguish you from your competition, and how you plan to reach them.

Determine the name's objective. A name with a clearly defined, narrow purpose communicates so much more than a name that tries to do too much and is therefore overly descriptive and literal. The best names capture the essence of your company while leaving something to the imagination — they're intriguing without sacrificing relevance.

Discover what naming styles you like and dislike. Your target should be at the top of your mind, but it's important for the name to generate some internal enthusiasm, too. What name candidates have you already written off? Why didn't they work for you?

Customize a proposal. We take pride in being transparent. Once we have all the information we need, we spell out the steps necessary to create the best solution so you feel informed and confident moving forward.

the gist:
During step one, we gather information, like your target audience, objectives and what you like and don't like in a name. Then we compile it all into a comprehensive proposal.

● Step 2: Ideate

Openness is the key to a riveting brainstorming session. This is how we allow everyone's inner wordsmith to flourish:

Create a "safe space" for creativity. Institute an imagination-friendly environment by withholding criticism. There should be no such thing as a bad idea. No one should fear getting egg on their face.

Encourage "unsafe" ideas. Ten silly ideas are better than one hundred safe ideas. Safe ideas are dead-end roads, while off-the-wall suggestions, even unusable ones, can blaze a trail to brilliance.

● Step 3: Screening

When we screen our name ideas, there are usually casualties — which only proves why this step is so important. Most naming agencies don't have an extensive preliminary screening process, but we believe you deserve to receive only potentially usable and available names.

Unlike the ideation phase, the screening phase is tedious and time consuming. It requires poring over reams of data and reports. But these areas are where our detail-oriented rule followers truly shine:

Trademark screening. Trademark screening. Other naming agencies might perform a quick search on the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office website. This search tool is very basic and only produces exact-match or a few near-match results. It doesn't show you all of the names that are spelled differently but sound similar, which means your name could be at risk of meeting the "likelihood of confusion" standard of trademark infringement.

Fortunately, we use the same sophisticated, robust tools that trademark attorneys use to better distinguish safe names from risky names.

Linguistic screening. A name may be legally available, but that doesn't mean it's linguistically viable. We can screen for offensive or vulgar meanings in key languages and demographics.

Web Screening. We can check for availability of dotcom domains, apps, and social media handles.

Color-Coding. Based on the data we process, we sort the names into four color categories: green, yellow, pink, and red. Green names have no or the fewest viability issues. Yellow names have a few more. Pink names are where it starts to get complicated and risky, and (as you can guess) the red names are off the table.

Step 4: Pitch

At this phase, we reconnect with you to seek your opinions and guidance on the names that have made it this far. When we present the names, we:

Pitch face-to-face via video calls. Providing the full context for the names requires seeing your reactions. We don't want to just shoot off an email knowing the recipient will blow through the list, pick their top few names, and pass them on without reading the supporting rationale. Even if we only spend a minute on each name candidate, we prefer to have the full attention of the decision-makers involved.

Discuss legal availability. Part of the context we provide at this stage is risk assessment. The risky pink and red names are more likely to catch your fancy because they are powerful enough to have already resonated with other people. It's helpful to know which of these you like so that we can try to wordsmith new ideas around them. At the end of the session, we're satisfied if you've culled down the list to half green or yellow names and half red or pink names.
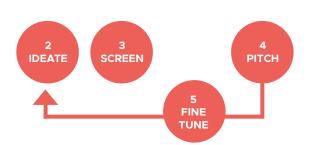
the gist:
Our third step is to run these names through our rigorous trademark, linguistic, and web screening processes.

We then grade names to identify the best candidates.

Step four is pitching: we present a color-coded list of names categorized by uniqueness, whether they are legally clearable and so forth.

the gist:
Step five, fine-tuning, is actually a series of steps that we repeat until we get just the right name. Using your feedback, we come up with new names, revisit old suggestions and do a little customer testing.

◉ Step 5: Fine-Tune

Fine-tuning means taking into account the guidance the client has given us — without treating it as absolute. If you've ever played the game Chutes and Ladders, picture this step as a chute back to step two. The process becomes fluid here and looks different for every client.

This is what we do if you're not sold on any of the first-round name candidates:

> *Generate new names.* We consider your feedback and go back through the Ideating, Screening, and Pitching phases as many times as it takes at no additional charge to you.

> *Revisit old names.* Throughout the process, your palette and perceptions evolve. Even if you purport to detest a name, we may take the liberty of revisiting it or presenting a variation of that theme. On a surprising number of occasions, a name our clients previously said they didn't like ends up back on the list.

> *Run your favorites by customers.* We like to pause during this phase and reach out to a few hundred customers and prospects to get their reactions to your favorite names as well as their new name suggestions. This standardized Customer Validation Study is quick and easy and let's us confirm with your target that we are headed in the right direction.

⊙ Step 6: Testing

This is more in-depth than Customer Validation Study in Step 5. It is an optional phase of quantitative evaluation research that involves testing your top names with a large and diverse group of targeted prospects. The invaluable insights we deliver can allow you to more deeply understand your target and how they will interact with your brand or product.

Here's a rundown:

Cast a wide net. Instead of relying on focus groups, which rarely allow you to draw statistically valid considerations, you need hundreds of respondents from across the country in order to capture helpful data.

Define the criteria. You can't simply ask, "Which names do you like best?" People develop strong opinions quickly, and their answers to any subsequent questions rely on subjective criteria that they often can't even define. That makes it more difficult to get informative answers to the meatier questions.

Instead, we lead with questions like "Which name strikes you as most unusual or unique?" or "Which name would make you most interested in finding out more?" or "Which name best fits the concept?"

Look out for polarization. After we've asked our other questions, we finally get around to like/dislike in order to measure polarization. You don't want to go with a safe name that nobody dislikes. But you also don't want to choose a highly polarized name. A little controversy is welcome, but if 25% love it and 25% downright hate it, you're stuck with a whole quarter of your market that won't budge. On the other hand, if 25% love it, 3% hate it, and the rest are neutral, that's easy to work with. The neutral percentage can be converted.

the gist:
Once we've developed a list of exciting, available names, it's time for step six. We run candidates through our unique customer testing process to see which names stick - and which best fit your goals.

Measure memorability. Memorability is probably the most important quality of a name. You can't cut through the noise to build brand awareness without memorability. And without brand awareness, you can't build brand preference. Above all, your target needs to know you exist.

It's ineffective to give respondents a name and then immediately ask them whether it's memorable. The only way to measure the stickiness of a name is to follow up later. Oddly, the names the respondents remember are not always the names they said they liked the most during the initial evaluation.

Of course, this is only an outline of what happens during the testing process. The process of testing names is as unique as your naming needs, so we always tailor our strategy to the name, its purpose, and its goals.

⦿ Step 7: ROI

A great name can tell a story, evoke intense emotions, and ignite a social experiment. It will remain streadfast through economic and political shifts and might even change the course of history!

CarMax®, Canon PowerShot, and Angry Orchard Hard Cider had no idea what the future would hold for them or how each would change the trajectory and landscape of their industries. But the investment they made in "making a name for themselves" with NameStormers paid for itself a million times over.

NameStormers

Bringing Aha! Moments to Companies Like You

With years of experience and one of the most straightforward but sophisticated naming processes out there, we've definitely got a jump on the competition. But we also offer one thing most other agencies don't: one name for one fee. We'll go through as many rounds of business names or product names as required without charging you a penny more.

How NameStormers Makes the Difference
We're flat. We're fast. We're forward-thinking.

⊙ Experience

As experienced business name makers, we have a proven process of name generation, which we've spent more than three decades tweaking and improving. We've made every mistake and adapted our model to avoid repeating them. As our diverse portfolio proves, we've completed naming projects for Fortune 500 companies, start-ups, and nonprofits alike.

The best part? You benefit from that hard-won wisdom by working directly with our most experienced naming experts: our founders.

⊙ The advantages of our client-centric model

Working with us means building a collaborative partnership. Our clear, streamlined methodology and built-in client checkpoints mean you never have to wonder what's going on behind closed doors or how much it will cost you. We work quickly and respect our clients' time.

⊙ The philosophy behind our flat fee

Creating the ideal name requires tinkering, tweaking, and reevaluating. Other companies might put a price tag on playing around with more ideas, but we see this continued work as a fundamental stage of the process. We don't charge you more to go back through the steps because we don't consider our job complete until you are satisfied and excited to move forward with a name.

Another reason we don't nickel-and-dime our clients is that we're committed to building lasting relationships and reengaging with our clients. Whether you need a single name or comprehensive naming architecture in the future, our hope is that you trust and know that we will always do the job well.

> "We offer one thing most other agencies don't - one name, one fee."

Thank You for Reading

We hope this ebook has helped you understand the in-depth process of naming, and demonstrated why you can trust NameStormers to collaborate with you. **Contact us** today to receive customized solutions at a great value that will lead to successful outcomes for your business.

---

www.NameStormers.com

**2201 East Windsor Road
Austin, TX 78703**

512.267.1814

NameStormers.