

Suggestions for Naming Products or Companies

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The following suggestions are made with a note of caution. That is, prior studies have shown that the principles improve the effectiveness of groups (better decisions in less time) when judged by objective criteria. However, they do not appear to improve group satisfaction. Also, as with other techniques, the group may not be completely successful the first time. Practice should lead to better use of the tools.

The basic idea is that structured judgmental techniques are more effective than unstructured techniques for solving complex problems. Specific principles involve the suspension of evaluation during idea generation, the use of decomposition for screening and evaluation, independent evaluations, and structured group meetings

1. **Expand the problem** in a group discussion. What is being named . . . the process? output? benefit? Why? What are the target markets? This might be assisted by five-minute “time-outs” for idea generation. Time required? Perhaps 20 minutes.
2. **Generate possible names:** The most effective procedure is to assemble the group, review the results from #1, then take a short time (say ten minutes per item being named) for brainwriting. The goal here is quantity, not quality. Aim high, say to develop a list of at least one hundred names. Then assemble the list, removing duplicates, and alphabetizing.
3. **Develop criteria:** Review the criteria (see below in this memo) to decide whether anything should be added or deleted. Suggested time: 15 minutes.
4. **Screening names:** Remove names that are obviously inappropriate, perhaps because they are already taken as URLs or as copyright. (Can the latter be checked rapidly? If not, wait until the list has been screened before proceeding to the next steps.) Use the “Avoid list” on the criteria.
5. **Evaluation of names:** Use each group member’s evaluations in a systematic way that is not biased by other group members. The most common way to implement this is through an anonymous questionnaire that would ask for evaluations and reasons. An improvement on this is Delphi, which involves more than one round of questionnaire with feedback provided. After the first round, each person would see a group summary and a list of reasons, all anonymous. A short discussion can then follow to discuss what might have been overlooked. This is followed by another round of anonymous ratings after the list has been pruned. This could continue for additional rounds. Each round should take less than 10 minutes.
6. **Split group:** Form subgroups of two or three people to develop recommendations for a name with a second, third and fourth choices.
7. **Discuss top choices in full group:** Ten minutes to try to gain consensus on top name with perhaps four alternates.
8. **Test names with target market samples.** Individuals are tested using the criteria. (This may take some time. However, a convenience sample can help if time is limited.)
9. **Recommend name with alternates provided.**

Software could be developed to summarize group ratings and comments. There may also be off-the shelf programs for doing this. A group at the University of Arizona business school that been using group process technology for more than a decade. Their computerized meeting room works well.

To get started, you might want to try aspects of the proposed procedure.

Criteria for Selecting a Name for Product/Process/Tool/ Service/Company

Criteria put in rough order of importance for a typical application. Rate 1 (low) to 10 (high):

___ 1. Descriptive of benefit, process, or key feature (especially if new)

- 1.1 Connotes what it does directly
- 1.2 Metaphor for a physical process
- 1.3 Fits with company name and offerings
- 1.4 Distinctive (not confused with other names or things)

___ 2. Easy

- 2.1 Full name is short
- 2.2 Converts easily to a short form
- 2.3 Easy to spell (as it sounds, and only one way)
- 2.4 Easy for user to remember full name
- 2.5 Easy to remember short name
- 2.6 Easy to pronounce (multi-national)
- 2.7 Makes sense as a verb (as to Xerox a page)

___ 3. Favorable connotations

- 3.1 Favorable connotations in English (and no unfavorable connotations for languages in secondary markets)
- 3.2 Short form works in various languages
- 3.3 Sound supports product attributes (Klink 2000)

Avoid? (Check problem areas)

- ___ Personal surnames
- ___ Initials (at least for new ventures)
- ___ Inappropriate homonyms
- ___ Inappropriate translations

Legal? (Check problem areas)

- ___ Name is available?
 - ___ Appropriate URL name available
 - ___ Avoids confusion because of similarities to other names
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Sources of the criteria

Some came from Henri Charmasson, *The Name is the Game*, 1988, Homewood, Ill.: Dow Jones-Irwin. He has a firm that specializes in names for hi-tech companies. The criteria are based on his experience, and he cites no studies. Nor am I familiar with much research in this area. However, here are a couple of related studies.

Kohli, C. & T. M. Hemnes (1995), "A corporation by any other name," *Business Horizons*, 38 (6), 29-33, reports on a survey of 866 name changes from 1960 to 1991 for firms listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The most common change was to make the name shorter (about 60% of the changes; it was lengthened only 10% of the time). Interestingly, the next most important change was to make the product description less descriptive, apparently because this proved to be restrictive.

The sounds of words convey universal meanings. Words that are formed in the back of the mouth and the tongue is back have different characteristic than when the tongue is forward and high in the mouth. The sounds can connote characteristics such as size, speed, strength, weight, and so on. This can be used not only in selecting names, but also in the selection of nouns and adjectives in the copy. Example: Which car do you think is larger and more powerful, a Bromley or a Brimley? Support: Klink, Richard R. (2000), "Creating Brand Names with meaning: The Use of Sound Symbolism," *Marketing Letters*, 11, 1-15.