

Guidelines for Creating New Product Names

Identifying and developing a new name for your product portfolio can be a tricky business. Here are some quick tips to make sure that the development team gets on the right track.

Start the Process Early

And by this we mean while the product is in the development stage, not prior to an estimated launch. Ideally, name development should be part of product development with marketing taking the lead. We live in an incredibly cluttered marketplace. The key is to build a cushion of time assuming that several name candidates will fallout due to legal restrictions. The naming process should start at a minimum of at least six months out, prior to public release. The more pressure the team is under to get a name out the door, the more likely that the team will end up with a name that nobody is really happy with, and even worse, could potentially make the portfolio seem messy and confusing to the customer.

Develop a Naming Framework

Ask key questions that will guide strategic direction:

- How will this new product name (brand) relate to other products in the portfolio? Will this be sold as a bundled solution or point product?
- Are we developing a name that complements or distracts from our existing name nomenclature?
- Will we be making improvements to this product in the near future in terms of its features or benefits?
Does it make sense to develop a new name or leverage an existing name from the customer's point of view?
- How will this product brand be differentiated from what is currently on the market? And will the customer understand this differentiation? Have we tested this in the marketplace? Or are we just working on internal assumptions?
- What is the role of the product name (brand) in the portfolio? Is it a me-too product or a category leader?
Is our resource allocation in alignment with the type of name we are developing?

Consider the Brand Portfolio

Avoid developing the name without considering your product portfolio. This is one of the single greatest mistakes to make because what may be right for the individual brand (new name) may be wrong for the overall portfolio. This often ends up resulting in:

- Too many names in too many segments: there may be too many names in the mix particularly if the objective for the business is to communicate an integrated solution
- Duplication and overlap
- Gaps in communicating how the names are differentiated or similar
- Inefficient and diffused resource allocation of name we choose (For example, if we invent a name that has no associative quality do we have the funds to build the right recognition.)

The Typical Steps Required for New Name Generation

1. Competitive Analysis
2. Naming Brief
3. First Round of Name Generation
4. Preliminary Legal Pre-Screening
5. Second Round of Name Generation
6. Short List Selection
7. Full Legal Search
8. Linguistic Evaluation
9. Oral Evaluation
10. Name Decision

Work Closely with Corporate Counsel

Your internal corporate counsel can provide the team with a sense of how cluttered the field is by forwarding a small list of names for pre-screening. The US Patent & Trademark Office also maintains an online database that lists registered marks where you can search their database at www.uspto.gov. Also, don't be shy to check out how names come up in Google and other search engines to get an immediate sense of how a term is currently in circulation. Doing basic searching online will help to determine what types of naming nomenclature is already in the public domain and protected.

Wait for Final Legal Clearance

Resist the urge to start putting a new name into circulation on draft marketing materials and collateral, until it has been fully cleared by corporate counsel. First, it adds an element of unnecessary legal risk. And second, it tends to make it that much more difficult to try to switch to a new term. Once a name starts being referenced internally, it almost automatically moves to adoption by the organization.

Great Brands Are Built Over Time

Contrary to popular belief, strong names take time and investment. Even the ones with a built-in evocative feeling like "Yahoo" require marketing support. Don't expect a new name to simply take off without generating internal enthusiasm for appropriately marketing it. And, always make sure that key constituents like the sales force and customer service can fully support it.



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