



THE NAME GAME

33 TIPS & TACTICS
FOR GENERATING
NAMES

BY STEVE RIVKIN

NAMING SOMETHING MAY BE THE MOST UNIVERSAL aspect of business. Whether it's a company, a product or a service, you've got to call it something. But with trademarks and domain names exploding around the globe, the challenge is doing the job better and faster.

Over the last decade, Rivkin & Associates LLC has generated new names for hundreds of businesses. Here are some of the shortcuts, thought-starters and mental prods we've observed along the way. So if the name is your game, read on.

1. WORK BACKWARD FROM THE SELLING PROPOSITION

Start by writing down an advertising headline, a positioning statement or a theme line for your product. Then work toward a name that reflects that marketing strategy.

You have an instant coffee that tastes and smells like real

ground roast. The name: Taster's Choice. Your new bath soap has so many oils and softeners that it leaves the skin silky soft to the touch: Caress. Your chain of Mexican restaurants serves up a mouth-watering range of that spicy cuisine: The Whole Enchilada.

2. SPELL IT A DIFFERENT WAY

An intentionally misspelled word could become your company name: Toys R Us. Or it could be your product name, such as the gelatin dessert that became JELL-O or the fruit-based drink for kids that became Froot. But avoid engaging in difficult-to-remember technobabble, such as these real names: @Climax, 1-4-@LL, 160 over 90, Design VoX, mmO2 and \$Cashnet\$.

3. GO AGAINST THE GRAIN

Study the competition. If everyone else is high-tech, think

high-touch. If all the category names seem masculine, try feminine.

A hospital in Arkansas found that its competitors all had serious, straightforward names for their maternity centers, like The Maternity Center or The Birthing Center. So one hospital called its center Stork & Company. The community loved it.

There's a long list of cars with three-syllable names all ending with the letter "a": Aurora, Corolla, Integra, Maxima, Miata, etc. If you were branding the next new model, you might choose to go against the grain.

4. GENERATE FIRST, JUDGE LATER

Get yourself (or your task force) started by generating as many different names as you can. Write everything down. There are no bad ideas, yet. Save the judging for later.

In a group session, try this penalty: Every time someone says, "What a lousy idea," they have to produce two more ideas for names.

5. GO FOR QUANTITY

Don't fall in love with a short list of two or three possible names. Develop lots of names. In a typical trademark search, you'll lose at least 8 of every 10 names you generate—sometimes more.

6. TRY A RANDOM IDEA

Creative consultant Roger von Oech suggests opening your mind to things that have nothing to do with a problem you're working on.

Open your dictionary to page 133 and pick the third word. Make that word relate to your

naming need. Could you use it as a metaphor?

Write down the name of your favorite sports team. How would it impact the project you're working on? Random ideas can make your mind blossom.

7. TRY FOR AN ACRONYM

Volunteers In Service To America=VISTA; Mothers Against Drunk Driving=MADD; A bank's Fully Automated Super Teller=FAST.

Acronyms are hard to create. But if you can come up with an acronym that has real meaning, you've already built a marketing premise into your name.

8. GET COMFORTABLE

Get away from the phones. Get away from the office. Physically, you'll do your best work on naming in a relaxed, comfortable environment. Emotionally, it should be an environment that says it's okay to take chances.

9. STUDY YOUR LOCAL RETAILERS

Retailers often come up with inventive, evocative names. What thought processes are they using that you could use?

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Best Buy's Geek Squad is an unexpected combination of language, engaging the brain on several levels. One Night Stand is a women's boutique that rents high-priced designer clothing for special occasions. And Creature Comforts is a descriptive name for a pet groomer.

10. MANUFACTURE A NEW WORD

Try putting together a new word from the parts of words you already have. In some cases, you can weld entire words together. It's called constructional linguistics.

A car plus a van yielded Caravan. Reporting on the news of the week yielded *Newsweek*. Manufactured names are all around us, such as Citibank, NutraSweet, Sunkist and Bridgestone.

This is not a new technique. In the 1860s, a cheap and hard-wearing floor covering made from flax ("linum" in Latin) and oil ("oleum") was named Linoleum. And the illustrious luncheon meat Spam came from spiced ham.

11. PLAY BOTH SIDES OF THE BRAIN

The "magic" in a new technology can have analytical and logical appeal. Sony's Trinitron was derived from "trinity," meaning the union of three and "tron" from electron tube, depicting the way the Trinitron combines three separate electron tubes. Or the name can have subjective and intuitive appeal, like the Northstar engine.

Let's say you've developed a new family of products—brand name Centaurus—for medical imaging that laps the field when it comes to wide viewing angles with maximum color accuracy. According to the scientists, your invention reduces the amount of light scattering in the matrix and provides an extended viewing angle of greater than 170 degrees.

But what brings it all home is your platform name: Super WideView Technology. Paired with your brand name, your promise is both subjective and rational.

12. EMBRACE EMOTION

Reason alone does not a great name make. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter acknowledged this aspect of naming when he wrote, "The protection of trademarks is the law's recognition of the psychological function of symbols. If it is true that we live by symbols, it is no less true that we purchase goods by them."

Sears could have named its car battery Reliable. It's practical and logical, but very ho-hum. Now consider the actual choice, the evocative and emotionally charged DieHard.

13. THINK ABOUT WHY IT WILL BE USED

A \$100 pair of sneakers should make me faster and more agile. So what suggests fast and agile? Reebok is the name of a fleet-footed African gazelle. Puma is the Spanish word for a large wild cat. Would Keds or Converse make me that agile?

14. THINK ABOUT WHERE IT WILL BE USED

Imagine your product in the customer's hands, actually being used. A marketer realized that many people like to dictate on their way to and from work—and Commuter became the name for a portable dictating machine.

15. BORROW A PHRASE FROM THE LANGUAGE

A linguist refers to this as "adapting a metaphor." It's similar to how Sears borrowed the word diehard to describe a tenacious and stubborn car battery.

Another example is Close-Up toothpaste, which contains mouthwash to make you feel comfortable in "close-up" situations. It is even known as the kisser's toothpaste in the trade.

Once upon a time, Dutch sailors used the expression "spikspinternieuw" in speaking of a new ship. It meant the ship was new in every spike and splinter of wood. The British later anglicized the phrase to "spick-and-span-new," and U.S. sailors Americanized it to "spic and span." All it took was an alert manufacturer of household detergents to seize the name Spic and Span.

16. USE THE BEST TOOLS

For serious naming efforts, there's only one choice for a dictionary: the prodigious 13-volume "Oxford English Dictionary." A distant second choice is "Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged," with nearly half a million entries. While you're at it, forget the slender thesauruses found in most offices and get a nice fat one. Two good choices are "March's Thesaurus and Dictionary" and "The Synonym Finder," which contains 1.5 million synonyms.

17. GO TO CHURCH

In 1878, Procter & Gamble invented a new soap. It was white, very pure and it floated. Harley Procter was struggling to find a name for it. Inspiration came one Sunday morning as he listened to the minister reading from Psalms 45:8. "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad."

Young Mr. Procter had found his name, Ivory—even though the actual substance ivory is not pure white in color and it certainly doesn't float.

18. LISTEN TO YOUR CUSTOMERS

Today, that means focus groups or online panels. Once upon a time, it was just a chance encounter.

A Baltimore pharmacist was blending his own skin cream in the early 1900s. George Bunting sold it in small blue jars labeled as Dr. Bunting's Sunburn Remedy. Female customers who never ventured into the sun without a parasol raved about the cream. But he wanted a broader base of business. Then one day a male customer entered the store and remarked that the sunburn remedy had miraculously cured his eczema (a painful inflammation of the skin). From that chance remark, Dr. Bunting's Sunburn Remedy became Noxzema (for no eczema).

19. THINK OF THE NAME AS A PROMISE

Linguists have observed that a name is much more than a sound. It is also a bundle of associations. What attribute or benefit can you capture? The cold remedy NyQuil was coined from the fragments "ny" (from night) and "quil" (from tranquil)—the promise of a tranquil night's sleep. And "raise your arm if you're Sure" is the message from an aptly named deodorant.

20. GO FOREIGN

Look for translations of root words, core words and relevant terms. Mitsubishi (whose symbol is three diamonds) named its new luxury car the Diamante (derived from the Spanish, Portuguese and Italian words for diamond). Volvo means "I roll" in Latin and Oreo means "hill" in Greek. (The original version of the cookie was mound-shaped, not flat.)

Decaffeinated coffee was introduced in Europe, with Sanka being a contraction of the French phrase, "sans caffen."

21. HAVE A COMPUTER DO THE WORK

Several software programs exist for creating company and product names. Or you could create your own by using a program that "mates" words in column A with words in column B.

Computers don't have much judgment, of course. They don't have marketing orientations or linguistic awareness. But they'll certainly spew out lots of possibilities, which you can then review.

22. PURCHASE AN EXISTING NAME

A bank paid \$10,000 to acquire another bank's name for a cash management service that was no longer being marketed. A perfume company paid a million dollars for the rights to one name that had already been cleared and registered in 70

countries. Coors licensed the name of its upscale Irish Red beer from a long-defunct brewery.

If a name you covet is owned by someone else but is dormant or little used, go after it. Have an intermediary (such as a trademark attorney) make an offer. You have nothing to lose.

23. TAKE THE TIME TO EAVESDROP

You never know what you'll hear. A well-known sleep aid was named by a fellow who overheard a group of people leaving the theatre late in the evening. "Night, all," they called to each other. This alert listener had his product's new name: Nytol.

24. ESCHEW INITIALS

Studies have shown that all-initial names are as much as 40-percent less memorable than names that use actual or made-up words.

If you doubt that, just look at the all-initial names of companies in the Fortune 500. How many do you really recognize? Does this one mean anything to you: "JCP&L, a GPU Company?"

25. SAY IT OUT LOUD

Names should be pleasing to the ear as well as to the eye. Imagine how many times each day your new name will be said over the phone.

Just altering a word's formation may produce a better sound. The origin, *caleō*, of both these words suggests "warm" or "loving." But *Calida* is more pleasing to the ear than *Calidus*.

26. SUMMON A SUFFIX

Suffixes play a special role in developing new names. Could one of these be useful?

-ine, -in are frequently used for medicines and chemical substances: Anacin, Bufferin and Listerine.

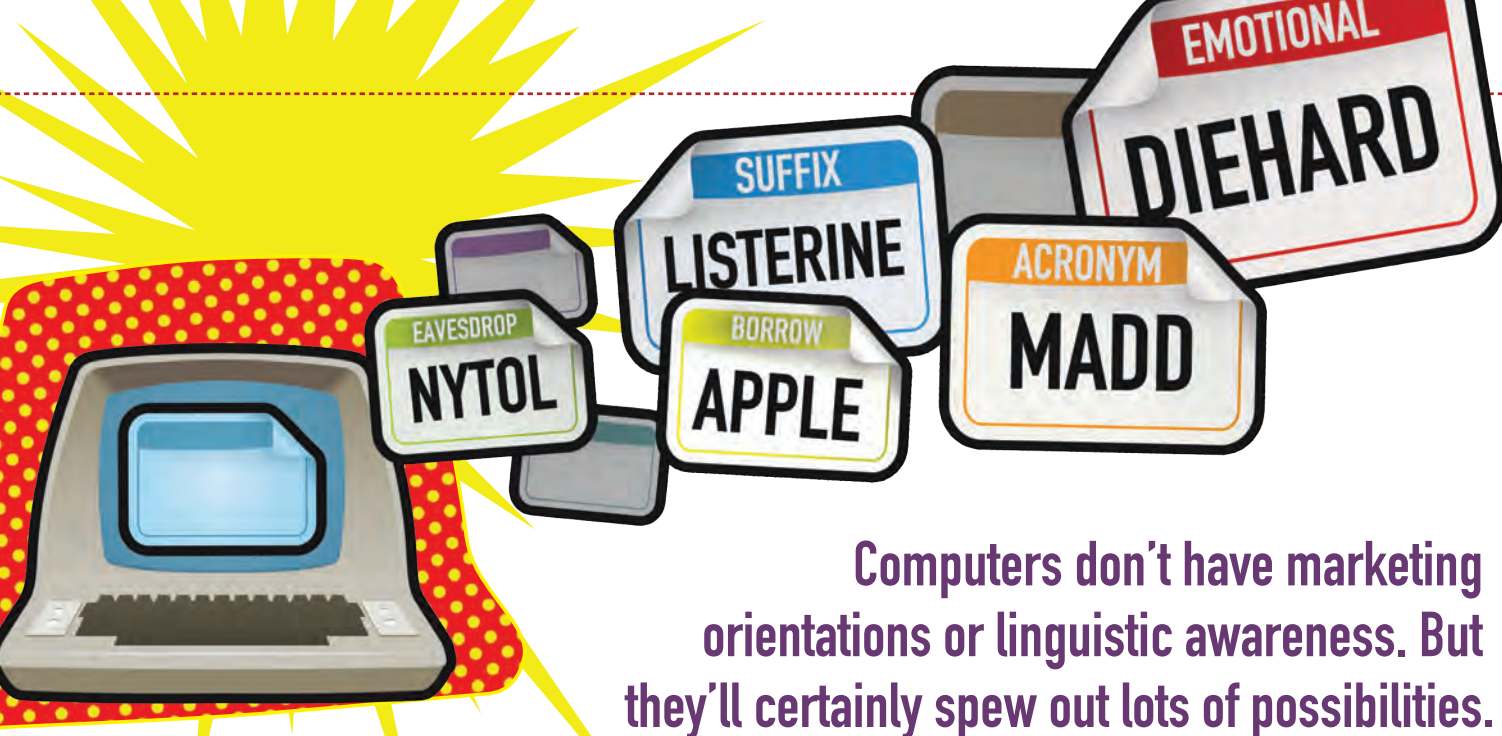
-oid normally means "resembling" or "having the form of": Celluloid and Polaroid.

-ex is often used to imply "excellent" or to give prestige to a name: Rolex and Kleenex.

-elle is a feminine suffix that adds grace and softness: the triangular-shaped diamond, Trielle.

27. PUT THE BENEFIT RIGHT INTO THE NAME

A perfume named Passion. A deodorant named No Sweat. An all-terrain vehicle named Explorer. A long-lasting, wear-resistant polyethylene named Duration.



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28. FIND A BIG BROTHER

Someone in an allied field might give you the name you need. If you're naming the company's newsletter, for instance, look at the names of metropolitan newspapers. But go beyond the obvious ones like *Times*, *Herald* or *Gazette*. You'll find some novel coinages: *Post-Intelligencer* in Washington, *Sacramento Bee* in California and *High Point Enterprise* in North Carolina.

29. START WITH AN UNUSUAL LETTER

In the English language, words most commonly start with these five initial letters: S, C, P, A and T. The five least common are X, Z, Y, Q and K. One out of eight words starts with an S. One out of 3,000 starts with an X.

George Eastman coined the name Kodak for a variety of reasons, including that it was short, unusual and vigorous. "The letter K," he said, "has been a favorite with me—it seemed a strong, incisive sort of letter."

30. REPEAT THE SAME SOUND

The rhythmic cadence of a name can affect its appeal and memorability. Kodak uses the same sound as bookends for the name.

Listen to the repetition of sound in a name such as Fruit of the Loom or Coca-Cola.

31. UNFOLD YOUR MAP

Place names can become product names.

The slip-on loafer is believed to have evolved from a Norwegian shoe called the clog, so Henry Bass, a cobbler from Maine, named his loafer the Weejun.

A Massachusetts cookie company installed a new machine that could wrap cookie dough around jam. The first jam the

company tried was made from figs. Their policy was to name their products after neighboring towns, so Newton, Mass., was duly honored with Fig Newtons.

32. REVERSE THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS

General Ambrose Everett Burnside was the commander of the Army of the Potomac during the Civil War. His most distinguishing feature (which launched a trend) was his profuse side whiskers, growing down along the ears to the cheeks. They were called "burnsides." It might not be a brand name, but around the turn of the century, the word experienced a linguistic transposition and became sideburns.

The holding company for Pathmark supermarkets could have given itself the prosaic name of General Supermarkets Corp. Instead, it was transposed to Supermarkets General.

33. LAST BUT NOT LEAST, BORROW AN IDEA

Thomas Edison once said that ideas have to be original only in their adaptation to the problem you're working on.

The name "Apple" can describe a fruit, a record label and a consumer-electronics company.

So go ahead. Borrow one of these ideas. **PM**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Rivkin is a marketing and communications consultant, author and speaker. He founded Rivkin & Associates LLC, a firm that creates new names for companies and brands. Prior to that, he spent 14 years working with Jack Trout and Al Ries at Trout & Ries Inc., a marketing strategy firm known for its work in positioning. Follow Steve's monthly blog on naming at www.NamingNewsletter.com or reach out to him at Steve@rivkin.net.