

Would a brand by any other name smell quite so sweet?

By Allan Gorman

Maybe, maybe not.

For most companies, naming and building an identity is almost an afterthought: the founder names the company, the first products are descriptively named; and branding means, for the most part, a logo, stationary, a brochure, maybe a web site and some advertising.

The assumption is that the name doesn't matter as much as the product delivered, and that the number of dollars you put into advertising and promotion is what will get you noticed and remembered.

I speak from experience here, because this is exactly how we evolved to the point our own company is at today.

Why consider changing your name?

Today, there are more choices and more media messages than ever before. It's harder and harder to stand out... and break out. And that's true whether you invest millions into advertising or nothing at all. Advertising can get you seen; it cannot, however, guarantee that you'll be remembered.

Being remembered is all about the brand... touch points... experiences... and instant perceptions. What can help an anonymous prospect form an opinion quickly better than a distinctive and emotionally compelling name?

A great name can be an announcement (an ad, if you will) that says: "We march to the tune of our own drum" and lays claim to a unique category. And it can go a long way towards establishing yourself as a preferred brand.

Changing your name can be dangerous.

Just because we decided to change our name, doesn't mean you should. Naming decisions should be made carefully and purposefully, and great caution should be exercised.

Even if your present name isn't that great, there's still a lot of good will and equity associated with it. Hopefully, there are still many clients, fans and acquaintances that value you in the way they've become accustomed to. Changing your name (or image, or promise) is going to upset their apple cart. It may confuse them and you may even lose some current or prospective clients who don't like the change.

It's also going to take a commitment of courage, funds and patience to turn your ship of state around. Taking on a new name can be almost as challenging as building a new company.

If you're contemplating a name change, or a new name for a new business, know exactly why and what you want to convey. And be sure that the long-range rewards will far outweigh the short-term losses.

The right name grows from the brand story.

I'll share a secret with you... it's not really about the name... it's about the brand story. The choice of name, and the decision to change it, should come from a clearer understanding of how and why you're different; how and why you can do what you do better than anyone else can.

Developing the right story requires a lot of homework and soul-searching. It takes gauging and analyzing the market, and discovering how you might be able to fill a sorely lacking niche.

It takes narrow-focusing your message (and sometimes your audience), and committing yourself to becoming the very best at being "that".

Then, once you're comfortable in the knowledge that "that" is what you want to be, and will do your best to support, only then should you address the name.

Qualities of a powerful name*.

Once you have a clear idea of the right brand positioning for your company or product, start exploring and testing names. Here are some benchmarks you can use to measure how good the name candidate is. The more of the following criteria it meets, the more powerful it will be:

Is it self-propelling?

- Will people talk about it?
- Can it work its way through the world on its own?

- Can it convey a story without explanation; whether at a local bar, on the job, or on CNBC?

Does it make an emotional connection?

- What does the name suggest?
- Does it make you feel good?
- Does it make you smile?
- Does it lock into your brain?
- Does it make you want to know more?

Is it poetic?

- How does it look written and how does it sound spoken?
- Does it roll off the tongue easily?
- How much internal electricity does it have?
- How does it sound the millionth time?
- Will people remember it?

Does it have a unique personality?

- Does the name have attitude?
- Does it exude qualities like confidence, mystery, presence, warmth, or a sense of humor?
- Is it provocative, engaging?
- Is it a tough act to follow?

Does it have depth?

- Is the name a constant source of inspiration for advertising and marketing?
- Does it have "legs"?
- Can it work on a lot of different levels?

The key is to step outside the box that the industry -- any industry -- has drawn for itself, and to do it in a fresh way that hits home with the audience.

Clearly, you are not just choosing a name; you are also making a number of important decisions about how you will voice yourself to the world.

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Secrets for Building a Sexier Brand” from <http://www.brandspa-llc.com> or send an e-mail to agorman@brandspa-llc.com

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**"Qualities of a powerful name" is adapted from a paper by Steve Manning and Jay Jurisich of Igor, a maverick branding and naming agency. Check out their blog/newsletter at <http://www.snarkhunting.com>*