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## It's your business

### Clever names can be a boon for businesses

**Marketing** • But the first rule is making sure the name doesn't confuse customers.

#### Fast track

Guidelines for choosing a business name:

- The name should describe what the company does, if possible.
- Find a name people will remember.
- Clever or catchy names may be more memorable, but make sure they convey the image you want for the business.
- Keep it short and pronounceable.
- Avoid names too similar to existing companies. Check name availability with the county clerk, California secretary of state and U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
- Test the name with advisers and potential customers to make sure it has the desired impact.
- Consider future growth. A name that narrowly describes the type of service or location may be too confining as the company grows.
- Choose carefully. Changing the name later can be expensive and cause customers to lose track of your company.

By JAN NORMAN  
The Orange County Register

One night in 1973 Mike Meskell and his dad, Harry, were wracking their brains for the perfect name for their new tuxedo rental shop.

Mike's mom said, "Friar Tux would be cute."

The name tweaked the moniker of Robin Hood's sidekick.

Nah. But after several hours of culling such dry fodder as Mike's Tuxedos and Mr. Penguin, "Friar Tux started sounding pretty good," says the president of the Anaheim-based chain of 22 shops.

"I've been told Friar Tux is the best name in the business," he says. "I think the name's worth a million dollars to us now."

Some types of businesses gravitate toward clever names. It doesn't seem to appeal to law firms, toxic-waste handlers or mortuaries. But retailers, Internet firms and services love to twist words, alliterate or use double meanings. Such names help them stand out, though occasionally they backfire.

"People remember us," says Cheryl Moore of Something Moore, a fashion retailer in Laguna Niguel. "But people call thinking we're a big women's store."

"If we direct people to our Web site, we have to be sure people know that Moore has two 'O's or they get (a paid companion) in New York."

Still, companies shouldn't sacrifice clarity for cleverness, suggests Chiranjeev Kohli, a specialist in company names at California State University, Fullerton.

"Companies on a limited budget should choose a name that tells people what the company does," he says.

In this category is Restaurants on the Run, a Lake Forest firm that delivers meals from 270 eateries in Orange, Los Angeles and San Diego counties to offices, factories and homes.

"It details what we do here, which I think is important," says partner Matt Martha. His two partners thought the



'I've been told Friar Tux is the best name in the business. I think the name's worth a million dollars to us now,' says Mike Meskell, CEO of Friar Tux Shop • Photo: Kathi Kent / For The Register

name might be too long. But the descriptive alliteration prevailed.

Kohli says, "It's really good; it tells people what the company does. It's clever but not too cutey."

The name is memorable, Martha adds, and it's enhanced by a clever logo (the first R wears tennis shoes and carries a tray) and a consistent color (green) for lettering, employees' shirts, etc.

Darlene Christy, co-owner of Maw and Paw Kettlecorn in Laguna Hills, agrees that a catchy name needs an equally clever logo. Younger customers for Christy's popcorn confection might never have heard of the '50s Ma and Pa Kettle comedies, but they remember the name and the logo of a country couple, she says.

Jim Bremer actually had a logo before he had a name for the Tall Mouse crafts store he started in Fullerton in 1966.

"If you're going to succeed in business, you need to build a better mousetrap," he says. "That seemed inhumane, so some friends and I at a New Year's Eve party talked about building a better mouse instead. A cartoonist who was there started drawing versions of a better mouse."

The favorite drawing depicted a tall mouse, and that name stuck for the four-store chain now based in Yorba Linda.

"Once you hear it, no one ever forgets it," Bremer says. "The downside is no one knows what it means. Branding is tougher for an independent retailer."

Some business owners work hard

to find a catchy name that has some kind of descriptive tie-in.

Kathy Mercurio flirted with Balboa Buds and Fleur du Jour for her Newport Beach flower shop before settling on Merci Bouquet, which she saw in a greeting card.

"I get a lot of wire orders," Mercurio says, "because I think florists in other locations look for the best name that doesn't sound like a big chain."

The drawback? "People call and talk French."

Ken Noland uses two names for his Tustin financial consulting practice. Employees utilize the legal name, Enterprise Management.

"But when I introduce myself I always end with 'I'm your CFO to Go,' which I have trademarked," Noland says. "Many of my clients only know me by CFO to Go. It's catchy, descriptive of what I do, and a branding name is so important."

Internet companies are especially fond of clever names, Kohli says. "Internet companies take pride in being nonconformist, and a novel name adds a touch of rebellion."

Leo Petrini had more than nonconformity in mind when he decided to name his Internet-based productivity and management firm, Web Footed Friends Inc.

"We want to be friends with our clients. We're Web-based. Web suggests a duck, which is our logo," he explains. "We wanted a name that would be remembered in a sea of people seeking attention. But we also wanted to have fun."



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