

THE NAME GAME

IDENTIFICATION: The moniker you choose for your business should say a lot in as few words as possible.

Ronald Murayama thought he had a winner. The former dentist invented a sonic-powered toothbrush and flosser. He named it Soniplak, a combination of sonic and plaque.

It is short, suggestive of what the product does and, best of all, the U.S. Trademark Office approved it last year.

However, in the waiting period before final registration of the name, Sony Corp., the Japanese electronics giant, notified Murayama that it was challenging the name. Too similar to Sony, a corporate attorney said.

Murayama, of Laguna Niguel, is spending thousands of dollars to cross swords with Sony. But he estimates he'll have to spend \$35,000 to 340,000 for new packaging, labels and marketing materials if he loses.

Murayama has discovered that the name game is cutthroat and costly. Is a name really all that important? It's Your Business asked in Problem 269.

Murayama believes it's worth fighting for. Most business owners and marketing experts

WHAT'S IN A NAME? SOME CLUES TO SUCCESS

Most business experts say a good name for a company or product will boost sales. But what makes a name good?

- ▶ **Short:** The longer the name, the less likely people will remember it.
- ▶ **Suggestive:** Research shows that consumers like names that suggest what a product or company does (ColorBrite for laundry detergent).
- ▶ **Primed for growth:** A company name should hold up as the company diversifies its products or services or expands geographically.
- ▶ **Protectable:** Almost 900,000 names have been registered with the Patent and Trademark Office. If a name is too common, it's tough to protect it legally.
- ▶ **Cautiously coined:** Made-up, or coined, names can be easier to protect. They have strong identity and limitless expansion opportunities but need time and money to build recognition.

Source: Dr. Chiranjeev Kohli, California State University, Fullerton



JAN NORMAN
It's Your Business

agree that a good corporate or product name is like gold.

Sixty percent of U.S. companies believe a product or corporate name can boost sales, says Chiranjeev Kohli, an associate professor of marketing at California State University, Fullerton.

Kohli spends much of his pro-

County entrepreneurs say they strive for a company name that is distinctive and suggests what they do.

James Wendt wanted such a tag for his Irvine marketing firm, which specializes in company- and product-name development and protection. He chose GNAMEs Marketing Services.

"This name will immediately identify my company from the competition. (It) is imaginative and tells the public what I am in business for," Wendt says.

Besides, he likes it better than Wendt Associates.

When Lynette Smith started her own typing service in Yorba Linda, she wanted to create a quality image. She chose Quality and has altered the subtitle as her business evolved from typing service (1980) to professional services (1982) to word processing (1983) to editing and word processing (1989).

The trick is finding a distinctive name that isn't already being used, Kohli says. "In 1991 alone, 120,000 trademark applications were filed. That's 10 times the size of an average person's vocabulary."

His research has found that consumers favor and remember names that suggest what the product does, such as ColorBright for a laundry detergent. So when Kohli and partners

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Professional time researching the value of names and has found that not every one is worth a fight. In fact, some are expensive mistakes.

Remember when United Airlines changed its corporate name to Allegis? The name combined allegiance and aegis (Greek for shield), supposedly to imply safe travel. Consumers didn't get it. After spending \$7.3 million trying to promote the new name, the company switched back to UAL.

MAKE THE NAME DISTINCTIVE

First and foremost. Orange

FROM 1

wanted a distinctive, suggestive moniker for their name consulting firm, they chose "I.D. entirely."

KEEP IT SHORT

Perhaps the most important feature of a good name is brevity, Kohli says. In a study of 1,000 U.S. companies that changed their names, more than half shortened the name. Only 92 made their names longer.

Holton & Holton Screenprinting & Signs in Anaheim took the short route in changing to One Day Signs.

The first name was too long and hard to remember, Robert Holton says. "Everyone always waits till the last minute to order signs, so we thought this could be our niche!"

Lynne Lawrence was looking for a name that would convey that her Santa Ana company provides nationwide computer service using a network of 1,000 subcontractors. She chose United Service Network Inc.

Many potential customers thought they already knew the company, "so obviously the name conveyed some sense of stability and familiarity," Lawrence says. "But the name is also long and unwieldy, so my partner shortened it to USNet. It's short and easy to remember. It sounds high-tech, bringing to mind local area networks, which we do service."

PLACE AND PRODUCT?

Kohli generally recommends against using geography or product in a company name. It's too

easy to outgrow as a company diversifies its products and expands its markets.

However, some local entrepreneurs say such designations work to their advantage.

"Having survived for 15 years just selling cheesecakes, I give a great deal of credit to our name," says Vince DiMeglio of N.Y. Cheesecake Co. in Costa Mesa.

There's really no such thing as a New York cheesecake, but transplanted easterners who grew up believing civilization ended at the Hudson River are sure that New York cheesecake must be of the highest quality.

John and Catherine Guzzetta decided to use location and specific service in naming their business Orange County Div-

ing Academy.

"It tells what we do and that we cater to the Orange County area," John Guzzetta says.

CHOOSE, THEN AVOID CHANGE

Choose your name carefully, Cal State Fullerton's Kohli recommends, because it can be costly, even disastrous, to try to change it later.

Nissan Motor Co. Ltd. spent three years and \$30 million to change its car brand in the United States from Datsun to Nissan. And Esso spent \$200 million changing its name to Exxon.

Thomas Myers called his Tustin carpet-cleaning business Myers Carpet Care. But as carpet restoration from water damage became 85 percent of his work, he thought about changing to Myers Restoration Service.

"But we kept the same name because our customers and the insurance agents with whom we have regular contact know us as Myers Carpet Care," he said.

Charlene Walker and Sandra Young created a career-guidance service in Tustin aimed specifically at women. Against the advice of mentors, they called it Womens Focus.

"After we named our corporate outplacement division Career Focus to appease these people," Young says, "guess which business generated the moat in interest? Womens Focus."

"We're changing it back."

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