



# Make a Name for Yourself

The Definitive Guide to Naming  
& Renaming Your Company



# Naming a Company is Seriously Complex

A lot of folks think that naming is naming — it doesn't matter much if you're naming a company, product, service, initiative or child — you just slap a name on it, and call it a day.

While you're probably reading this guide because you already know the importance of naming in branding and business, you might not realize some of the intricacies of naming a company or organization compared to naming a product or service.

In short, naming a company is much more complex. Here's why:

## Soul Searching

As any business or brand owner knows, you have to do a lot of soul searching when naming. But for a company, either a new company that's seeking its name, or an established company that seeks to rename, you must understand and clarify the essence



of your company's existence — who you are, what you *really* do, and why it matters to the world. Depending on your type of business, where it is now, and where you see the business going, those are massive questions.

Because a product is usually more focused in its functionality and offering, it's easier to answer those questions with greater clarity and speed.

### Stretch

Companies and organizations usually offer more “things” — products, services, brands, activities, etc... — than a single product does. Plus, the lifespan of a company or organization is typically longer than most products, and the opportunity for evolution is greater. So when naming a company it becomes important to consider and name to the full scope of your business today, and where it could go tomorrow.



At the same time, you don't necessarily want to date yourself with your name too much, as 10 or 20 years from now, you don't want your name to sound, well, like it's 10 or 20 years old.

### Socialization

Naming a company is a much more emotional and social process than naming a product. Re-naming can be particularly tough. Unlike a product, a company is a major part of employees' identities. The name of their company is something they'll share frequently with family, friends and people they meet at cocktail parties or on the subway. You'll need to socialize the naming process appropriately with anyone you want to keep happy. This means including key players in the decision-making process as well as sharing the final decision with everyone in a smart, strategic manner.



# About Tanj

A Leading Language & Brand Consultancy in NYC

Hi. We're Tanj. We create little bits of language – names, taglines, stories and copy – that have a big impact on our clients' brands.

We work with everyone from Fortune 500 companies to startups and agency partners. While we do a lot of things for our clients, here's what we do best:

Brand  
Naming

Making the hottest, most viable names around

Brand  
Stories

Revealing the true story behind your brand

Brand  
Voice

Crafting a unique, consistent tone of voice

Copy  
Writing

Writing sweet copy – you get the good stuff



<b><u>Part 1</u></b>	<b>Why to name or rename your company</b>	
Chapter 1	<b>New Company</b> <i>You need a new name</i>	8
Chapter 2	<b>Existing Company</b> <i>You need to rename</i>	13
Chapter 3	<b>Your Mindset</b> <i>Proceed with confidence</i>	24
<b><u>Part 2</u></b>	<b>How to name or rename your company</b>	
Chapter 4	<b>Prepare</b> <i>Learn what to expect</i>	31
Chapter 5	<b>Focus</b> <i>Know what you're naming</i>	35
Chapter 6	<b>Decide</b> <i>Choose how you're going to seek ideas</i>	39
Chapter 7	<b>Understand</b> <i>Profile your audience</i>	46
Chapter 8	<b>Analyze</b> <i>Understand your competition</i>	50
Chapter 9	<b>Dissect</b> <i>Find the core value of your offering</i>	56
Chapter 10	<b>Strategize</b> <i>Create a clear naming strategy</i>	60
Chapter 11	<b>Unite</b> <i>Bring everybody together</i>	66
Chapter 12	<b>Develop</b> <i>Create quantity &amp; quality</i>	70
Chapter 13	<b>Assess</b> <i>Check for legal &amp; linguistic viability</i>	75
<b><u>Part 3</u></b>	<b>How to decide on your new company name</b>	
Chapter 14	<b>Evaluation</b> <i>Leverage criteria</i>	84
Chapter 15	<b>Socialization</b> <i>Get buy-in</i>	90
Chapter 16	<b>Launch</b> <i>Ready, set, go</i>	95
<b><u>Part 4</u></b>	<b>Company naming trends</b>	
Chapter 17	<b>Buck or Follow</b> <i>When to lead, when to follow</i>	103
Chapter 18	<b>Tech Naming</b> <i>What's going on in tech</i>	107
Chapter 19	<b>B2B Naming</b> <i>What's going on with B2B brands</i>	110
Chapter 20	<b>Templates</b> <i>Use them!</i>	115



# Part 1.

Why to name or rename  
your company



# 1. New Company

You need a new name





“Don't start off on  
the wrong foot.  
Take the time to  
plan for your  
present and your  
future.”



# “So, what do we call ourselves?”

If you have a new company, there’s no question about it: you need a name for the company. And you need the right name.

Starting a business is a big deal. There are thousands of moving parts, and it may be tempting to just slap on a good-enough-for-now name with a vow to come back to it in a few months when things have settled down.

Don’t do that.

As soon as you start doing business under your new name, you start building equity in that name. So every day you spend without the right name is (1) a missed opportunity to build equity in the right name, and (2) making you and any other employees or stakeholders more attached to the wrong name. Once you have equity and attachment to a name, it becomes very hard to change it in several ways:



- Emotionally: As the feeling that “this is our name!” grows, it becomes difficult to face the idea of leaving it behind.
- Rationally: Once you start to build equity in your brand, it feels irrational to get rid of a name that people have started to know. It might feel a bit like making a big bet: You can take the cash you have and walk away knowing you’re doing okay but you could have more, or you can take the leap and possibly come out way ahead. Wouldn’t it be better to plan ahead so you don’t have to make that decision for your company?
- Technically: The longer you wait, the more involved it will become to ‘fix’ your name. While you’re sitting on the decision, your company has been moving forward with the placeholder name. So you’ll face having to design a new logo, replace business cards



and any signage you may have, update your website and social media accounts, etc. Things get complicated fast.

When it comes down to it, your name is the most essential distillation of your company. It tells you and the world who you are, what you do, or what you stand for. Finding the right name is a key part of your business strategy. So don't start off on the wrong foot. Take the time to plan for your present and your future. It's worth it.



## 2. Existing Company

You need to rename



“Often the business owners were in a rush to go to market and didn’t take the time to get to the right name...”



# “Houston, we have a problem.”

Changing a company name is a big deal. A really big deal. Potential challenges include everything from a loss in the equity you’ve built into the name over the years to the added costs of updating your visual identity, website, signage and beyond. That’s big. Yet, there are a number of very good reasons that companies change their names. Here’s the top 10 reasons we’ve seen:

## 1. You just didn’t get your name right the first time

We see this a lot with early- to mid-stage startups. Often the business owners were in a rush to go to market and didn’t take the time to get to the right name from the start. Names that hinder a brand at this stage might have pronunciation challenges, lack relevant associations, incorrectly position the business, or lack flexibility for the long term.



Example: Take a look at one of our clients. Their original name was Mogulus. The co-founders realized that the name — the message behind it and the style it projected — was a potential roadblock to growth, so they bit the bullet and changed to Livestream. They've never looked back since.

## 2. Your current name lacks stretch

Ideally, brand names grow with your company as the business evolves. The challenge for brand owners, especially early on, is that you don't know exactly where your business is headed five to ten years down the line. An ultra-descriptive name can be good for its immediate clarity, but it can quickly become limiting if your offering changes.

Example: Remember YouSendIt? That file sharing program that allows you to send big files easily? This successful startup underwent





a massive rebrand, including a name change, because the very nature of their business had expanded well beyond just sending files. So they changed the name to something more flexible: Hightail.

### 3. Your business gets sold, or you buy another business

When a business is bought or sold, changing the name is often imperative, legally or otherwise.

Example: When Capital One bought ING Direct, the ING name was not included in the deal — and it didn't fit with Capital One's brand, anyway. To comply with requirements and better fit within its portfolio, the company changed the name of its newly-acquired online banking biz to Capital One 360.



## 4. You lose your trademark lawsuit

Sometimes you've got a great name that is working really well for you, but a major trademark issue forces your hand. This can be a tough situation, but if you've got to change your name, you might as well make the best of it.

Example: A partnership to take the "The Best Chocolate Cake in the World" from Portugal to the U.S. didn't work out and the owners split. The owner who did not hold the rights to the trademark needed a new name to set up shop in the States. While the original name was quite mouthwatering, it was also quite a mouthful! We renamed them ChocoBolo, which is rooted in the Portuguese for "chocolate cake," to get past the legal hurdle and give them a simpler name with more flexibility.



## 5. You move to a region where your current name is not available

The trademark culprit strikes again. Legal issues can spring up when your business expands to a new country, and a name that was all yours before is suddenly someone else's property.

Example: SAM Learning had a thriving business in the UK and wanted to expand to the U.S., but they couldn't use the name on this side of the pond due to trademark conflicts. We developed the name Penda for them: a name they could call their very own.

## 6. Your name isn't ownable or unique

Often a name that feels like an easy choice when starting a business is a name that feels like an easy choice to a lot of other people too. So you end up sharing a name with



dozens or hundreds of other businesses. That might work for a little while, but as success grows, you'll need a unique moniker that you can own and easily be identified by.

Example: A company called OneSource came to us when they had outgrown their too-diluted name. OneSource had been a good fit for their business, but they were just one in a very long list of companies with the exact name. We worked to coin a unique, ownable name that would propel them into the future, and they're now known as Avention.

## 7. You merge with another business

If one name doesn't win out over the other one in a merger, then a new name can take the form of a blend of the existing two names, or an entirely new name altogether.



Example: Blending names sometimes yields unwieldy names, like PricewaterhouseCoopers (eventually shortened to PwC) and Air France KLM, but maintains equity. A whole new name can be risky as legacy names often carry great equity, but it's often a risk worth taking. The merger between Bell Atlantic and GTE, for example, gave us Verizon.

## 8. You want to make your long name short

For better or for worse, people sometimes decide that their business name is just too long. Short names are great for a lot of reasons, but when a name is cut down to bare-bones initials, the name literally loses its meaning.

Example: General Electric to GE. Kentucky Fried Chicken to KFC. Yellow Pages to YP. The Facebook to Facebook. Some of these work while others (ahem, YP) feel a little forced, but they all achieve succinctness at a minimum!



## 9. You can't repair your poor brand image

When a company gets slammed so hard they can't rebound with their current identity, an extreme makeover is necessary.

Example: Remember Blackwater? In the wake of a series of very high-profile disasters, they changed their name to the unpronounceable "Xe." This may have backfired – when a name is that hard to say, it's much easier to say "The Company Formerly Known as Blackwater." They have since changed their name AGAIN to friendly-sounding Academi, which begs for a heart over the i.

## 10. You need to send a new signal in the market

When your business is making a big change, whether it be in your structure, offerings, or technology, a new name is a big, bold way to announce the start of a new era.



Example: Turning back the clock to the last century, Haloid was a very successful photographic supplies company. After decades in business, they developed a new technology called xerography. Seeing that this invention would bring about major change in their business, they changed their name to Haloid Xerox, and subsequently Xerox, as we know them today.



# 3. Your Mindset

Proceed with confidence





“The success of a renaming project largely lies on confidence.”



## "Can we top our current name?"

*"Do or do not. There is no try."*  
- Yoda

Yoda's advice works in pretty much any situation, and naming is no exception. There is no try when it comes to renaming a company: Do it, or don't do it.

Are you thinking about renaming your company? If so, before you start, lay out the pros and cons, discuss them with key players, and decide if you are going to do it or not.

A lot of people go into a renaming project saying "if" and "maybe," as in, "if we find a name that works better than our current one," or "maybe we'll just stick with what we have." This is a surefire way to waste a lot of time and money, because the success of a renaming project largely lies on confidence. If you just think of it as an exercise in seeing what you can come up with, you will not end up with a new name.



So, decide first. Do you need to change your company's name? If so, jump into the process with both feet and find a new name. If not, keep the name you have. Just don't let momentum make the decision for you.

Of course it's easier in the short term to keep your current name. But if you have identified reasons that the current name is not feasible or is limiting your business, it's important to stick to your guns. We know how you feel: It's like getting rid of a boyfriend or girlfriend whom you love but you know you're incompatible with. You know what you have to do.

Once you've made the decision, maintain confidence. Confidence is contagious, and it keeps you on track. When you act and speak with certainty about your decision to rename the company, others are much more likely to see it as a smart move.



If you have a seed of doubt, figure out those concerns before you begin the Herculean task of renaming, because that seed will grow into roots and branches of dissent, and all your work will be for naught.



# Part 1: Checklist

Why to name or rename your company

Did you and your teammates think deeply about who you are and what you offer?

If you are renaming your company, have you clarified why you are doing so?

Are you confident? If you aren't 100% committed to renaming your company, clarify your concerns before you begin the process.





# Part 2.

How to name or rename  
your company



# 4. Prepare

Learn what to expect



“You will face  
constraints of epic  
proportions.”





## “Naming is easy. We’ve got this.”

You speak. You write. You communicate with clarity. You’ve named your kid and your dog. You’ve even penned an oh-so-cute nickname for the love of your life. So naming your new brand should be a snap, right?

Wrong.

Naming is deceptively difficult. You will face constraints of epic proportions — strategic, legal, linguistic, organizational, social, financial, temporal, mental — and you have to overcome all of them with one or two words.

Plus, everyone else thinks it’s easy too, so when you’re managing a naming project, you are dealing with a less-than-informed audience. Educate yourself on ways to overcome the challenge you are about to face. (Don’t worry, that’s why you’re reading this guide). Then aim to share what you learn with those around you.



Oh, and how long will it take?

The simple answer is that it depends. For startups that make decisions quickly, a few weeks might be enough. For more established companies and organizations that need to run approval up the ranks, securing a name in two to three months is the standard.

Either way, you won't have your name overnight. So start early and be prepared for the long haul.



# 5. Focus

Know what you're naming



“Sit down with your team, and clarify the scope of the new company.”



## “Wait... what do we do?”

Creating or re-branding a company is always complicated.

The first question to ask is obvious, but the answer can elude you. We typically start any client briefing by asking “what is your company all about?” We may need to spend several hours with a client to truly understand the answer to that question, and the implications that we’ll need to take into account.

Sit down with your team, and clarify the scope of the new company. Do you have a very specific, narrow offering? Could you expand to provide more products or services in the future? What opportunities might you want to be open to?

Clarify what you are before making any further moves. If you aren’t sure how you might evolve — in many cases your distant future



may not be clear — you can name to what you are right now, while filtering names based on the possibilities of what you think the company could become.

For example, you could assume that your offering will remain the same, or that you will expand and evolve quite a bit over the next few years. Your strategy can focus on both paths (name to what you are now, or potentially a broader vision of what the company could become). And both paths may yield dramatically different types of names, all while getting you to success – a final workable name.



## 6. Decide

Choose how you're going to seek ideas



“It takes more than just pulling a single name out of a hat.”





# “Are we naming this ourselves!?!?”

You have a couple options when it comes to naming your company. Here’s the skinny:

## Option 1: DIY

You know, do it yourself?

### The Good

- Cost: It could be cheaper to do it yourself. You’ll avoid paying an outside vendor.
- Speed: You are handling it internally, so you can just get it done.
- Volume: Depending on the size of your staff or company, you can create a lot of ideas quickly. Who knows? Fred in Accounting might come up with a winner.

### The Bad

- Chaos: Very often DIY naming projects run afoul because they don’t have clear objectives, direction or a process. They crash and burn hard.
- Quality: Even though your employees can speak, read and write, it doesn’t mean they’re going to create killer names. More likely than not, Fred in Accounting just can’t get the job done.



- Costs: When projects drag on, costs go up. Your launch can be delayed. Your trademark screening fees skyrocket. Worst of all, you find yourself having to change the name after you launch because you are being sued for trademark infringement. Do you know how much that costs?

## Option 2: Online Naming Tools

This one is similar to DIY. Only it's a slightly different strategy. There are a number of free online naming tools – [wordoid.com](http://wordoid.com), [nameboy.com](http://nameboy.com) and more – that will help you generate ideas. There are also online shops that claim to offer specialized naming services for next to nothing.

With this option, you are basically looking at the same pros and cons as doing it yourself. Get ready to roll the dice because with this route, it's a real crapshoot.



## Option 3: Call Your Ad Agency

Heck, your agency is creative. They came up with that great campaign last year. So naturally they can name your company, right?

### The Good

- Price: Traditional agencies want you to buy media. That's where they make their money. Rarely will they charge you for this kind of creative.
- Creativity: Almost any agency has a copywriter who can cook up some crazy ideas for you.
- Integration: If your agency is in charge of your advertising, they'll offer perspective on integrating the name with an advertising strategy down the line.

### The Bad

- Experience: Most ad agencies just don't do naming. They don't know the intricacies of how to generate smart ideas, and lots of them. Nor do they understand the more technical aspects of the field, like the legal and linguistic hurdles.
- Carelessness: They may rush you through the naming exercise to get to the "fun stuff" (i.e. developing your campaign). Along the way, they make mistakes.



- Quality: The worst naming presentation we have ever seen came out of an ad agency – one founded by an advertising giant in the 1940s. Zero strategy. Zero creativity. Zero quality. Other agency naming presentations we have seen weren't much different.

## Option 4: Naming & Branding Consultants

Picture it: an army of consultants are marching through your door. Sometimes it's like that – big branding firms often bring massive teams to the table. Smaller naming companies or independent consultants usually come in ones and twos. If you go down the naming and branding consultant route, here's what to expect:

### The Good

- Experience: Although we can't vouch for everyone, we'd be willing to bet that most naming and brand consultants have enough experience to steer you away from common naming pitfalls.
- Quality & Quantity: Most consultants understand that it takes more than just pulling a single name out of a hat. They know you'll need quality names, and a lot of them, to get you to the finish line.



- Price: Although they're not free, many smaller boutique firms offer tremendous value and insight for relatively reasonable fees.
- Scale: Many bigger consultancies have vast resources to help you build your brand outside of just the name. They can handle everything from research and strategy to design, implementation and management.

### The Bad

- Price: Yep, you'll pay to work with the big boys. Seriously. We've seen naming projects – just the naming portion – run more than \$200,000. Is it worth it? Perhaps. Is it financially feasible? Not for most companies.
- Scale: Smaller shops that specialize in only naming often lack the resources to help you with every aspect of building your brand.
- Speed: This one's tricky. Most consultancies take anywhere from a few weeks to several months to develop a batch of viable name candidates. In your world, that's probably an eternity. But the flip side is that it takes time to get things right.



# 7. Understand

Profile Your Audience



“The more you understand about your audience... the more direction you have to name to.”



## “What do our customers *really* want?”

*“We see our customers as invited guests to a party. And we are the hosts. It’s our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.”*

- Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon

A great host understands her or his audience. That’s the only way to strike up interesting conversation, offer just the right food and drink, and make a memorable experience for guests.

With naming, the more you understand about your audience — not just pure demographics, but true mindset and emotions, for example what they think, like, dislike, prefer, expect, not expect... what moves them — the more direction you have to name to, and evaluate ideas once they’ve been created.





If you have bona fide research that profiles your audience, you are ahead of the game. If you don't, you can ask a few simple questions of your team, and existing or potential customers, to pry open what really makes them tick:

- Who are your primary target audiences?
- Are there secondary audiences to consider?
- How do they use and think about the sector you are launching in?
- What drives them to purchase?
- What special, unique needs or wants might they have in a name?



# 8. Analyze

Understand your competition



“What are my competitors today doing? What could happen tomorrow?”



## “What makes this brand unique?”

When planning any big business decision, you always want to understand the environment around you. What does the landscape look like? What are my competitors today doing? What could happen tomorrow?

Naming is no different. So try analyzing several aspects of your competitors:

- Core story or positioning — what, at the core, do the competing brand stand for?
- Surrounding messaging — what messages does it tout on its website, within brochures and in videos?
- What the name says — what message does the name alone deliver? If indecipherable, what generally do you think it’s about?

- What type of naming constructs are used?

Real word	Is it plucked from the dictionary? (e.g. Twitter)
Composite	Is it two real words put together? (e.g. BuzzFeed)
Simplex	Is it a single word created via blending or shaving root words? (e.g. Google)
Phrase	Is it a real phrase, or made up phrase, from everyday language? (e.g. 23&Me)
Acronym / Alphanumeric	Is it some kind of acronym, or alphanumeric? (e.g. IBM)

- What kind of expressions are used?

**Descriptive**

Does it directly describes the what the company does? (e.g. IBM standing for International Business Machines)

**Suggestive**

Does it indirectly suggest key benefits or functionality of the company? (e.g. Microsoft)

**Abstract**

Does it create an image of functions and benefits of the brand, but have no actual connection to the product or service? (e.g. Apple)



Map out competitors' names to see where they land. Ask yourself a few simple questions. Where's the white space? What areas for naming construct, expression and tone feel right for us? Do we want to lead? Do we want to conform to naming conventions in the space while still standing out?

While there's no right answer, you can make some smart decisions about possible directions for creative name development. This exercise also helps you evaluate names you develop throughout the process.

On pages 120-121 we provide a more in-depth framework and templates for you to use in your analysis.



## 9. Dissect

Find the core value of your offering





“Put pen  
to paper.”



## “Um... wait. What do we stand for?”

So you’ve done a lot of probing into your audiences and your competitors, but what about your brand – the very thing you are trying to name?

What does your company stand for? What is your offering really all about? You need to get to the heart of your offering, and clearly articulate it.

Put pen to paper.

While there’s no right formula for finding the core value of your offering, it typically starts by developing a value proposition, and listing up a few differentiated and compelling benefits.

What’s a value proposition?



There are about as many ways to write a value proposition as there are to make a sandwich. If you don't already have one, search around online for a formula that's right for you and your company. Keep it very simple, but specific. These are three basic questions your value proposition should answer in very clear, pointed terms:

Who

Who is our customer?

What

What problem or problems does our business help them solve?

Why

Why should they care?

*Key questions to answer to create a value proposition*



# 10. Strategize

Create a clear naming strategy



"A naming strategy is a game plan that lets you know two things: *what to say & how to say it.*"



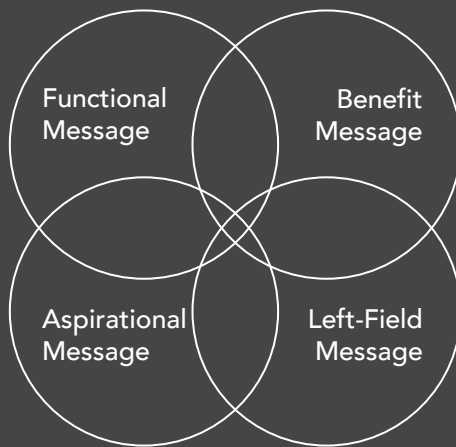
## “How do we make sense of it all?”

Once you have your audience profile, competitor analysis and value proposition, you are finally ready to pull everything together into your naming strategy. Mind you, not a single name has been created yet.

A naming strategy is very simple. It's essentially a game plan that lets you know two things:

- What you say: What is the message, or set of messages, you will send in the name?
- How you say it: What is the naming style, or styles, you will create (remember naming expression, construct and tone from Chapter 8)?

For getting the message right, place your competitor analysis and your value proposition side-by-side and ask yourself a few simple questions, then pour the answers into a fancy diagram like this:



*A simple, effective way to map out message in your naming strategy*

- **Functional:** “What does the company actually do?” Your response, which serves as one theme to name to, should be relevant to your audience, differentiated from your competitors, and credible to your brand.



- Benefit: "How does my audience benefit from what we do?" Is the benefit more tangible, like "improved performance," or more emotional like "a better life?" You could even choose both and make two separate themes that speak to benefits. But again, be relevant, differentiated and credible with the themes you create.
- Aspirations: "What is the brand's higher-level, more emotional vision for the future, and why should that matter to our customers?" Think big, stretch the boundaries, be bold. But remember, be relevant, differentiated and credible.
- Left Field: "How can we push the boundaries of what our brand can be? What can we say that's evocative, truly cutting edge, and quite frankly a little out there?" Go crazy.





Create themes for each of the categories above. Some may resonate with you more, but at least consider them for the time being. For each theme, list up a handful of keywords that help support the theme. These keywords will be useful thought starters when it comes time to name.

On pages 118-119 we provide an example of a theme and a blank template for you to use when developing your naming strategy.



# 11. Unite

Bring everybody together



“All key members  
should have some  
skin in the game.”



## “Hey, do you have a minute?”

Believe it or not, you still shouldn't have created a single name, or given any real attention to options that have been. Be patient. We'll get there.

Once you have your strategy, it's important to align all key stakeholders who will have a say in the final name.

You do not need to cast the net too wide and have everyone in the organization buy into your naming game plan. But core members of your team who will have an influence on the final decision should have a chance to review where you are going with your strategy, and offer input at, or before, this stage.

That way, all key members should understand the direction, and have some skin in the game. Once you've got buy-in, you are less likely to have dissenters raise their hands at the end of the process and derail all the work that you've gone through to date.



Now that you have everyone's input, do your best to massage the most relevant feedback into your strategy, and then get the naming show on the road.

Let's name.



# 12. Develop

Create quality & quantity



“To get quality *and* quantity, you have to commit blocks of time to naming.”



“Let’s roll up our sleeves.”

Finally, the day has arrived.

WOOHOO!!

You’ve got your naming strategy, your computer, your dictionary, whatever other books and resources that inspire you.

You’re ready to name. So get to it.

This book isn’t about creative techniques for naming. It’s more about the best practices you as a business owner and marketer should go through to ensure naming success.

And ultimately within the actual name generation phase of a naming project, the only piece of advice you need to remember is this:

It’s about *quantity* as much as it’s about *quality*.





A lot of people think that if you create five to ten names, you're good to go. But you'll soon see that based on your strategy, and ultimately based on the screening we recommend you carry out after you develop a batch of names (see Chapter 13), you will need to ramp up the number of ideas you explore well beyond a simple dozen or two.

This may require exploring anywhere from 200 names to 1,000 names at the early stages of the development process. We've even gone up to 4,000 names for projects.

Yes, 4,000.

So to get quality, you need to be focused. Use a thesaurus, books, articles, ads, blogs, out-of-category name examples and brainstorming to inspire your thinking.



Again, continue to jump off the naming strategy and explore it from all sides.

To get quality and quantity, you have to commit blocks of time to naming. So dedicate pockets of your schedule. Carve out an hour here, an hour there, over the course of a week or two and make sure you are focused.

Set goals on volume (e.g. say "I am going to create 50 names right now"), bury your head in the strategy and get inspired. Once you reach your goal, go do something else, and come back to naming later.

So why do we need 100, 1,000 or even 4,000 ideas just to get to one final name out of this process?

Read on.



# 13. Assess

Check the viability of names



“Names are trademarks. Trademarks are property. Don’t mess with other people’s property.”



## “You mean my name is unavailable?”

Names are trademarks. Trademarks are intellectual property. Property is, well... property. And as most of us learned in grade school, you don't mess with other people's property.

That's why you screen the names you have developed during your exploratory. We suggest you walk the ones you think have potential through at least two types of screening.

For US based brands, the first is TESS — The US Patent & Trademark Office's database of registered trademarks. Just search “TESS” and you'll find it. While it's not the most intuitive system, you'll figure it out.

There are more sophisticated, targeted searches you can do to save time in the process, but the easy way is to type it into the database, click search, and review the listings.



This book is not a comprehensive guide on how to search. But a quick tip is that if you are reviewing the listing of a registered mark that is the same name as what you have created, and in the same industry (for example if you make software, and there is already a software company registered under the same name), kill the name.

Unless you have deep pockets (like Apple did to settle the use of the name "iPhone" with Cisco) or are interested in acquiring the company (like Google did with "Android"), it's probably best to move on to another option.

For brands launching outside of the US, it gets more complicated. Most countries have searchable trademark databases. And there are sophisticated (and expensive) trademark search solutions that check multiple databases at once to offer a comprehensive assessment of names globally. We won't get into that here.



The second check we recommend is a simple Google check. Just type the name that you developed into Google and see what the results yield for the first few pages. Is it a completely diluted, generic term — for example “milk,” which could be a cool name for your company but obviously has billions of existing hits all focused on dairy? Evaluate the first 20-30 results.

Once you’ve screened the name alone, check the name with some keywords that describe what your company does. For example “NAME + software,” for a software company, or “NAME + insurance” for an insurance company.

If you see results that show brands operating under the same name, in the same or similar field, in the region or country you want to operate in, this might be a conflict. While it’s almost never black and white, you might want to consider moving on to other options.



URLs are a big hurdle if you want a pure domain name for your company. If you want a pure URL, you'll want to check the availability by typing the name + .COM into your browser and by checking a domain registration site such as GoDaddy.com.

If you're open to a modified URL, come up with a list of modifications (e.g. Go + NAME, My + NAME, Name + descriptor, etc.) and check each of them until you strike gold.

For more information on URLs, check out our blog post entitled "How to Create a Pure, Available .COM Domain Name."

The last type of screening you'll want to carry out is a check in foreign languages. This will help you avoid negative meanings and associations with your names, especially if you are considering a highly coined name.





Contact a translation company to see if they can have native speakers of key languages evaluate the names you are considering. This check is important for global businesses, but also domestic ones. Thanks to the internet, people all over the world can have access and exposure to your company.

Use a spreadsheet to track the results of your screening. It's the easiest way to keep tabs on results for more than a handful of names.

Once you have your results, weed out names with obvious conflicts, and highlight names that seem clear.



## Part 2 Checklist

How to name or rename your company

Have you clarified the scope of your business – for now and for the future?

Do you know your audience? What are their brand preferences and expectations?

Do you have a clear understanding of your competitors? What styles of names are they using? Where's the white space?

Have you written down your new company's value proposition? Do you know what you want to stand for?

Have you pulled all of the above into a clear, coherent naming strategy? Is everyone on board with it?

Did you develop at least 200 names?

Did you screen names for obvious trademark conflicts?





# Part 3.

How to decide on your  
new company name



# 14. Evaluation

Leverage criteria



“Names should map back to your strategy.”



## "Yes, these are good to go."

So you've removed your creative thinking cap and your eyes are glazed over from all the screening results, but you have a list of options that have passed the preliminary trademark screening and now you're ready to shortlist.

Pick the very best names only. In this case, "best" can mean anything. But it should primarily mean the following:

- Names that adhere to all of the basic criteria of good naming:
  - Easy to pronounce
  - Easy to write
  - Easy to remember
- Names should map back to your strategy:
  - Do they communicate key messages that you targeted with the "what you say" portion of your strategy? Which themes, and ultimately names, really are the strongest?



- Do they adhere to the expression, construct and tone direction you established in your strategy? Are they different from the competition?
- Are they relevant to your audience? Is it a name that you think will resonate with them? Compel them to act? Or simply and quickly understand your company?
- Names that veer away from the strategy – essentially they are outliers – but they are magnetic, unexpected and completely fresh amidst all other candidates. You don't always have to include these kind of candidates, but we find they often are useful in the mix.

Names that deliver on the above are what you should deem the "best of the best." That's your shortlist. And keep it to about 10-15 names to share with the rest of your core team. More could confuse people, less might not be enough.



Also, surveys can gauge consumer feedback.

In many cases, we find it helpful to conduct surveys to gauge reactions to names.

Depending on your timing and budget, a name evaluation could be a sophisticated qualitative or quantitative survey, or it could be as informal as asking employees what their thoughts are.

Note that this feedback, although very useful, shouldn't necessarily dictate the final decision. When faced with a range of names in a survey, consumers tend to say they prefer more familiar, expected names, which are not what great brands are built on. If companies always relied on focus group results for a name, there would be no Google, no Nike, no Amazon, no Uber.





Also, the leap from a name in a survey to a fully blown out brand is significant, and consumers don't necessarily see that. But you and your team should.

In short, these surveys should primarily be used to understand how your audience actually reacts to a name, and to help you make a more informed decision about which name to pursue.



# 15. Socialization

Get buy-in



“Seeing the new name in full context bolsters confidence and minimizes potential dissent.”



## “And the new name is...”

When re-naming a company, a big part of the new name's success rests on proper socialization. It's important to keep in mind that every employee of a company feels some ownership of the name, as their employment is a major part of their individual identities.

Whether they love or hate the name, you can bet they'll be talking about it. To ensure your people feel ownership of the new name, there are several steps you can take to empower them to be positive ambassadors.

During the naming process:

- Be transparent: Early on, be open about the process. Offering a presentation — or at least a detailed email — that explains the process and reasons for re-naming will help everyone feel included and prepared for the eventual change.



- Be inclusive: Consider including employees in the naming process.
  - Choose a selection of “influencers” at varying levels in the organization to provide input on what they see as important considerations for the new name. This can be achieved through online surveys, phone interviews or in-person discussions.
  - If you’re handling the naming process internally, consider inviting employees to submit name suggestions. This may or may not produce useful names, but it will certainly help with engagement.

## When the name is set in stone:

- Time it right: Roll out the name internally shortly before rolling it out externally. No one wants to hear about their company’s name change from the media.
- Have your ducks in a row: When it’s time to socialize the name, you should present it with the new word mark and/or logo, and the major pieces of new collateral should



be ready to go. Seeing the new name in full context bolsters confidence and minimize potential dissent.

- Be clear: Announce the name with confidence, and share the story of where the name came from and why it works. Enthusiasm is infectious, and a clear, simple story is priceless.
- Bribe 'em: Seriously, if budget allows, a branded giveaway is a nice token to help employees connect to the new name. Just remember, no one wants a cheap flashlight or a stress ball. Think along the lines of water bottles or hoodie sweatshirts.



# 16. Launch

Ready, set, go



“Before you tell a soul outside your Circle of Trust what the new name is, have the launch planned.”





## “So how do we put the word out?”

Launching a new company name properly can play a big part in the initial success of the name. This is particularly relevant for companies that are changing their name, rather than those just starting off with new everything.

You might have the perfect new name, but if you launch it incorrectly you risk alienating employees, confusing consumers and looking sloppy. On the flip side, if you introduce the name properly, there's a great opportunity to gain a lot of buzz about your name and what the shift represents for the company.

Before you tell a soul outside your “Circle of Trust” what the new name is, make sure you have the following launch steps carefully planned.

1. Brand strategy: Take the time to think deeply about the brand, beyond the name.



What does this change signify for your business? You don't have to share all the details with everyone, but successful rebrands are built on solid strategy. And sharing some of the details publicly will prevent people from making their own assumptions about the reason for the change.

2. Visual and verbal identity: Have your visual identity hammered out, and key applications and touch points ready to go before launch. This will signal that the decision has not been made lightly, minimizing pushback, especially when renaming. Also, it's much easier for people to accept and appreciate a name when it is presented in context as a word mark, with the logo if applicable. If you're doing a full brand relaunch, as many companies do when launching a new name, ensure that copy and communications for the new



brand are on message and on voice. Again, this will signal that this is a well-planned decision and that your ducks are all in a row.

3. Internal communications: Plan a company-wide meeting to explain the new name, the process that you've gone through, how you've received feedback from employees all along the way, and what it means moving forward. This should happen immediately before launching external communications so employees don't find out about the new name from the media.
4. External communications: If renaming, clearly define and explain your reason for changing the name and what the new name means to the business and brand moving forward. You can share this in a press release, letter from the CEO, launch



video, blog post, tweet, or all of the above. These communications should be ready to go immediately following the internal launch.

People may not care about the nitty-gritty details, but they will want to know why the big change is happening. Besides, it's a great opportunity to get some buzz going about what's next for your company.

4. Migration strategy: You might want to migrate from one name to another by providing some context, such as "NEWNAME, formerly OLDNAME," for several months. Before you launch the new name, be sure you've thought this aspect through carefully.



## Part 3: Checklist

How to decide on your new company name

Did you choose a name that maps back to your strategy – or otherwise feels right?

Did you socialize the name appropriately to ensure you have internal allies for the name?

Is your brand strategy clearly defined, and the visual and verbal identity ready to launch?

If you're renaming your company, do you have a clear plan for the internal launch?

Do you have external communication plans ready to go?

If you're renaming, have you decided on a migration strategy?





# Part 4.

## Company naming trends



# 17. Buck or Follow

When to lead, when to follow



If you look at the names of competitors in your category — or at a list of current names in any category — you'll notice trends. It could be anything from silly words in the 90s (think Google, Yahoo) to dropped vowels in the 00s (Motorola's Razr and Krzr, Flickr, Twttr, Bhldn), to simplicity in the 00s (Haagen-Dazs' Five, Vlasic's Farmer's Garden, Kind, Frito-Lay's Simply line). There are a few decisions you'll need to make for your company in order to decide whether current trends are the way to go for your name.

### Fit In or Stand Out?

Do you think it's important to have your name fit in with the competitive landscape in order to be credible? Or is it more important to have your name stand out from the rest to signify that your offering is unique? There's no one-size-fits-all answer here, but asking yourself these questions can help guide your naming.





## Timely or Timeless?

Are you looking for a name that will be instantly cool? Or a name that will stand the test of time? The two definitely do not always intersect. Names like WorldCom, GENICOM and Inacom may have been rad in the 80s, but they became laughably dated in the 90s. Napster, Friendster and Monster were bumpin' names around the turn of the millennium, but now they feel very... turn of the millennium. Think about the goals and longevity of your business when you consider an on-trend name. Microsoft may still be going strong with its oh-so-70s name, but it just doesn't have that timeless feel that Apple has captured.

## Follow the Trend or Buck the Trend?

Did you think we would give you an answer? Unfortunately, we aren't mind-readers. But your answers to the questions posed above should help guide you to the right answer for



your business. There are benefits to fitting in, and benefits to standing out. There are benefits to being timely, and benefits to being timeless. Consider your company's needs carefully to decide whether you want to say yes to the trend.



# 18. Tech Naming

What's going on in tech



If there's one trend that's sweeping across the tech space right now, it's simplicity. Real words — or real close to real words — are where it's at. This is quite refreshing to see after all the coined names we've seen in tech over the past decade, from Flickr to Twtr, Spotify to Friendster, OKCupid to eHarmony.

Today's landscape features a lot of names that were plucked straight from the dictionary — in a smart way — or that otherwise feel very organic.

You've almost certainly heard of Tinder, Uber, Lyft and Nest. If you are even more on the pulse, you have also heard of startups like Handy, Headspace, Thumbtack, Wish, and 8tracks. The wildest names here, Lyft and 8tracks, are downright homespun compared to older names like Zynga.



It will be interesting to see how this trend plays out. Real words are extremely difficult to trademark, and no real word .com domain names are available for immediate purchase, so while this type of name is really lovely, it does carry some major challenges.

That said, some exceptional creativity can get you over the trademark hurdle. An open mind can help you get past the URL challenge — yes, you CAN add a descriptor or another fun word to your domain name (like Tinder did with GoTinder.com), or (horror of all horrors) use an alternate extension such as .co. Or you can get out your checkbook and pay off the squatter.

Legal and financial hurdles aside, this trend is one we can get behind. These real-word names feel pure, natural and smart. And as technology integrates more with humanity, that's something that just feels right.



# 19. B2B Naming

What's going on with B2B brands



Let's face it. B2B companies aren't known for having the coolest names. With top dogs like IBM, SAP and HP, the leaders aren't exactly inspiring.

But it's not all alphabet soup, and it's not all boring. The B2B world is moving away from robotic names like Microsoft and Symantec. Today's B2B companies are finding success with more compelling names that people can connect with. After all, when we're talking "B2B," each of those "Bs" is actually made up of real people.

So if you're thinking your company doesn't need a great name because it isn't consumer-focused, think again. People will see your name, and it will affect their perception of your company. Let's take a look at some myths about B2B naming and how it can be more fun than you might think.



Myth 1: Names are either super silly or super stuffy.

Names don't have to be wacky to be interesting and compelling. For instance, Marketo is a cool name that has a clear reference to its marketing automation software. Zenefits is a clean and honest expression of a simplified HR benefits portal. And Pure Storage is about as descriptive as a name can be, but it's simple clarity is refreshing.

Myth 2: B2B names can't be fun.

Sometimes B2B names can be bizarre, and that can work too! MailChimp is a great example of a fun, crystal clear, successful name. Hootsuite social media management also has a somewhat goofy name, which communicates speed and all-in-one organization. They balance out the playful name by keeping their other brand elements very simple and straightforward.





Myth 3. Compelling names are just a trend.  
It's not just newer B2B companies that have dared to adopt compelling monikers. Intel has become such a ubiquitous name that we sometimes forget it's actually also a really great name! Oracle, too, is a strong and captivating name that has stood the test of time.



# Part 4: Reminders

## Company naming trends



You can follow current naming trends, or buck them. What's right for your business?



For better or for worse, tech naming is ultrasusceptible to trends. Think about whether you want a trendy name or one that will last through multiple decades.



B2B naming does not have to be boring. Your B2B company can have a moniker that is refreshing, compelling, or even fun!



# 20. Templates

Use them!



## “Try using these...”

In the following pages, you will find examples and templates for key content revealed in this book. Let the examples guide you. Use the templates as is, or adapt them to your project. Specific components include:

- **What You Say – Naming Themes**  
A naming theme example and template for you to write your own story and keywords.
- **How You Say It – Expression & Construct**  
The Tanj framework with examples for evaluating the types of expressions and constructs in a naming landscape. Plot your names and your competitor’s names to see trends and areas of differentiation.
- **How You Say It – Brand Tone Mapping**  
A simple framework for mapping the overall tone of brands and names. We’ve included some examples for reference. Customize each axis to the types of tones that are relevant to your field.
- **How To Track Your Names**  
A basic Excel sheet template for tracking name development, screening and shortlisting. This format makes it easy to manage all ideas and information generated throughout the entire project, all in one space.

# What You Say

Naming Theme Example *(referenced on pages 64-67)*

## Surprise & Delight

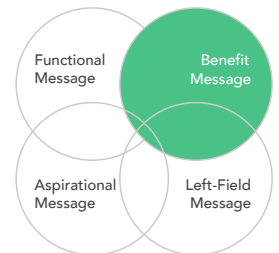
### Story:

In a world of stale agency ideas and cookie cutter processes, we're breaking the mold with a fresh new take on creative. For us, creativity is about making connections that most people wouldn't normally make. For you, it's about building your brand with creative that surprises and delights.



### Keywords:

- Creative
- Quirky
- Fun
- Inventive
- Innovative
- Challenging
- Unique
- Unexpected



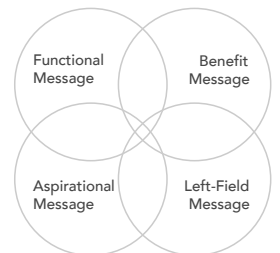
# What You Say

## Naming Theme Template



Templates

Theme Title _____
Story or Explanation _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Keywords _____ _____



# Competitor Analysis

Naming Construct & Expression Examples (referenced on pages 55-57)

Templates

Expression

## Abstract

*(Creates an image of functions and benefits but has no direct connection)*



Firefox

xerox 



*"Atlantic & Pacific"*

## Suggestive

*(Indirectly suggests key benefits or functionality)*



Old Spice



*"Anima Sana In Corpore Sano," Latin for "Healthy soul in a healthy body"*

## Descriptive

*(Directly describes key functionality or benefit)*



JELL-O

howstuffworks



*"International Business Machines"*

Real Word

Composite

Simplex

Phrase

Acronym /  
Alphanumeric

Construct



# Competitor Analysis

## Naming Construct & Expression Template

Templates

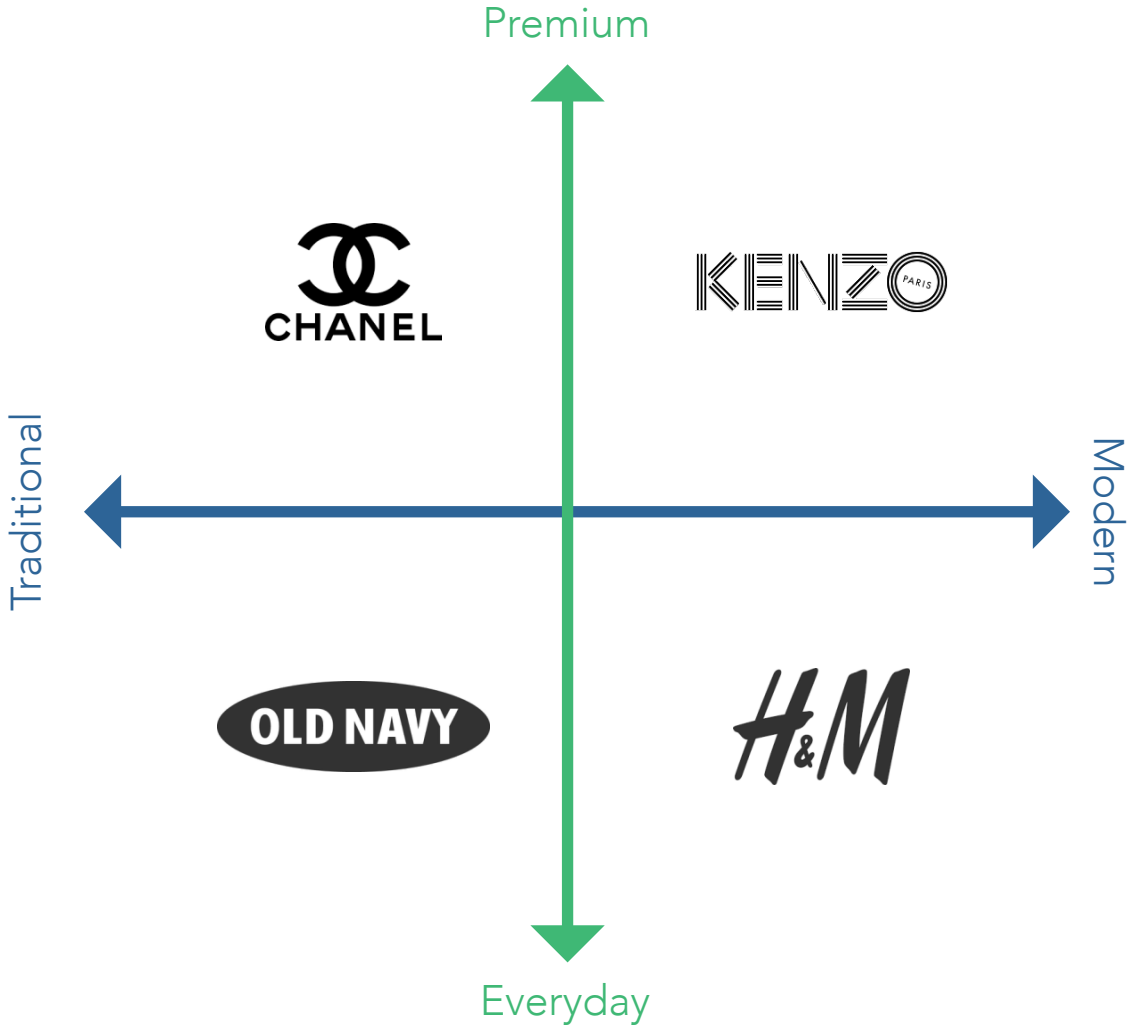
Expression	Abstract					
	Suggestive					
	Descriptive					
		Real Word	Composite	Simplex	Phrase	Acronym / Alphanumeric

Construct



# Competitor Analysis

Brand Tone Mapping Example (a simple way to plot the overall naming tone of competitor's names)

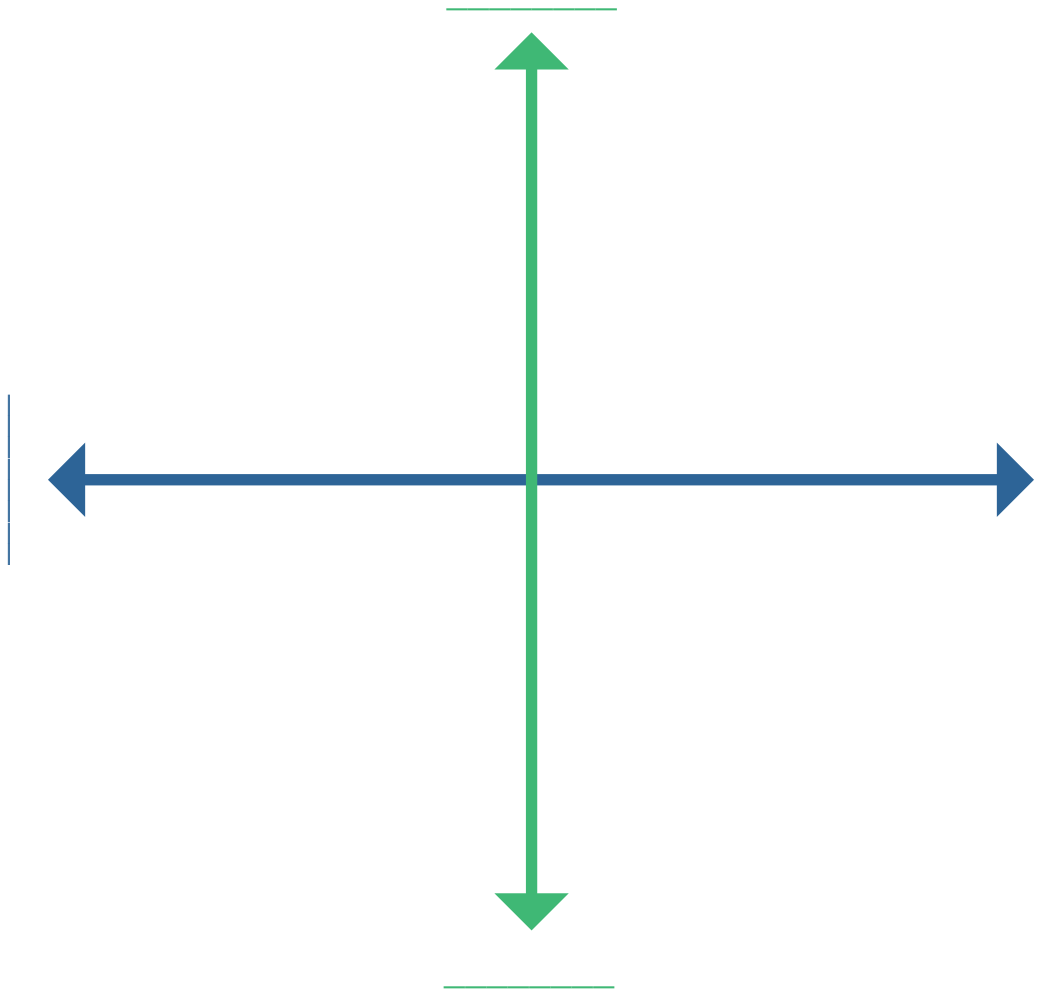


# Competitor Analysis

## Brand Tone Mapping Template



Templates





# How to Track Your Names

Spreadsheet Example (track your work in a spreadsheet similar to this one; it's a quick, stable and efficient way to work with multiple rounds of development and screening results)

Name	Meaning	Theme	TM Screening	Google Screening	Shortlist
<b>2s &amp; 3s</b>	2s company, 3s a crowd	1. Mate	Good	Fair	Yes
<b>Better Half</b>		1. Mate	Good	Poor	
<b>Clique</b>		1. Mate	Good	Good	Yes
<b>Clubhouse</b>		1. Mate	Fair	Poor	
<b>Confetti</b>		1. Mate	Poor	Fair	
<b>Duets</b>		1. Mate	Good	Poor	
<b>GoRound</b>	Mobility	1. Mate	Poor	Good	
<b>Matchmade</b>		1. Mate	Fair	Good	Yes
<b>Q &amp; U</b>	The letter Q is always paired with U	1. Mate	Poor	Good	
<b>Roundabout</b>	An outing	1. Mate	Good	Good	Yes
<b>Taproot</b>	The source	1. Mate	Good	Fair	Yes
<b>Yellowship</b>	Fellowship + Yellow Tail	1. Mate	Good	Poor	
<b>¿Question?</b>		2. Ace	Good	Good	Yes
<b>Argyl</b>		2. Ace	Fair	Poor	
<b>Celestial</b>		2. Ace	Poor	Fair	
<b>Coil</b>		2. Ace	Good	Poor	
<b>Context</b>		2. Ace	Poor	Fair	
<b>Countdown</b>		2. Ace	Fair	Poor	
<b>Decoy</b>		2. Ace	Poor	Good	
<b>Dreamr</b>		2. Ace	Good	Poor	
<b>Embrace</b>		2. Ace	Good	Fair	Yes
<b>Index</b>		2. Ace	Good	Poor	
<b>Inkblot</b>		2. Ace	Fair	Good	Yes
<b>Mirro</b>	Coined from Mirror	2. Ace	Poor	Good	
<b>Query</b>		2. Ace	Good	Good	Yes
<b>R.</b>	R for "Rum"	2. Ace	Poor	Good	
<b>Reverb</b>	Suggests rockstar	2. Ace	Fair	Fair	Yes
<b>Revolv</b>		2. Ace	Poor	Poor	
<b>Short Fuse</b>		2. Ace	Good	Good	Yes
<b>Snare</b>		2. Ace	Tier 1	Poor	
<b>Stylo</b>	Coined from Style	2. Ace	Tier 1	Fair	
<b>Sugarmaker</b>	just because sugar and rum are classy in a fun way, refers to the sugarcane.	2. Ace	Tier 1	Poor	
<b>Wild Shadow</b>		2. Ace	Tier 1	<a href="http://forums.wildshadow.com/node/690">http://forums.wildshadow.com/node/690</a>	



# About the Authors

Meet Scott & Jill



## About the Co-Author

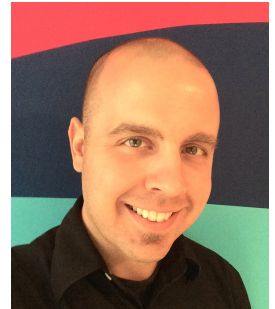
Scott Milano, Owner & Managing Director, Tanj

For more than a decade, Scott has specialized in naming and verbal identity – harnessing the power of language to deliver lasting, tangible impact on his clients’ brands.

His naming and branding experience spans hundreds of clients across most industries in North America and Asia. His credentials include personally naming the Nintendo “Wii” game console and Sony “Bravia” television.

Prior to launching Tanj, Scott honed his naming, branding and writing skills as a creative director of verbal identity at Interbrand in New York and Tokyo.

Scott has a degree in Philosophy and Economics from the University of Maryland, College Park. When he’s not naming something, he’s probably thinking about naming something, fixing up his 100 year-old house or relaxing with his wonderful wife and kids.





## About the Co-Author

Jill Stanewick, Naming Director, Tanj

Jill is an accomplished brand namer, copywriter and linguist. She has a B.S. in Psychology from Virginia Tech and an M.A. in Linguistics from the University of Virginia.

Her background in these fields has helped her create powerful names, slogans, messaging and copy that resonate with audiences global and local.

Prior to joining Tanj, Jill worked as a verbal identity consultant at Interbrand in New York.

There, she created naming and slogan programs for a wide range of clients: from Monster to Microsoft, and from TD Bank to JCPenney.

Jill's joys in life include balcony gardening, cooking and judging brand names.





Good luck with naming your new brand. If you have questions along the way, feel free to drop us a line.

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