

It sells the product by itself

Samuel Clemens, aka Mark Twain, had a unique appreciation for the power and influence of language. He said, “The difference between the almost right word and the right word is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.” In today’s over-communicated global economy, effective verbal brand communication that is achieved through name research is not just important, it is critical.

Before market researchers assume responsibility for any U.S. or international name research initiative, they should have a clear understanding of

what name research can do for their organization. Because name research is a comparatively new category in marketing services, this science is still somewhat undefined and often misunderstood. Perhaps the definition of name research is some-

what fuzzy due to an individual’s perspective, position and frequency of use.

Name research is simply finding the best name for a specific product. At a speaking engagement for the International Trademark Association’s Strategy Forum in New York I explained the overall objective of name research to an audience of trademark attorneys this way: “The goal of effective name research is to choose a product name that reflects and fits the customer’s needs so precisely that the name sells the product.”

Insights into name research

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This article will help you understand how to integrate name research into your organization's marketing strategy. To start with, name research may include parts of any one or all of the following functions:

- point-of-origin for name research project;
- the construction and coordination of a name research brief;
- directing activities for the verbal brand name development;
- foreign-language name research and analysis;
- trademark research coordination;
- marketing research and analysis.

There are three branding components that may be part of your marketing task. However, they are not part of the name research discipline and will only confuse, distract and dilute the name research part of your task. They are: 1) package or trade dress design; 2) logo design or type-

face; and 3) tagline or strapline. These visual branding components should be dealt with only after you select your verbal brand name. When completed in the correct sequence, visual branding will add value to your company's new product initiative.

Begin with a need

All name research initiatives begin with a need. The need for name research may spring up in product development, brand management, market research, advertising, marketing management, legal or even in the executive suite. (A few years ago I was surprised early one Saturday morning when I was contacted at home by an executive from a leading automobile manufacturer, regarding an immediate need to rebrand a vehicle.) Each of these functions within an organization may have its own ideas about how to define name research.

In order to better grasp the meaning of name research, one must first comprehend the distinctions between brand, visual brand and verbal brand. Having a clear understanding of these distinctions will assist in delineating the scope of your name research work.

Brand: Simply, a brand dwells within the part of the human mind that perceives a product's intangible benefits differentiating an otherwise readily substitutable product in a highly customer-relevant way.

Visual brand: A visual brand includes trademarks, such as logos, packaging and trade dress.

Verbal brand: A verbal brand is the name, the language or words used to express your product idea to your customer.

It is important for companies and/or their consultants not to get too far out front in the process of



verbal brand name development and research. First, you need to consider whether your name research assignment requires a brand equity study, package optimization or verbal branding. Each of these missions requires specific expertise and experience. Matching your needs with the correct provider will go a long way towards assuring a timely and successful outcome.

A Google search of “branding company” nets 373,000 hits. Often, consulting groups that refer to their organization as a branding company stretch the definition of name research to match their internal product offerings. Because of the relatively low frequency of branding projects in some companies and the expertise required, the majority of branding work is outsourced. It is important to understand your internal needs and match those needs with the specific expertise that’s required in the proper sequence.

Clearly communicate

A key requirement for a name research brief is to clearly communicate the project’s scope, geography and scheduling objectives. These prerequisites return us to the meanings of brand, visual brand and verbal brand. Is the project a study of an existing brand? Is your company a multi-brand marketer that is consolidating, eliminating or optimizing an existing brand? Or is the task at hand to update the visual brand with a new logo, packaging or trade dress? Has your company innovated a new product that requires a new verbal brand or extended a product line that requires a new verbal sub-brand?

What is the realistic geographical marketing potential of your brand? The product brand team may have global aspirations; however, down-to-earth financial realities may suggest a more focused strategy. Setting geographic objectives will provide guidelines for name development, foreign-language interpretations, trademark ownership, market research and project scheduling.

Constructing a brief that precisely defines the project’s scope and geog-

raphy will effectively lay the foundation for long-term success. Additionally, you must determine which parts of the project will be carried out internally and which tasks need to be performed by consultants. Budgeting and scheduling are integral to making a name research project run smoothly.

Historical perspective

Assuming that directing a verbal brand naming project is a part of your name research project, it helps to understand verbal branding from a historical perspective. From the 1950s to the 1980s verbal branding was, more often than not, an afterthought. Advertising in the mass media, primarily on network television, was the driving brand-building strategy for the mass market. Product, service and company names typically originated within companies and were created by product developers, sales, marketing, executive management and even corporate founders. Outside the corporate domain, advertising agencies may have direct input to the process. Just about any verbal brand name would have succeeded during this era. Remember Hydrox cookies?

Then something changed. It is what I have referred to in industry speeches as a “disruption in the traditional marketing four-*Ps* model.” From 1980 to the present day, the following four marketing disruptions have occurred.

Product - choice explosion

1980: The average store had 5,000 products.
2008: A Wal-Mart SuperCenter has 150,000 products.

Place - channel consolidation

1980: There were hundreds of local and regional retailers.
2008: Wal-Mart sells almost 25 percent of Procter & Gamble’s total volume. Others such as Kroger, Amazon, LensCrafters and Home Depot are consolidators in their respective markets.

Promotion - media fragmentation

1980: Three major television networks (ABC, NBC and CBS) have the controlling market share. A frequency of three television commercials has an 80 percent reach. Today it takes a frequency of 100 commercials to reach the same audience.
2008: The Internet, hundreds of cable channels and interactive media dominate the

shrinking audiences of network television and large city newspapers.

Price - commodity/private-label

1980: Pricing was a tactic, e.g., auto rebates.
2008: Pricing is a strategy. The new Tata Nano automobile from India is three meters long, seats four comfortably, does 65 m.p.h., gets 50 miles per gallon and is the same price as the DVD player in a Lexus.

The disruption in the traditional marketing model has transformed the task of verbal brand naming from afterthought to forethought, increasing both its priority and difficulty.

If a verbal brand name is the foundation on which your brand’s business will be built, what are the communication building blocks that will provide support? Certainly, perceived differentiation, memorability and purchase intent should be mandatory. Additionally, salient product attributes should be included and later utilized as independent variables as a part of the market research analysis.

The verbal brand name is the only clear, identifiable aspect of the product that your customer uses in selection and purchase.

All brands are global

Today, all brands are global in the wired and wireless world of Internet communications. Your company’s branded products are easily accessible worldwide, even if your company is primarily a domestic marketer. Right now you can go to Amazon.com and order HobNobs, a popular milk chocolate candy from the U.K., or find Japanese Hello Panda biscuits for sale. Consider that an eBay shopper in Venice, Italy, sees basically the same screen as someone logging in from Venice, Calif. The verbal brand name is the same, only the language is different.

Remember that one of the key components of the brief is to define geography. If your marketing area is defined as the U.S., North America, Europe or Asia, foreign-language name research and analysis is critical. Misinterpretation or implied negativity can lead to an embarrassing failure and retreat from the

marketplace.

A commonly-cited naming *faux pas* is the textbook case of Chevrolet's Nova introduction in South America. Although there is some controversy regarding the name's impact, if any, on Latin American sales, the name "no va," if pronounced as such, can mean "it won't go."

The Coca-Cola brand was introduced to China as Ke-ke-ken-la. Imagine the shocker when Coca-Cola's printed signs translated to "bite the wax tadpole" or "female horse stuffed with wax," depending on the dialect. After researching 40,000 Chinese characters that could be a phonetic equivalent, Coca-Cola brand managers settled on, "ko-kou-ko-le," which can be loosely translated as "happiness in the mouth."

Perhaps the most astonishing conversation I have had regarding foreign-language translations was with Sigvaid Baerentzen from the WaterPik-Neodent Company in Denmark. In the Danish language, the translation for "pik" is male genitals. "Water" translates to "vand." Thus the translation is "Vandpik" or Danish slang for morning erection. When I asked Baerentzen why they did not modify the name WaterPik for his country, he told me, "The greatest advantage is that dentists and consumers do not forget the name when they have heard it only one time."

Some of our firm's recent foreign-language name research and analysis has resulted in veering away from an array of names. Verbal brand names that were suitable for North American markets held the potential for global misfire. A few examples include a verbal brand name in Hebrew that sounded too similar to a baby food in Israel that had recently been linked to infant deaths and illnesses; a name for Arabic-speaking markets that sounded too Jewish; another that translated in Hindi to "devil" or "demon;" one in French that had an association with "nudity" or "naked;" and a German name for a service-related product that translated to "com-

plaint."

There are essentially five choices when considering your global linguistic strategy:

1. Enter the market with the country of origin verbal brand name.
2. Phonetically-translated verbal brand name.
3. Directly-translated verbal brand name.
4. Combination of original verbal brand name and phonetic translation.
5. Combination of original verbal brand name and direct translation.

From a cultural perspective, consumers by and large prefer "home-grown" or domestic verbal brand names. In major markets with large GDPs such as the U.S., U.K., Germany and Japan, the appeal of national verbal brands is exceptionally strong. However, global brands are very acceptable within certain categories of products.

Consumer electronics from Asia, including products marketed by Sony, Samsung and Panasonic, are flourishing globally. German performance auto brands Mercedes and BMW, and U.S. motorcycle marketer Harley-Davidson are strong global players. At the same time that Japan's Toyota has achieved market share in the U.S., Korean automakers Hyundai and Kia find the U.S. market difficult to penetrate. NameQuest research indicates that Hyundai is perceived as too foreign and as having quality issues, and KIA is a U.S. military acronym for "killed in action." Because of the ongoing U.S. military presence in Korea and potential for a nuclear confrontation in the North, the Kia brand and potential "killed in action" negative associations may be problematic.

Identify and distinguish

The term "trademark" is often used interchangeably to identify a trademark or service mark. A trademark is defined by the International Trademark Association as any word (Poison), name (Giorgio Armani), symbol or device (the Pillsbury Doughboy), slogan ("Got Milk?"), package design (Coca-Cola bottle)

or combination of these that serves to identify and distinguish a specific product from others in the marketplace or in trade. Even a sound (NBC's chimes), color combination, smell or hologram can be a trademark under some circumstances.

Each day in the U.S., the average consumer will come into contact with about 1,500 trademarked products. If that consumer goes to the supermarket, the trademark contacts increase to 35,000. A trademark as an intangible asset may have more intrinsic value than a company's physical plant. What is more valuable: the ownership of the Coca-Cola trademark or the ownership of the bottling plants?

Five reasons why trademarks are important:

1. They add shareholder value.
2. They differentiate your product.
3. They define your territory.
4. They are your sign of continuity.
5. Patents expire, copyrights run their course, but trademarks last forever.

Because the ownership of a trademark creates value for your organization, it is vitally important that your legal team or trademark attorney be involved in the process. The verbal brand name development generally works within the realm of marketing terms. From a legal perspective, your trademark attorney will scrutinize your names with variations of what I refer to as the naming spectrum:

1. Fanciful/neologisms - "invented" names
Advantage: strong legal protection
Disadvantage: Cost of educating the public
2. Associative - indirect communication
Advantage: communicates message plus legal protection
Disadvantage: public needs some education - may confuse
3. Descriptive - communicates directly
Advantage: immediate communication to the customer
Disadvantage: may be less distinctive and less protectable

Because the Internet has attained

a predominant place on the media landscape, securing a .com domain name plays a significant role as a part of your brand's intellectual property portfolio. Trademarks provide a basis for businesses to effectively exploit the Internet as a communications tool. Your trademark can provide your customers with a top-of-mind Internet address as a means to research you company and its products and services.

The World Intellectual Property Organization in Geneva, Switzerland, provides annual reporting regarding the international trademark activities of the 81 Madrid Union member nations. Global trademark registrations were up 9.5 percent in 2007. Companies based in Germany, France and the U.S. were the leading nations in filing for registrations.

Today, consumers in developed countries everywhere are confused by the sheer number of product and service choices. Take an infrequently purchased service such as health care. If today you had to buy a new health insurance policy, what company would you choose? Therefore, your service or product name must communicate verbally. But how will you know if you made the right choice in selecting a verbal brand name?

Ask your customer.

Somewhat risky

One of the most astonishing discoveries I made in the early years at NameQuest was that nearly all of the Fortune 500 corporations I encountered did not conduct any validated market research on verbal brand names. Given that many of these organizations invested significant sums on new product launches, it seemed somewhat risky to me to move forward without testing the viability of the product's name.

The primary objective of testing verbal brand name candidates is to determine the name(s) that will most effectively sell your product. For your name research to be unbiased and to provide reliable and actionable results, do not include a name test component with another research assignment. This is especially important in a focus group setting. For example, on one occasion I was behind the glass watching a client's focus group in San Francisco. The group's primary task was to evaluate a new food product. After a wide-ranging discussion and taste tests, near the end of session participants were asked to evaluate product names. After discussing a couple of name choices, the group

became visibly enthusiastic about the third name. The contingent from the company and its advertising agency stood up, applauded, gave some high-fives and made a decision. The problem here was that this verbal brand naming decision was emotional not rational.

High priority

As a market researcher, removing the internal emotional decision-making aspect should be a high priority. The best method of mitigating partiality is to look at a quantitative solution. Quantitative research that provides more than a visceral understanding of the verbal brand names will assist in making a rational determination. A research instrument designed to capture salient marketing intelligence such as memorability, fit-to-concept, pronounce-ability and purchase intent can provide management with actionable information.

The role of name research in the global economy will continue to grow in importance. The competition for your new products today may not be your true competition. The biggest challenge for your new product may be competing for the attention of your customer. Having an insight into name research will help. | Q