



Names and Brands

What is a Brand?

“Our biggest asset is four letters: S-O-N-Y.”

Norio Ohga, Chairman of the Board, Sony Corporation

For your brand development efforts to succeed in today’s dynamic and fiercely competitive markets, it is crucial to understand the relationship between names and brands.

As has been said about other world-class brands, if all of Sony’s other assets disappeared in a flash, it could begin to rebuild instantly on the strength of its powerful brand. The name, however, is not the brand. Those four letters, derived from the Latin *sonus*, for sound, and the name of the company’s flagship transistor radio, are an invaluable brand asset because they now represent something distinctive and meaningful. No matter how extensively the company diversifies, the name Sony boldly and simply signals, to a global audience, a brand promise of ingenuity and high standards.

Metaphor defines brand as the essential distinguishing characteristics that differentiate one company, product, or service from another company, product, or service. In a competitive marketplace, a nexus of brand attributes and associations creates a certain set of expectations – promises to be delivered on – in the hearts and minds of the company’s or product’s various audiences. Successful brand-building begins and ends with communication of that promise.

What constitutes a brand is ultimately defined and supported by an organization’s leadership and internal culture, by the quality of and benefits offered by its products and services, and by how it responds to new or changing customer and marketplace needs. A meaningful brand provides a company with direction and clarity of purpose and offers customers, partners, employees, and the financial community a reason to prefer it to others. To signal what a company or product represents, a brand has to clearly convey believable brand attributes and relevant associations in a language both verbal and visual.

And Yet, the Name is Not the Brand

Frequently at brand strategy meetings, marketers will eagerly exclaim, “We’re going to become the industry standard. We want to be the Kleenex of our category. We need a name like Kleenex!” This is a lofty, bold, and admirable goal, worthy of pursuit, but the critical difference between the desired end result and the tools required to reach it has, in this scenario, been lost – the marketers are confusing the brand with the name.

How did Kleenex become the industry standard of the facial tissue category? The same way any brand comes to dominate a category – by being the first big brand recognized in its field, by providing what is perceived to be a quality product and service, by keeping current with the changing requirements of the times, and by promoting consistent and appealing brand messages.



The Kleenex *name* contributed to the brand's success by providing Kimberly-Clark's marketers with a strong and protectable trademark that captured the product's primary user benefit, cleanliness. But the powerful Kleenex *brand* was built through years of concerted marketing efforts by Kimberly-Clark.

Those eager marketers, then, probably don't really need a name like Kleenex – a name beginning with the letter K, ending in X, employing a phonetic spelling of the benefit “clean.” What they do need is a name that will enable them to build a brand that can dominate their category. The right name can indeed help them achieve that goal, through clear, compelling, and consistent communication of their own core brand messages.

The Role of the Name in Brand Development

Standing apart from your competition is more important than ever before. Brands today must struggle for survival in crowded, frantic, and noisy markets. The advent of the Internet has raised the decibel level even higher. To be noticed, you have to be heard. But cranking up the volume isn't the answer.

Engaging brand introductions begin with “What's it called?” and long-term relationships are often predicated on the answer. As your company or product name is often the first “point of contact” your target audience has with your brand, a good name is a fundamental branding tool and can serve as an anchor for all your brand-building efforts. The right name helps you communicate the value of your brand proposition in a simple, succinct, and engaging manner; to attract the attention of your target market it must illuminate a distinctive positioning.

To be understood and preferred, your organization, product or service must communicate, verbally and visually, a clear and compelling positioning. Real brand personality has to be quickly established and a genuine point of differentiation compellingly articulated. To become well-known and highly regarded you need not speak more loudly nor more often, but rather speak more clearly and directly with your target audience, always using your own unique voice.

For example, the Cheerios name positively communicates both a happy experience and the “o-ness” of the cereal product. The “Apple” of corporate name Apple Computer communicates the brand attributes of simplicity and approachability, key differentiators between Apple and its PC competitors. And the Jaguar name communicates “out of the ordinary,” powerful performance, and sleek design, important attributes of that luxury car brand. Such apt and evocative names communicate key brand messages, providing long-term focus for branding efforts and offering consumers a way to recognize, know, understand, and appreciate a brand from among the sea of its competitors. They are an articulation of a meaningful brand promise.



What Makes a Great Brand Name?

How can you determine a name's potential for successfully building your brand? At Metaphor, we evaluate the effectiveness of name candidates based on the following criteria:

Basic Criteria

Is the name –

- appropriate?
for the endeavor, and credible in a competitive context
- appealing?
pleasing to the eye and ear
- distinctive?
unique among your competitive set
- unambiguous?
easy to spell and pronounce
- available?
ownable and useable in key markets

Great Name Criteria

Does the name –

- speak to the target audience?
addressing real market needs and expectations
- map to defined strategic objectives?
illuminating your competitive stance and advancing marketing objectives
- evoke unique character and personality?
providing a cornerstone for your other brand-building efforts
- communicate key benefits, not features?
ensuring relevance and longevity
- inspire promotional and advertising campaigns?
generating market interest and engaging the target audience



Even a great name, however, is not the right name unless it is also appropriate to the culture, internal and external, to which it belongs. The right name for your brand is one that fits “from the inside out,” resonating as powerfully with those who must “speak” the brand as among those who will “hear” it.

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