

Strategy Considerations For Naming Of Products Or Services

Increasingly, the selection of a name for a new or re-branded product, service, company or other institution is becoming the subject of more careful investigation.

The growing recognition that there is a relationship between product/service brand name and its success in the marketplace has lessened the willingness of management to rely on hunch, and has caused more emphasis to be placed on the systematic development, selection, and testing of likely name candidates.

General Principles

First, the brand* must clearly stipulate the basic strategic platform for the offering – i.e., the core concept, or mission – as a standard against which new names can be generated or, if candidates already exist, against which they can be evaluated. Testing then must be conducted among all pertinent brand constituencies, and the most promising names subject to further assessment based on executive, marketing and legal judgments, as appropriate.

In the course of the process it is important to note that a product or brand name does not function “in a vacuum.” There is need for unity, clarity and distinctiveness in a brand’s total stance. This helps customers and other stakeholders relate to the brand with greater speed and involvement, thereby optimizing its chances in a competitive marketplace.

Within the general framework described above, new name candidates should...

- ... be “product related”; that is, appropriate (or at least neutral) in terms of the brand offering.
- ... communicate no negative meanings, directly or indirectly, that (could) pertain to the brand.
- ... be easy to remember.

Screening and Testing

Once an initial pool of name candidates has been generated – by company personnel, outside professional sources, or customers – they should be reduced by preliminary screening to a manageable number. Usually, a certain proportion can be eliminated at the outset on judgmental, logical or legal grounds. Then some additional candidates might be weeded out for failing to meet certain special criteria custom-tailored for the brand under consideration. Finally, if needed, the least promising of the surviving candidates can be identified by preliminary consumer screening. Experience suggests that the final list of candidates should be subdivided into groups of not more than five or six names each for market testing.

*For editorial convenience, in this paper “brand” is used to refer to the name of the product, service, company or other institutional entity at issue.

If sterile results are to be avoided, name research should be qualitative and interpretive as well as quantitatively sound. Creativity as well as scientific discipline is required to identify strong candidates and also to learn how best to capitalize on them. Thus, in addition to presenting respondents with a list of desired characteristics (e.g., “high quality,” “established,” “good value,” “up to date,” etc.) and asking them to associate certain test names with these characteristics, spontaneous unstructured attributions also should be elicited and then analyzed to determine in what context or along what dimensions respondents position a given name.

We have found six dimensions that are especially useful in obtaining and verifying this kind of information. Questioning on these various dimensions may be included in one master interview or administered separately to different constituent segments:

- **Connotations, associations and feelings.** The pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral meanings and reactions that the name evokes.
- **Product relatedness.** The kinds of “products” (types, classes) that come to mind and the product characteristics (objective and subjective) communicated by the name.
- **Memorability.** The manner, order and degree of accuracy with which the name candidates are recalled, including the ease with which they are remembered.

- **Direct evaluation.** The degree to which a name per se is liked and preferred.
- **Audio clarity.** The degree of ease or difficulty involved in the pronunciation and aural apprehension of the name. This test is important, since inflection, mispronunciation and attendant embarrassment can detract from otherwise positive qualities of a name.
- **Visual clarity.** The degree to which the name attracts (favorable) attention, is clear and recognizable in various settings and conditions – especially in relation to the communications approaches and vehicles likely to be employed.

Let Us Help

Business management is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of name selection in strategic planning. Checklist, formulaic, or other types of “canned” research approaches do not meet the requirements of good name planning and selection. DRI’s name research experience has shown that a rigorous and systematic program of custom-tailored market research not only leads to optimum name selection, but also yields dividends in leads for promotional themes and other aspects of marketing strategy.

DIALOGUE
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