

What's in a name? Everything!

Scott Clark

What do "Tender Lubing Care," "Wok and Roll," "Madison Hair Garden" and "The Filling Station" have in common? They are all effective business names (at the end of this column you can verify what these business are).

The name you select says so much about your company, yet new business owners often try for something cute, poetic, or personal rather than taking the time to develop an appropriate name for their business.

The name you select for your business conveys a specific image. Make sure it is the image you want. Suppose you looked up restaurants in the yellow pages and saw "Red's Diner" listed? You'd probably envision a very informal greasy spoon. What about "Twin Pines Supper Club?" Seeing this name conjures up images of enjoying a multi-course dinner in a more formal environment.

Then there are the business names that don't convey anything. Consider a business named "Jay's Jabberwocky." You really have no idea what this business does or sells.

To create a business name with the power to draw customers and imprint itself in their memories, try the following:

Write a sentence describing your business and what it sells. Decide what customers you want to attract and what you want the business name to accomplish. Study trade journals and industry articles to identify key words and phrases commonly used in your business that your customers would recognize.

To create a list of candidate names, consider some of the following techniques:

1. Have the name describe the business you are in. If you own a well-known established business with its name and advertising splashed all over the media, you may be able to violate this rule; otherwise don't take the chance.
2. Make the name memorable, not crazy or idiotic, but strive for a moniker with a natural tie-in. Names that incorporate puns or plays on words that everyone understands can be effective in capturing the attention of potential customers. When a name has a double meaning, people will ponder both the name and the nature of the business, and this may translate into increased sales.

Los Angeles florist Aron Benon changed the name of his flower shop from "The French Flower Market" to "Floral and Hardy" and his phone-in sales took off. Other examples: "Twice Told Tales" is a used book shop, and "Mud Sweat and Gears" is a bicycle shop. Before you go to "Hamburg Inn," you know what is on the menu; before you go to "The Salty Dog," you aren't quite so sure.

3. Even though you like the sound of your own name and may want to use it for the business, never use it by itself. Business names like "Abigail's" or "Phillip's" or "Richardson's" don't tell you anything about the business, while "Sam's Security Systems" and "Connie's Pies" are much more informative.

Next, write up a list of candidate names. Resist the temptation to select the best one on your own. You want to choose the name that will play the best with potential customers, so test these candidates on friends,

associates and potential customers to determine which name is most meaningful and memorable. Also make sure the name will not be confused with those of existing companies.

Once you have the best candidate selected, consult a business attorney. If you will only be doing business locally, you will want the trade name registered in the county courthouse. However, if you plan on a regional or national business, you should ask your attorney to conduct a trademark search to ensure your proposed name will not infringe upon any other businesses.

Finally, launch your newly named business. If you have named it well, the business name will be an effective marketing tool to bring in future customers.

(The businesses mentioned at the beginning of this column are an automotive service center, a Chinese takeout restaurant, a hair salon, and a dental center.)

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