

## Who Thought of That Name?!

Burger King, Coca-Cola, JCB, Nike, Sony or Virgin – no matter what the brand, someone, somewhere, sometime created the names now recognised instantly by millions of loyal customers. David Rivett of Design Bridge, responsible for many new product development projects and the creation of brand names, believes that all too often clients focus on the physical properties of their new products – features, size, colours, quality, operation – at the expense of name consideration, which is ‘tacked on’ to the new product development process just prior to launch. Branding consultancies believe that creating the right atmosphere and having a very clear understanding of both client culture and target market characteristics are fundamental to the creation of a suitable brand name. Very often a creative workshop is used by the consultancy to probe the minds of the client personnel in order to establish buzzwords or emotive trigger descriptions for the new product that may be incorporated into the brand name. The name for Anchor’s So Soft new spreadable butter was created in this way.

The real difficulty comes not from creating a suitable name, but in registering the preferred choice. Intellectual property lawyers now specialise in trademark registration and searching. Qualitative research, such as focus groups, often throws up many brand names consumers believe might be appropriate. Marketing strategy workshops amongst managers in a company frequently do the same. The result is that some organisations compile extensive lists of names with potential for their types of product, which are then registered, even though at the time there is no expectation of using these names. Companies such as Cadbury’s and Ford have large lists of already registered brand names which at some time they may use but that are no longer available to any other company. This is not ‘sharp practice’, merely a logical extension of marketers hearing good suggestions from colleagues, distributors and consumers and marking them down for possible future use.

Another consideration for branding consultancies is how the new product’s name will work alongside the client’s umbrella brand. For example, Novon is given independence from owner Sainsbury’s, and Cap Colombie from Nescafé; whereas the Focus, Mondeo and Fiesta names are very much tied to the Ford umbrella brand. There is no right or wrong in this dilemma. Some companies, such as Sainsbury’s with Novon, want to create sub-brands that, in the eyes of target consumers, are apparently free-standing. For Ford, the logic of cross-promotion and economies of scale in creating brand awareness have persuaded senior marketers to always utilise the Ford brand alongside the individual model name.

Most brand names are, at some point in the creation process, tested out on consumers, but according to leading branding consultancy Interbrand Newell & Sorrell, such tests have to be carefully constrained so as not to allow consumer suggestions to set the process back to square one. The research, argues Interbrand, should identify profoundly incorrect name suggestions, rather than present consumers with a blank sheet of paper for totally new suggestions. Interbrand’s Nometrics testing methodology is well respected in the branding fraternity. First, names are tested in isolation of any product or service. Consumers are invited to nominate likely products to be associated with the suggested names. In the second stage of the Nometrics

process, names are linked overtly to specific products, and the research gauges the views of consumers and the likelihood that they will purchase products that are so named. Ultimately, a good name cannot overcome product deficiencies, poor distribution, ineffectual promotion, incorrect pricing or inferior customer service, nor can it combat the superiority of a competitor's marketing strategy. A poor, inappropriate, confusing, unmemorable or misleading name can, though, do much harm to an otherwise good product offering.

Sources: Peter Doyle, 2001; Tom Blackett, Interbrand Newell & Sorrell; Deborah Carter, Dragon; David Rivett, Design Bridge; Colin Mechan, FLB; Paul Gander, 'Generation game', Marketing Week, 22 October 1998, pp. 45-8; Prophet, 2004; Interbrand, 2004.