

Choosing The Right Business Name

By Ramona Creel

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Sometimes, new entrepreneurs are in such a rush to get started at their businesses that they jump right into working with customers without giving much thought to their BUSINESS NAME. "I'll just do business under my own name for a while, until I find something I like." While it seems easy at the time, you might want to re-think the plan to change business names down the road. You will find that, as your professional recognition and customer base grow, people have started to IDENTIFY you with the name of your company. A name change in mid-stream can be costly and confusing.

First, you will lose ground in the marketing arena -- it takes time and effort to build up BRAND RECOGNITION, and that time is lost when you change names. You may also lose customers to the competition -- what are they to think when they go looking for "Joe's Mobile Car Wash" in the yellow pages and you've changed your name to "Fast and Easy Auto Detailing?" They might think that you've gone out of business and it's time to find someone else to clean their cards. And finally, changing names can cause you increased PAPERWORK and EXPENSE -- changing your bank accounts, credit cards, marketing materials, incorporation documents, DBA registration, etc. So why not get it right the first time? Here are some suggestions for choosing a business name that will serve you well for years to come.

IS IT MEMORABLE?

When people hear the name of your company, will they be able to REMEMBER it 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 3 hours, or a week later? When they decide to hunt you up on the web or in the phone book, will they be able to easily recall your business name? It doesn't matter if you are choosing a fictitious business name or using your own -- the same rules apply. Your name should be UNIQUE enough that it will stick in a potential customer's mind -- "Smith's Gym" isn't going to be nearly as easy to remember as "Work That Body."

You also want to stay away from names that are likely to be CONFUSED with another company. You may think it's a cute idea to come up with a name that closely resembles (without exactly copying) another company's name. But calling your personal coaching company "Joys-R-Us" is confusing, unoriginal, and likely to bring about a lawsuit! And beware of phrases or ACRONYMS that are overused in your profession. You wouldn't believe how many Professional Organizers use some combination of words that spell out SOS (usually "Someone's Organizing Solutions"). Your company will stand out more if your name is truly unique.

IS IT EASY TO SPELL?

However, the next question is “when they do recall it, is it easy enough to spell that they can immediately find your listing?” You want to stay away from challenging spellings and pronunciations. Calling your restaurant “Phine Phoods” is just asking for trouble -- how is your customer going to know to look under “p” instead of “f” in the phone book? And if your last name is Piccalopoupoulis, you may be better off creating a fictitious business name. A good rule of thumb to follow is to pay attention to what happens when you tell other people your name -- if you are always having to SPELL or PRONOUNCE it slowly, it will be hard for people remember and find later on.

This is particularly important if you are planning to turn your business name into a DOMAIN name. Websites with long or hard-to-spell names get overlooked during standard searches. And try to avoid having to include a hyphen or underscore in your name to make it appropriate for the web. Short, snappy, easy-to-remember names work best in the translation from brick-and-mortar to internet.

DOES IT DESCRIBE YOUR COMPANY?

Will customers learn something specific, unique, or descriptive about your business, just from hearing the name? Will they get a feel for WHAT you provide or HOW you provide it? Many individual service providers try to sound like high-end firms by using some derivative of their first and last name for their company identity – “Joanna Carrol and Associates,” or “JC Consulting,” or “Carroll and Company.” But what does that really tell a potential customer about your company? I don’t know if you are an insurance agent or an attorney or a professional organizer. Include something in your name that describes your product or service -- “JC Graphic Design” -- so customers aren’t left WONDERING what type of business you have.

You can also include some information about those special CHARACTERISTICS that make your business DIFFERENT from the competition. Okay -- so you’ve told me that you are a printer. Why should I hire you instead of the printer down the street? You might be faster, cheaper, provide better quality, have more experience, offer a higher-end product, or provide more services than the other guy. If it’s appropriate and pertinent, include one or two of those traits -- “JC Full-Service Graphic Design” -- in your name.

DOES IT LIMIT YOU?

If you are joining an industry that allows for “branching out,” be careful about giving your company a name that traps you in a very small service area. For example, a company that starts out putting in tile floors -- but has plans to expand into vinyl, hardwood, and carpeting down the road -- wouldn’t want a name like “TileMasters.” Something more along the lines of “FloorMasters” will give the company the FLEXIBILITY they need to grow and change later on.

And if you have intentions of ever expanding your service area, you need to be careful about a GEOGRAPHICALLY limiting business name. “Hair Over Atlanta” isn’t going to work as well when you open locations in Seattle and Los Angeles and New York. Be sure to check the US Patent And Trademark Office’s online database (<http://tess.uspto.gov>) to make sure your name is available for national use before you start printing it on your cards.

You also have to stop and think about whether naming your company after yourself -- “Bob’s Bar and Grill” -- will limit you in a different way. If you have ever read “The E-Myth” by Michael Gerber, you know that having customers identify your business as an EXTENSION of you brings about its own special pitfalls. You become indispensable to the company -- people get used to seeing Bob behind the counter every night and that’s what makes it “Bob’s” -- the business can’t run without you. And if you ever decide that you want to take a break, let someone else run the place on your behalf, or sell the company, you will run into a roadblock. Quite often, what seems like a great way

to PERSONALIZE your business ends up turning it into a stone around your neck.

This business is your baby, your investment in the future, and you will have it with you (hopefully) for a long time. Don't short-change your business by skipping out on one of the most important steps you will take during start-up -- selecting just the right name.

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Ramona Creel is a Professional Organizer and the founder of OnlineOrganizing.com -- a web-based one-stop shop offering everything that you need to get organized at home or at work. At OnlineOrganizing.com, you may get a referral to an organizer near you, shop for the latest organizing products, get tons of free tips, and even learn how to become a professional organizer or build your existing organizing business. And if you would like to read more articles about organizing your life or building your business, get a free subscription to the "Get Organized" and "Organized For A Living" newsletters. Please visit <http://www.onlineorganizing.com> or contact Ramona directly at <mailto:ramona@onlineorganizing.com> for more information.

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