



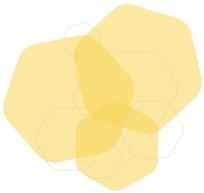
10 RULES

FOR NAMING YOUR BRAND

An OntoBox Training Strategy Guide

10 RULES FOR NAMING YOUR BRAND

Naming your startup isn't the easiest thing to do...for some people. It's easy for us, but for those who don't understand the principles of branding and market positioning, naming your startup can actually be quite confusing. Or worse, some people fall in love with startup names that stink and are none the wiser. Avoid that fate; make sure your brand has a name that's ready for war (and business, of course) with these ten rules for naming your brand.



One more note before we begin: Some very successful companies—including Apple—have broken these rules. But keep in mind that you are not them. Furthermore, some companies can succeed in spite of mistakes, so they hardly serve as counter examples for breaking the rules.

I TAKE YOUR TIME

I was at a going away party a few years ago for Marc Nathan, one of Houston's (then Baltimore's, now Austin's) startup leaders. What I enjoyed most about the party was meeting like-minded innovators who really sought to make a difference in the Houston startup scene. But what I was perhaps most pleasantly surprised by was a conversation I had with an entrepreneur who was NOT directly in the marketing space, in which I was told some advice the source once received from a mentor:

"There are only so many things you can control on behalf of your business...and your name is one of them."

I couldn't agree more. The name of your business carries real weight and impacts your success, so meditate on it. Come up with a long list of names. One of two things will happen: either lightning will strike for one name when you add it to the list, or one of the names will continually grow on you until you love it. (For the record, RedShift Writers grew on me).

Either way, let creativity do its work. Take your time naming your startup.

2 ENOUGH WITH THE ACRONYMS

Acronyms aren't pretty. Some companies switch to them because there is an impression that acronyms are cool. Others make the move to solve problems (i.e., GE's decision to avoid the generic by going by GE rather than General Electric).

Keep in mind that your startup name is not always what people will call you. McDonald's is Mickey D's. Buffalo Wild Wings is B-Dubs. Budweiser becomes Bud.

Let your customers hand out nicknames. Name your startup something more full-body.

3 AVOID THE CURSE OF THE GENERIC

You would never name a person "*Human*", right? Or a dog "*dog*"? So don't name your company "*Texas Oil Services*." It may be friendly for SEO, but it hampers you in the real field of optimization: psychology.

Your brain can only index so much. The information that stands out sticks around. The information that blends in disappears.

Keep in mind that very few market leaders are generics:

- Google is a math term. It has nothing to do with search in a DIRECT way.
- Xerox means nothing. Now it's synonymous with copying.
- Irish Springs sounds like fresh geography, not a soap.

See what I mean? Avoid generic language when naming your startup.



4 SPELL IT THE WAY IT SOUNDS

Your eyes can't hear and your ears can't see. And word of mouth is essential to the success of almost any startup.

In fact, a common process people use to find the business they need is as follows:

Person A says to Person B *"Have you heard of Company X?"*

Person B says, *"No. I'll have to check them out!"*

Person B pulls out a mobile device or hops on the computer when he or she gets home, then types in *"Company X."*

And if the way Company X is pronounced doesn't match the way Company X is spelled... Person B never finds it!

Person B is your customer. He or she is the **FIRST** thing your startup needs to be an actual business. Make it easy for people like Person B to find you. It's just one step in the purchase process.

5 MAKE SURE IT MAKES SENSE IN ENGLISH, SPANISH & PREFERABLY CHINESE

This one isn't always 100% possible... but you can at least make sure English is covered right?

If you're reading this, you know English. So avoid the fate that has befallen some companies. Name your startup something that works in the languages that matter.

6 CHECK YOUR INITIALS

Let's say you're a travel startup specializing in Bahaman vacations. So you name your company Bahaman Seas.

Sounds OK, right? But then comes the day when you're taking notes on a to-do list... and you use shorthand to save time only to realize your luxury company's initials are BS.

D'oh! It may seem insignificant, but this seemingly minor issue can destroy the name of your startup. And remember: You can't pivot around your name very easily once it's chosen. Select a startup name with pleasant initials.

7 CONSIDER THE COMPETITION

Some companies enter an already crowded market with a proven concept. Other times companies use a "blue ocean" approach (my favorite kind of startup). Either way, you need to stand out in a crowded market and you will always have competitors— even if you feel like you are the only one in the industry.

iPod didn't just go up against other MP3 players; it took on tapes and CDs (and won, by the way). The first mousse fought with hair gel. The first boxers fought with briefs. And so on.

Whatever you decide to name your startup, it must position well against your competition, whoever that is. In fact, you may want to apply this to ALL of your branding. If your competitor uses blue as a color, use red. If they use traditional media, use digital outreach. Dare to be different, from the name on down.



8 THINK CATEGORY & SLOGAN

Remember, your name and every other aspect of marketing within your startup will live and die by your market position. Every company has a name, category and slogan.

- **Nike** is the **athletic clothing** company that tells you to **Just do it.**
- **Burger King** is the **fast food restaurant** that lets you **Have it your way.**
- **GEICO** is the **car insurance** company that **Saves you 15% in 15 minutes or less.**

The more you pay attention to other companies, the more you will be able to separate the good from the bad.

A few clunky combos:

- **Farmer's Insurance** is the... **insurance company** that yells **We are farmers.** (They kind of hit you in the face with that one. And honestly, shouldn't they be farming instead?).
- **Panera Bread** is the **restaurant** that tells you to **Make today better.** (Sounds more like a beer company to me... or maybe chocolate if you don't drink. AT LEAST give me a whole sandwich instead of just bread!).
- **Dr. Pepper Ten** is a **diet soft drink** that is **not for women.** (I'm OK with a manly concept... in theory. But for one thing, you may be pissing off women who drink regular Dr. Pepper. And more importantly, subtlety is usually a plus in marketing).

Think category and slogan when naming your startup.

9 USE A LITERARY DEVICE

Allow me to geek out for just a moment:

A literary device is a rhetorical arrangement intended to convey meaning or reinforce memory of something specific. Some popular literary devices include rhyme, alliteration, metaphor, parallel structure and repetition.

Consider these examples of companies using literary devices:

- **Little Caesar's** with the slogan **Pizza pizza!** (*Repetition*).
- **Meineke Muffler** (*alliteration*) where **You're not gonna pay a lot, but you'll get a lot!** (*Parallel structure*).
- **Rice Krispie Treats** with **Snap Crackle Pop!** (*Onomatopoeia*).
- **Budweiser, the King of Beers** (*Metaphor*).

And so on. Watch for literary devices in names and slogans.

10 MAKE IT FINGER FRIENDLY

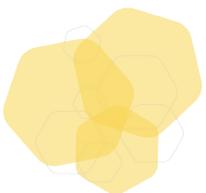
This refers more to the URL than the name itself... but keep it friendly to type. Google is four letters spread out over six spaces... and the first four spaces use only Gs and Os!

This is the digital era. Help your customers rest their digits. Even in OntoBox Training, a fourteen letter name, there are only nine actual letters used... and the majority are used in the first word, making the fingers feel plenty comfortable in spite of the length of our company name.

At OntoBox Training,

We strive to incorporate all kinds of learning and match it with a variety of teaching to offer our professionals the best chance at achieving their professional goals. Just as one person's dream is not the same as another's, one person's style of accomplishing their objectives may be unique and require special attention and adjustments.

Our job is to account for those adjustments and help students make the most of our business, sales, marketing, leadership and company culture courses, something we not only thrive at but also love to do.



Want more information on naming startups, products or anything else in business? Or need a little help with your own naming process? For more information on OntoBox Training, contact us today at Learn@OntoBoxTraining.com.

