



VIBRATO WHITE PAPERS

On Naming Research

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THERE ARE THREE TYPES OF RESEARCH used in naming projects: audience assessment (which helps determine brand positioning), linguistic checks (which rule out negative connotations), and brand name research (which determines the ability of a brand name to spearhead a brand's promise). Experience has taught us that each type of research is appropriate at a different phase in the naming endeavor and that each yields optimal results only when properly conducted.

Brands thrive only when they are part of a relationship with their target audience. A brand uses several tools of communication to bring meaning to that relationship, to build the brand promise, and to reinforce the audience's trust. Audience assessment is the best research tool to help you find the language and tone for brand communications. It is imperative to build your brand's positioning based on insights derived from audience assessment — qualitative research and analysis that determine behaviors, attitudes, motivations, aspirations, demographics, and psychographics of your target. The audience assessment informs your brand positioning and drives the brand message creation, execution, and evolution.

In the name generation phase, linguistic research is the counterpart to legal trademark searches. While the potential names are still just words (rather than names), it is crucial that you ask your target audience simply, "What do you think of when you hear the *word* _____?" This determines whether potential names have any negative connotations within your target audiences. By surveying *word* connotations rather than asking for opinions on a *name*, you will get the linguistic feedback you need without compromising any potentially great names.

As the naming process moves forward and you are beginning to weigh the benefits of various candidates, it is time to move away from researching words and into researching *brand names*. Brand names are communication tools, words imbued with the message, tone, and promise of your brand. They are the communication touchstones of your brand. They begin, cultivate, and pervade the relationship your customer has with your brand. Brand names are never seen out of context, so brand name research must include context. Effective qualitative research at the brand-name phase positions new brand names among competitor names with appropriate cues — visual context including mocked up billboards, print ads, packaging, and background context including press releases, radio announcements, and news stories. Cleverly designed research allows your target to interact with your brand as they might in the marketplace. In so doing, you might more reliably determine whether your brand's communication tools (including the name) help or hinder the cultivation of a relationship with your audiences.

However, since it is difficult at best to recreate a brand relationship in a clinical environment, brand name research rarely produces reliable results. Consumers in focus groups generally prefer names that skew heavily toward relevance and description. They prefer forgettable, uninspiring names to differentiating, vibrant names. If your goal is a name that conjures no reaction and can make it through a focus group, rely on this research to make your name selection. If you aspire to a name that motivates consumers to begin and maintain a relationship with your brand, take the reins in the decision-making process.

Consumers aren't the visionaries for your brand. You are. So you, the leaders of your business must rely on your knowledge and vision to select your naming solution, armed with a naming strategy and a way to gauge which names fulfill your strategic objectives.

Ultimately, like all good research firms, *you* need to ask the right people the right questions to get useful results. Learn to speak in your audience's voice by asking your audience what language they speak. See whether a name has any negative connotations by asking your audience what particular words mean to them. And ask yourselves whether a potential name captures your vision for your brand.



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