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The name of a company, technology or solution is a central element of its image and a foundation for commercial success. A company name signals attributes like product quality, service level, operating philosophy, attitude, size, ambition, etc. This, of course, makes it important to find the right one.

Here are 10 tips for selecting a name, based on experience from launching dozens of names for global companies.

1. Do not aim for a name that describes – focus instead on a name that distinguishes. The biggest mistake companies make is being too descriptive with their names. The name should be able to imply the unique characteristics of your company or solution, rather than spelling them out.

2. Management involvement is key. Because selecting and adopting a new name is a highly emotional and political decision, you will not succeed without support from the top.

3. Avoid the alphabet soup of acronyms. Unless you are a GE or an IBM with millions to spend on advertising, be careful with initials. Metaphoric or imaginary names are many times easier for customers to remember and relate to.

4. Research should never replace decision-making. While research is a valuable tool for detecting unforeseen red flags in a potential name, many have a tendency to fall back on it when selecting. The theoretically most popular name – as suggested by AI – is not necessarily the strongest name for the long term.

5. If it feels comfortable – forget it. Everyone else will. Often, the most successful names over the long term are those that are most controversial initially (think Google, Accenture and Bluetooth). When you select a name, you are looking for something to punch through the marketplace clutter, not add to it.

6. Keep it brief. One-word brands are most effective. Lengthy, multi-word names lead to truncation. When people abbreviate your name, you lose control over your brand.

7. Employee contests do not work. While they are often well-meaning, they lead to names with no basis in the appropriate strategic rationale.

8. Name selection is about strategy, not emotion and politics. Nonetheless, many people are surprised that the decision becomes so emotionally charged. Stick to the strategy and do not accept the lowest-common-denominator solution.

9. Manage the decision-making process. There will always be someone who tries to derail it. Work diligently to keep decision-making progress on track.

10. Never expect unanimity. In the initial period following introduction, a new name often attracts scrutiny and debate. Familiarity breeds comfort. As people become more familiar with the name, they will also grow more comfortable with it.



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