

# **In a Word**

**What to expect when you're Naming**

**A great name  
can't fix a bad  
experience.**

**But a bad  
experience can  
kill a great name.**

While this is a love letter to Naming, it's important to start by saying that Naming is just one, very powerful, element of the many that a brand has at hand to tell its story. But the name is the most used, the most ubiquitous, which means it holds within it the majority of a brand's value.

It's also important to remember that while the process of creating and selecting a name is critical, once the name is out in the world, the meaning of the word itself will evolve based on how people experience the brand.

People rarely love a name because of its technical meaning, or its structure, or its linguistic merits. Instead, it's because of the meaningful association they have with the entire brand experience. If the brand experience is bad, the name becomes the shorthand for this—and possibly other—bad experiences. If it's great, the name becomes the handle for everything that's great about the brand, and the reason people use it, recall it, repeat it, recommend it.

And that's why the journey of naming should be: deciding how you'll tell the entire story of your brand in a word.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paola', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Paola Norambuena**  
Chief Content Officer  
**Interbrand**

**Your name is  
your brand's  
story distilled  
to its shortest  
form.**

**But what  
makes a  
name great?**

**When it works as a  
shortcut for people to  
make great decisions.**

What do we mean by great decisions? A great name is the fastest and easiest way for people to navigate the choice of a brand, or product, or service, when they need it most.

Names are wayfinders, used by people to locate and choose you over your competitors. In them, they carry so many attributes, associations, experiences, and information that people immediately understand and accept. A great name conveys all of this in a single word or phrase.

**It starts  
with a story**

# To get a name right, it's vital to first **get your story straight**—one that gets at the very best of your brand.

Smart brands use the naming process to answer the toughest questions, to resolve lingering issues. They use it as therapy. They use it to gain consensus. They align priorities at the start.

Without the story, the naming process won't be fruitful, and can be frustrating—not a great feeling given Naming is by far the most emotional decision a business makes. The “I'll know it when I see it” strategy rarely works.

Your story also defines the objective criteria every decision-maker should use to evaluate and select a name. That's not to say there isn't room for personal preference—that's important to loving the final name. Using both, however, means you land on a name that everyone can love.

Shared understanding is central to starting on the path to the right name. First, you must:

## **Know what you're naming**

If you can't sum up what it actually is you're trying to name in a sentence, then you don't know what you're naming. Yes, this really does happen. Make sure you have a firm grasp on the details before you begin.

## **Know who cares about it**

Having a good picture of the brand's target audience is essential. Do your background research, but more importantly, talk to some customers in person—you'll begin to see your brand through their eyes. And don't forget your people internally. They'll have a lot to say about it.

## **Know what you want to say**

A few key communication points are all you need—but you need to know them backwards and forwards to ensure that these key messages are being conveyed by your name in a convincing and engaging way.

# The story in brief

The creative brief is a **less-than-sexy but oh-so-necessary** document that details directions for your naming journey.

(That's not to say you can't take a few creative detours along the way.) Brilliant names are crafted from solid creative briefs. It's your chance to outline what the name needs to do, and, in particular, what you don't want it to do.

Start with some personal responses:

- 1** Do you have a preference for a particular type of name? Do you lust after a name that's already out there?
- 2** Are there types of names you don't like? Any you downright hate? Now's the time to say it.



**And for people to know exactly what to do with your name, it's important to **know what you need the name to do:****

### **Does it need to break through?**

#### **Is it comfortable?**

It's probably not right.  
It's probably taken.

#### **Is it unusual?**

It should still be easy and fun to say.  
It should be universally and linguistically acceptable.

#### **Does it stand out from the competitors?**

It shouldn't share any distinguishing characteristics.  
It shouldn't try to beat them at the same game.

### **Does it need to be clear?**

#### **Is it common?**

It should use familiar terms.  
It should borrow from industry standards.

#### **Is it predictable?**

It will need help to stand out.  
It will need help to be ownable.

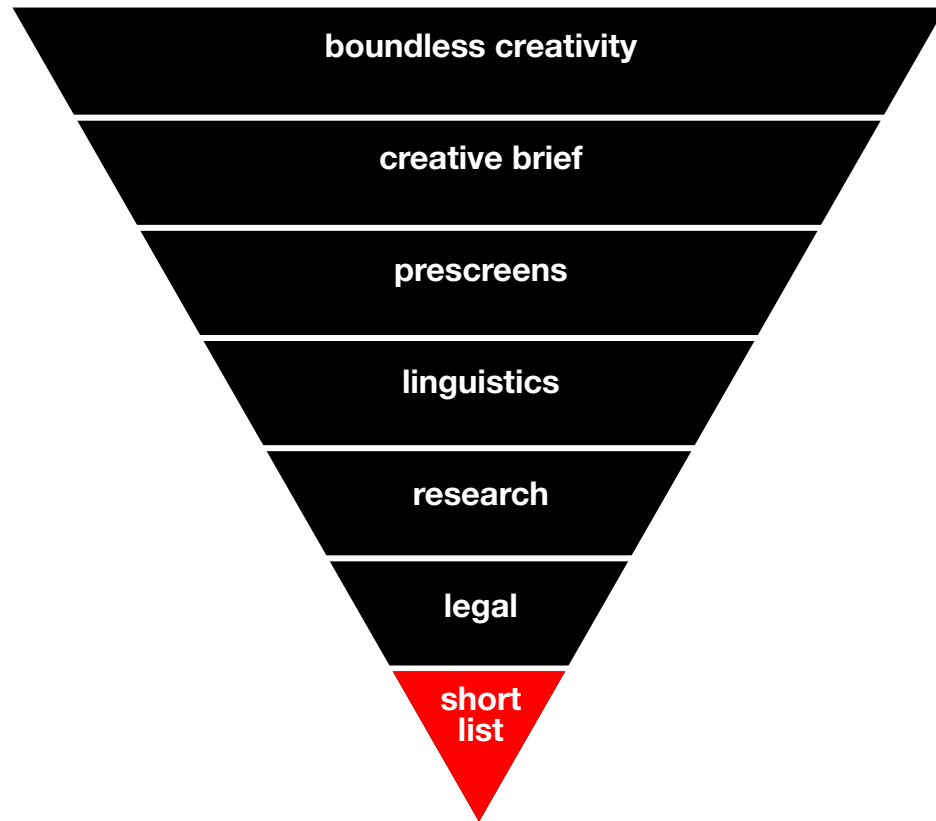
#### **Does it clearly tell you what it does?**

It shouldn't use terms so overused that they stop working.  
It shouldn't avoid a little twist that can make it more unique.

**A shot at  
brilliance**

creativity adaptability bravery lay out expertise  
insight flexibility ingenuity illustrate initiative edit  
innovation inventiveness fashion invent plan mold  
concentrate carve motivation originality illuminate  
improve resourcefulness inspire vitality genius  
inspiration imagination originality artistry vision  
create enterprise individuality cleverness polish  
talent ability artfulness brilliance craftsmanship  
finesse style touch virtuosity adroitness focus  
perception dream strategize design draw sculpt  
focus describe portray arrange construct draft  
compose idea pattern model depict brainstorm  
outline conceive intent purpose focus endeavor  
strive propose manage shape devise dedication  
draft iterate discard retry dare provoke excite  
amuse engage brilliant representation enhance

**Distilling your story into an extra-strength shot of brilliance is a highly creative process.**

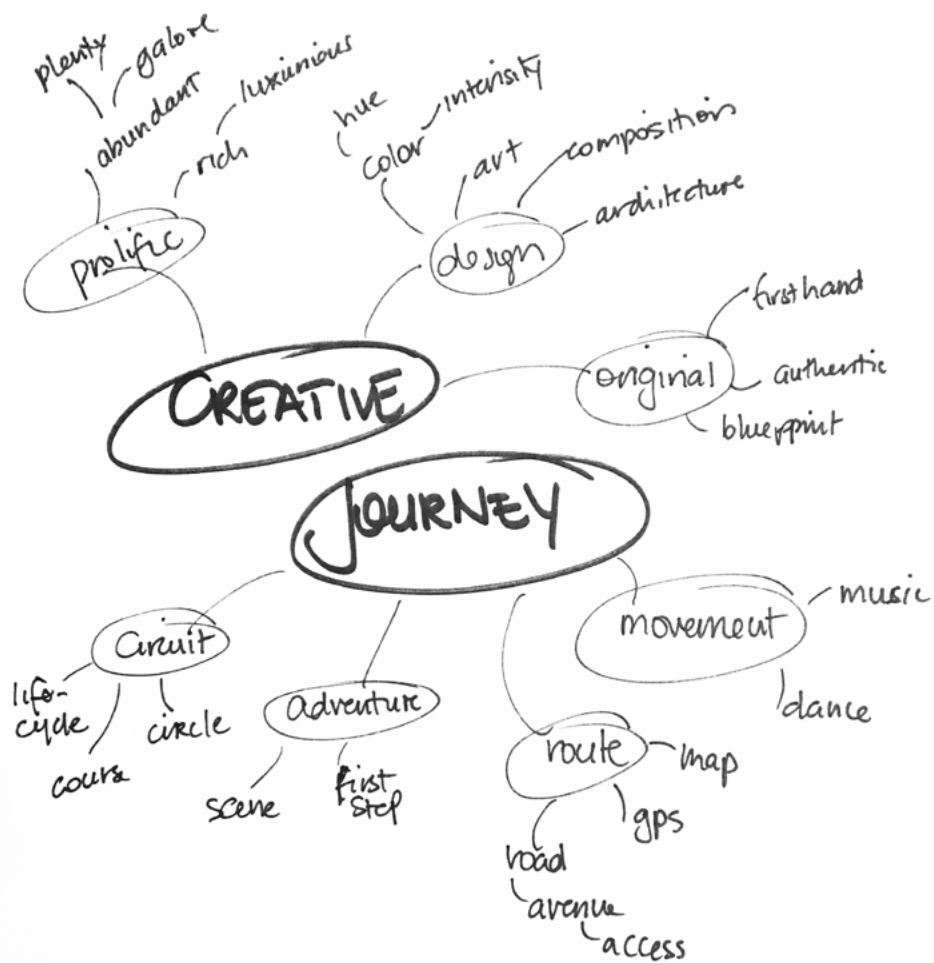


**Your name**

**With your story and brief in hand, it's time to get creative. That means you also need to be prepared to feel:**

- 1 Unrestricted**
- 2 Unfamiliar**
- 3 Uncomfortable**

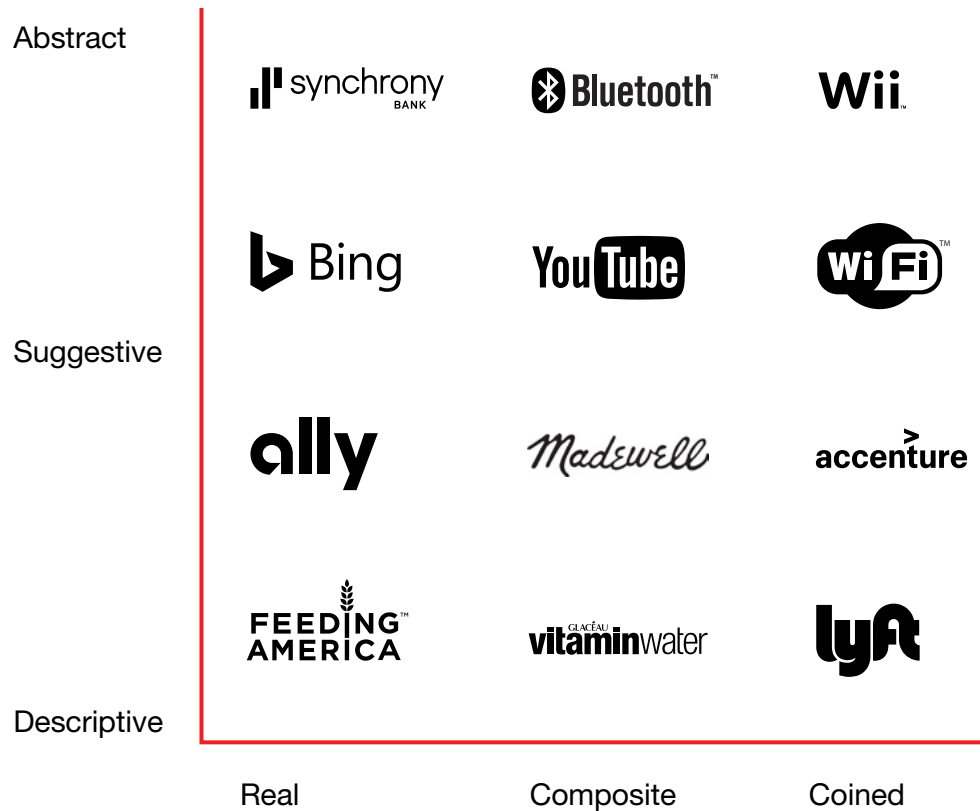
# 1 Unrestricted



Naming, surprisingly, involves a lot of math. As names get filtered through very real hurdles, many don't make the cut. The higher the hurdles, the more names you need at the start. So at the outset, remove limits. Explore everything. Restrain nothing. Avoid judgments. There are plenty of steps later to ground ideas.

It takes hundreds, if not thousands, of ideas to funnel down into a single name. The more creativity and variation conjured up at the outset, the faster you'll get to an ideal name.

## 2 Unfamiliar

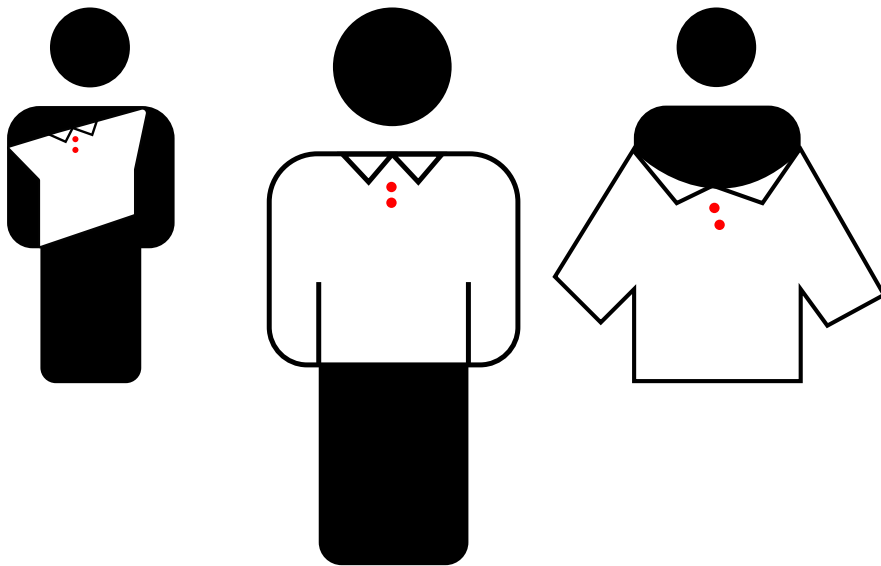


Leaving the safety of expectations behind is the only way to invite inspiration and break new creative ground. Be open to all possibilities, because many different types of names can be successful. Because you never know what will spark a new idea. Great names can appear unexpectedly.

And for some, it's the actual process of naming that feels unfamiliar. Not only can it be emotional, it can also challenge the rules of typical business decision making.

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## 3 Uncomfortable



Finding the right name means you'll have to try things and head in directions that might not be comfortable—at first. But names can grow on you. What was once uncomfortable eventually becomes so real that you can't imagine any other name in its place.

So take names for a spin, and see how they fit. Imagine them in real world scenarios. You might find your top choice doesn't make sense outside of the boardroom, or an underdog might end up being wildly popular. You won't know if you don't try (it on).

**A great name makes an impression without revealing what went into its creation: the soul searching, the exploration, the bursts of creativity colliding with practical implications.**



# The rules of engagement

# Naming can be an emotive process, which is why you need rules of engagement.

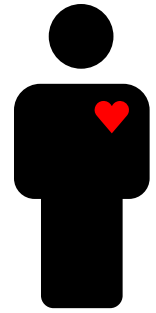
**1 Don't fall in love.**

**2 Don't dismiss names that feel neutral.**

**3 Don't let a name travel out of context.**

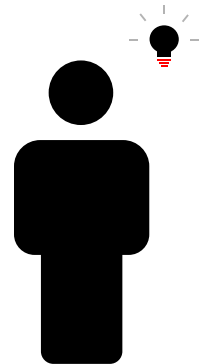
**Don't fall head-over-heels, because the one you "love" might not make the cut.**

Issues of trademarks, cultural barriers, or research may end up ruling out your personal favorite. That's not to say that you can't trust your gut reaction, but it's best not to hitch your wagon to one at the expense of keeping an open mind about others. You may find that your favorite fails later tests, and you may end up disappointed with the other results.



**Give a name time, and you might find you can't get it out of your head.**

A potential name might not instantly light up your life. It might feel a little weird—but you don't hate it. That's because the name doesn't mean anything yet. That meaning comes from experience. These empty vessel names are ones not already charged with some other meaning, and ones you can imbue with whatever meaning you want.



**Context is critical. Don't let your name travel without it.**

The naming process can be a little tenuous at the start. And one of the quickest ways to torpedo a potential winner is sharing it too soon with colleagues, or even family, who immediately decide they hate it. While outside opinions will eventually be important, it's not yet time to consider them. The name won't travel out of context in the real world, and shouldn't do so now.



**The beauty  
in the rigor**

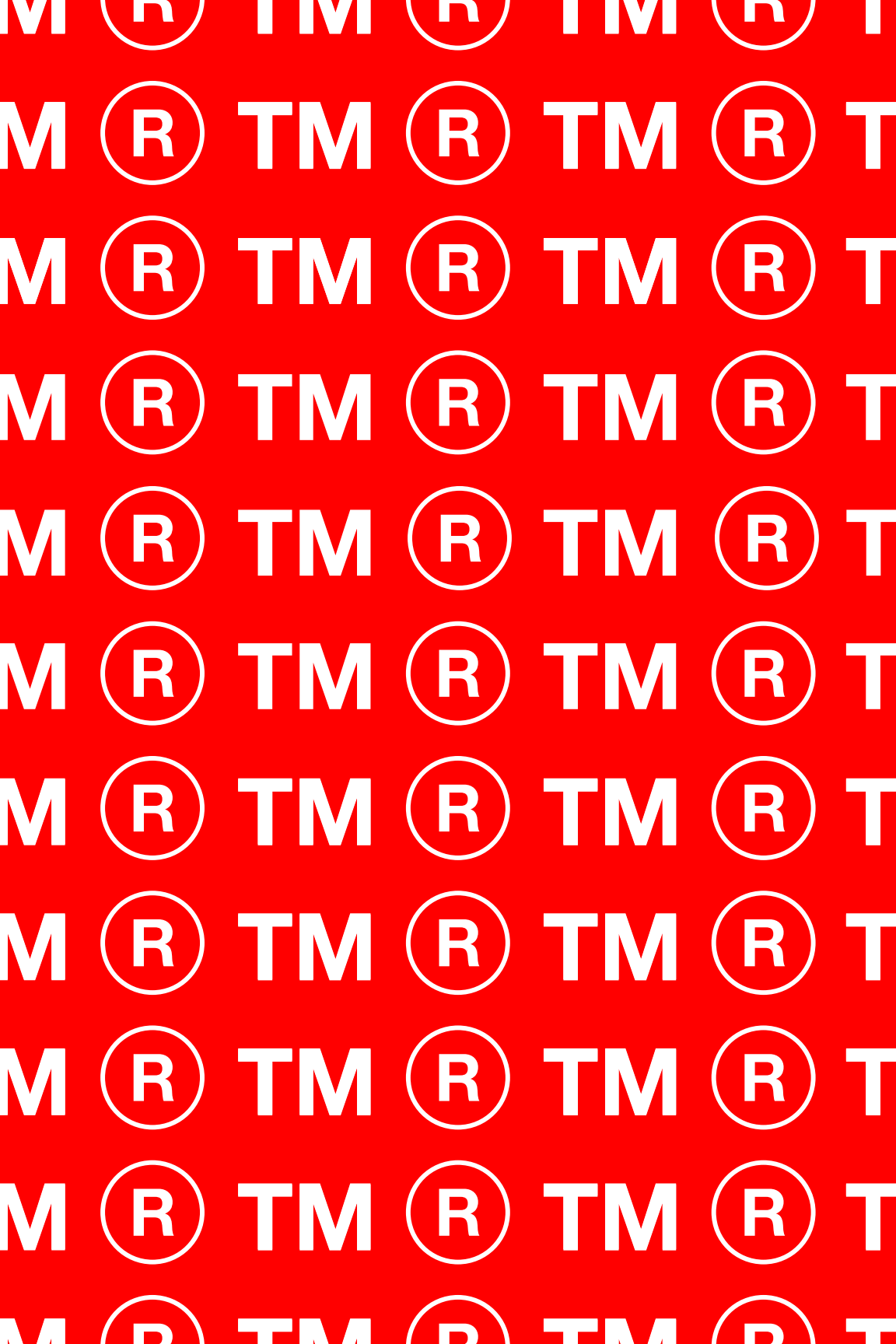
While there's romance in the unfamiliar, uncomfortable, and unrestricted creativity at the start, the naming process is a progressive one. It's supported by a meaningful methodology—albeit with a beauty and magic all its own.

This rigorous vetting process ensures you clear the right hurdles, so the name succeeds on both a practical and creative level.

**There are close to  
56 million active  
trademark filings  
globally, and counting.**

**And over 330 million  
registered domain names.**

**Chances are that the name  
you want is already taken.**



# 1 Make it legal

Given the sheer number of active trademarks, prescreens knock conflicts out early, and can help steer creative exploration—knowing what’s working and not working from a trademark perspective helps generate more original, and more effective, options.

The best name is one you can own. But the full legal process can be lengthy and costly. Removing name candidates that are more likely to fail makes getting to an ownable name much easier.

## 2 Help it travel

In our diverse and constantly connected world, names cross a lot of borders and languages. But one region's platitude could be another region's wildly inappropriate reference.

Linguistic and cultural checks are the only way to spot bad language—because bad words are sneaky, and can pop in places you just don't expect. By tapping local linguists, you can rule out any global gaffes before going out with your new name.

### 3 Ask your audience



Data-driven insight is a great way to help go from short list to final list, providing a detailed look at a name's performance with people who matter most—your audiences. And, of course, hard numbers are great for helping sell in a name to the final decision makers.

But research shouldn't just be a beauty contest. Instead, it should tell you exactly what a name can and can't do at launch, and how to round this out with design, messaging, campaigns...

# And, don't forget

**Names take on many forms when they're out in the world. Sometimes a contracted or modified version of it is needed for different platforms. These need to be created, tested, and secured too.**



**@newname**  
Social Media Handle

<https://www.newnamegroup.com>

URL



Apps

**NONE**

Ticker Symbol

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**From many  
to one**

# A great name can capture your heart in an instant. **But make sure it supports growth for all the instants to come.**

The best part of a progressive process is the consensus it builds along the way. Most of the decision makers have, by now, understood and agreed that one of the final set of names will be the one.

The name is now no longer a word on paper. It has taken full form—dressed with a logo, complemented by design and messaging, backed by a powerful story. Personal preference can now play a role, because each one of these final candidates is primed for success in the market. The best one for you will naturally step forward.

Once it does, make sure to take a top-down, bottom-up approach to introducing it internally.

## **Backed by leadership**

Every member of your leadership team, from the CEO down, must stand up and passionately support the name. They need to be armed with the story and all the messages that matter. Without that passion, there's no reason why anyone else in the organization should feel it either.

## **Embraced by people**

Your people are your most important audience—they're your brand advocates. Give them the story first, before it goes to market. Tell them exactly what all this means for them. Use this invaluable opportunity for engagement to spur pride and passion throughout the organization.

**All eyes  
on you**

# Now, all eyes are on you. **Help the name grow into the brand, and the brand into the name.**

You can't simply toss a name out into the market and hope it works. Until the name is truly associated with a brand experience, it's just another word. Once you've arrived at the name, the real work (or fun, depending on how you see it) begins.

Because now people are listening. They're asking questions. They're paying attention. With all eyes on you, it's the ideal moment to tell people exactly what you want them to know most.

## **In absence of a story, people will make one up for you.**

And there's no guarantee that it'll be right. Or good. So craft the name story with care. Imbue the name with all the attributes and characteristics you want for your brand. And avoid over-manufactured rationales—tell a real story, and give them the right something to talk about.

## **Make it custom, for your many audiences.**

Each of your audiences will have a different stake in it. Customers will want to know what to expect and do next. Investors and stakeholders will want reassurance and expect to see results. Members of the media will want a hook. Give them each a reason to care.

## **The name story will be front and center for... a mere few weeks.**

That's right. Weeks. So make it count—it's the start of it all. Once you have their attention, and they start engaging with your brand, they'll soon stop analyzing the name itself, and start associating it with their personal experience.

**Then step  
back and let  
the experience  
do the talking.**

**Is there a name in your future?  
Let us help you find it.**

## **Get in touch**

**Paola Norambuena**  
Chief Content Officer  
paola.norambuena@interbrand.com  
+1 212 798 7590

**Andrea Sullivan**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
andrea.sullivan@interbrand.com  
+1 212 798 7510

# Authors



**Paola Norambuena**  
Chief Content Officer  
paola.norambuena@interbrand.com

# Contributors

**Penelope Davis**  
Senior Director, Verbal Identity  
penelope.davis@interbrand.com

**Padmini Mangunta**  
Director, Verbal Identity  
padmini.mangunta@interbrand.com

**Callie Deddens**  
Associate Consultant, Verbal Identity  
callie.deddens@interbrand.com

**Mark Kersteen**  
Associate Content Editor  
mark.kersteen@interbrand.com

**Tori Miner**  
Director, Verbal Identity  
tori.miner@interbrand.com

**Matt Emert**  
Senior Consultant, Verbal Identity  
matt.emert@interbrand.com

**Janine Stankus**  
Content Editor  
janine.stankus@interbrand.com

**Jasmine Hong**  
Marketing Designer  
jasmine.hong@interbrand.com

[interbrand.com](http://interbrand.com)