



True to form:

**Why brand names
are getting real**

Creating and managing
brand value™

Interbrand

True to form:

Why brand names are getting real

by Caitlin Barrett

Names have always helped us to make sense of the world—now they're getting sensible. Naming trends have come to reflect the way we share experiences with our friends, fans, and followers in a world we're constantly constructing together. Names have gone back to basics, reflecting truths about humanity and the world around us and in the process, they're delivering a whole lot more authenticity—and, we believe, staying power.

Get real

Complex, Latin-based names once signaled everything new—and vaguely unapproachable—about technology. Tech was the domain of a geek elite but a bit of a spectator sport for the rest of us; we were meant to respect more than fully understand it. Early search engines, with names like AltaVista, maintained that distance. They boasted, "We can see everything from here. How about you?" "Still sifting through your results, let me get back to you," we grumbled in reply.

Now that we carry the internet in our pockets, the space between high-tech and highly human is dissolving every day. The net has become common space—and that's evident in the way we name. Bing is the perfect example.

Today, search is about more than search. It's about making decisions in an instant. "Bing," a real word and onomatopoeia, speaks to instant experiences, ones that are enjoyable and fresh and meant to delight us. Naming a search engine after "the sound of found" signals an approach to the category that reflects the way we want to interact with information: immediate, accessible, woven into the fabric of our daily lives.

Fashion has undergone a similar shift. High style once meant high prices, but in that model, only a handful of people could afford to follow the latest trends. Now the very definition of a great style find includes a story about getting a great deal. Exclusive is out, inclusive is in, and fashion brands have begun naming to signal to the world that they're playing by the new rules of getting real.

Madewell, J. Crew's less traditional sibling brand, uses its name to say "quality" but in a way that's so democratic and plainspoken that it comes across as refreshing and hip. It's named for the wearer, not the creator. The name's origins are as real as can be: J. Crew purchased the rights to its trustworthy name from a defunct New Bedford, Mass.-based manufacturer of high-quality workwear (think utility pants). And the brand experience walks the walk by opening up access to the normally behind-the-curtain world of its denim designers and workspaces, showcasing its craft as reason to believe its name is genuine.

So: Method or Windex? Ally or Wachovia? These days, brands answer to consumers, and a real name lets them know they're being heard.

Now that we carry the internet in our pockets, the space between high-tech and highly human is dissolving every day.

Then:



Unreal

Then Again:



Hyper-real

Now:



Really real

Even better than the real thing

A real name lets a brand's genuine personality shine through because it's rooted in associations we have in the real world. But what's a brand to do when it needs that level of familiarity on a global scale? You're not going to find a real word that means "speed," "fun" or "innovation" universally—but that doesn't mean a name can't suggest those things in any language.

Hulu, Vudu, Qubo...they might sound like nonsense, but they're sensical nonsense. Even when a name doesn't have overt meaning, it can evoke positive associations through familiar, universally pleasing sounds.

Brands are taking a shine to tactics that ensure a name's point of view doesn't get lost in translation. They're grounded in a universal concept that can be easily explained (Starbucks' Via). They're short and impactful (Vook). They're rooted in ruling languages, like English and Latin (Definity). They use universal syllable structure, alternating consonants and vowels (Kijiji, Adobe).

While that last tactic has become highly imitated in the digital space, one of the most successful global brands is 124 years into demonstrating the impact and memorability of two easy sounds: Coca-Cola's alternating vowels and singsong-y pronunciation are a proven way to spread happiness wherever you may roam.

Why brands should take note

The trend toward real is seen in every industry. Brands are no longer solo pioneers, using a complex, proprietary name to stake their claim. Instead, as a brand moves forward now, it wants to bring its audience along for the journey. And audiences are much more likely to team up with a brand that sounds like something they'd like to be a part of.

As we move away from the idea of brands as constructed monuments, the brands that tell true stories—and make authentic connections with real people—are brands that will live long, healthy lives. ■



Caitlin Barrett

Caitlin is a senior consultant for Interbrand's New York Verbal Identity department. She develops smart, insightful creative work that marries clients' brand strategies with their needs and goals.

Every brand has an authentic—and compelling—story to tell. By helping clients understand the power of language, Caitlin connects brands to consumers who truly align with their values.

Paola Norambuena
Senior Director, Head of Verbal Identity
T: 212-798-7590
Paola.norambuena@interbrand.com