

Interbrand

Views

Give Your Name a Voice Caitlin Barrett and Fell Gray

March 26, 2015

Why brand voice should shape your name

When your brand communicates, what does it sound like? This tone of voice question isn't just critical for collateral, ads, and other touchpoints; it is, in fact, an

often-overlooked key to naming.

A name can only say a few things well, so most naming work rightly focuses on identifying your primary message—after all, a sharp summary of what makes your offer stand out is a must. But just checking the box on *what* you want to say is not enough—you have to figure out *how* you want to say it. Making sure your names sound like your brand is where attention to brand voice makes all the difference.

To understand the importance brand voice plays in naming, let's consider two names: Zipity and Accelaran. Both are coined. Both are suggestive of the same communication point: speed. And if your creative brief stopped at those criteria, both names should be a great fit for the same company.

Yet the first suggests the spirit of a start-up, while the other tonally evokes world domination. The difference in tone is not just a matter of style, however. These names capture very different brand personalities.

And that's what brand voice is for: to express your organization's culture and personality, setting audience expectations for the way your brand behaves. It's the basis for the type of relationship you create: Is it formal and instructive, or helpful and encouraging? This is why voice must be a part of your

approach to naming. You need to align the way your brand communicates and the way it names its offerings. Ask yourself if your naming delivers on the promise established by the voice (and vice versa)?

Go beyond your gut

Bringing brand voice into the creative development phase can help you steer name generation in the right direction. Namers will tell you that having a clear sense of a brand's voice can be a real source of inspiration. If you're a fresh startup, your brand voice might be built around a spirit of optimism—so your creative direction might include sounds and symbols with upbeat associations and a rhythmic tonality. If you're an established global company, your brand's voice might be used to signal that you're a grounded leader. This might open up your brief to the use of linguistic cues of scale, stability, and legacy in how you name.

Or you can flip the script. Using your voice doesn't mean sticking to one note. With a structured voice in place, you can more easily break the rules and create tension. Brands that operate on a global scale could consider names with a highly optimistic tonality that suggests they're agile enough for the modern world—and avoid associations that imply a hulking

organization.

Brand voice also helps with name evaluation: those names that feel “not right” or “not like us” aren’t usually wrong because they’re off message—more likely it’s because they are off-voice. You can use brand voice to help articulate what doesn’t feel right and provide actionable direction to get names that capture the personality of a company.

Stand out and fit in

Aligning the way you speak with the way you name differentiates your brand, and gives your business a competitive advantage. Evaluating names against your voice helps ensure that the way you name is an expression of your unique brand, not merely an expression of your category. A technology name that starts or ends in “i” or a beauty name that uses a word that might describe a beautiful woman—these types of names won’t stand out in market. (You’ll also have a harder time clearing them for registration.) Voice helps you name in a way no one else can; a way that can create a distinctive naming system and style that complements the entirety of your verbal identity.

So, what does it look like when it’s a fit? Consider the following copy examples:

Your super-smart technology solutions. We’ll help you

get from A to epic.

Around the country and around the world, set your sights on advancing your business with unmatched efficiency.

Now let's go back to Zipity and Accelaran. Which name would be a natural fit alongside or within each piece of copy? And which feels disruptive? The expectations for what type of experience each brand might offer is likely a combination of the name itself, and how it interacts with the tone established by the language supporting it.

The bottom line? Always keep the promise of your brand in mind. And the next time you're naming, whether it's a company, product, or service, make your brand's voice as much a part of your brief as your brand's message.

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Qualcomm, John Deere, MWV, and Avis Budget Group, among others. Fell believes that astute, insightful strategy is the springboard for brilliant creative.

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