

## The Naming Group Whitepaper

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Dear CMO,

You're busy. Like, *really* busy. Your wheelhouse is huge. *HUGE*. That's precisely why delegating is your friend. You got to where you are because you build and utilize teams well, entrusting them with every ingredient of your brand's success. And your vision is the recipe: the catalyzing inspiration and marching orders that bring all the pieces together. Your PR team works to shape messages that relay your key strategic vision. The same vision that's visually channeled via graphic standards and brand voice to every ad, package design, or web experience. You envision and establish, they understand and execute. The system works brilliantly.

But name development is too often an exception. In naming, time and time again, we see that the all-important *recipe* is overlooked, as teams struggle through a dauntingly iterative process. Too often you find yourself saying, "go back and develop more names" or "we just haven't found THE name yet." In turn, we see your team sacrificing massive amounts of time, money and effort.

What if each time you had to name a product it took half the time, you were able to approve of a name on the "first round", and the names that your brand managers showed you were always on target, all the while assured that each name was going to work with other names around it (both existing and yet to be developed) to tell a powerfully cohesive brand story? Wouldn't that be nice?

So how do you get to such a naming utopia? We've identified a number of patterns that keep naming an ineffective, dreaded process. And we've identified you as the one to quell them from their root – and ultimately make naming a stronger, more streamlined and brand-advancing process.

## Recognize the problems...

### THE PERCEPTION OF NAMING IS LARGELY INCORRECT

Undervaluing naming as a narrow tactic leads brands to limiting, and sometimes catastrophic name decisions. The first step is realizing that naming is different – and often more consequential – from everything else you do...

- More than simply *defining* the product it labels, every name can set a bigger story in motion - supporting the parent brand as much as the offering itself. This can't happen when names are developed in silos.
- There's rarely an option to "tweak" or "refine" a name during the development process as one would a layout or a script. If a name feels "wrong", then the strategy behind it needs to change.
- Names are permanent. Campaigns can evolve, but a name is ingrained from the moment it launches. To get it right for the long haul requires upfront planning.

### **YOU START NAMING BY BRAINSTORMING**

You shouldn't. Teams (or their agencies) too often create long lists of options, but with little structure to guide the development, ultimate culling and selection. Naming requires its own unique set of procedures to parallel those that currently exist for every ad that's created or every package that's designed. And we've yet to see a brand that's got them.

### **YOU WAIT FOR LIGHTNING TO STRIKE**

The "I'll know it when I see it" approach is the source of many problems. Not just because it guarantees a multi-phase, trial and error process, but also because it assumes there is one right name that needs to be uncovered. It's oddly comforting to believe that there's one winner out there and to view naming as a pirate's hunt for buried treasure under mountains of "bad names that would never work". It's so much easier to say "it's just not there – keep going" than it is to stop and develop a narrow set of guidelines for exactly what you're seeking. But that's exactly what you should be doing.

### **YOU PUT TOO MUCH FOCUS ON PRODUCT AND NOT ENOUGH ON PLANNING**

When naming, most CMOs commit the same costly mistake of focusing on names' intrinsic meaning, when you should be focusing on their potential. In reality, no one name is most right for any given purpose. Success is defined by the vision that informs how names are created, how they're selected, AND how they are translated to the consumer at every touch point. More than other product-specific tactics, from packaging to advertising, a naming project conducted without regard for the full set of implications for the brand as a whole can derail an opportunity before it's even perceived.

### **YOU ENTER ON A BUNGEE**

If you swoop onto the scene, making snap decisions based on your gut – or, worse, out of fear or urgency – then withdraw just as quickly once your input is delivered, it means that you missed the planning, analyses and testing that got name candidates to that point. You've been there before, when they present those names to you and none of them "work." And you think: "If my brand manager or agency had really done their job, it would be crystal clear to me which name is right." But too often the criteria you use to decide are news to those who have been involved all along.

### **YOU LACK GUIDELINES**

That feeling you get when "the right name just isn't here" is rarely because your team has missed the mark. It's because there is no mark. Your brand's written benchmarks, graphic standards, style guides – you approved all of them, ensuring adherence to the vision that you set out to realize. A top-down gospel coming directly from you – a common understanding of what that ad or package should do in order for you to approve of it. But naming is a unique challenge that merits its own unique approach. And yet, most CMOs don't equip their teams with a path to naming with this unique opportunity in mind.

## **Fix the problems...**

### **ADD NAMING GUIDELINES TO THE BRAND HANDBOOK**

Develop clear principles and guidelines for naming at a brand level, and add them to the brand handbook as the standard for every name that's developed. They should differ from other existing standards and should outline specific process for developing and selecting names that reinforce a consistent, high-level vision for brand naming.

### **GET INVOLVED AT THE START**

YOU have to get involved in naming before any names are created – not just the usual chiming in for final approval. Even with guidelines in place, it's just as important for teams to align on project-specific objectives at the outset as it is to agree on the decision once the list of name candidates is created. Otherwise, you might be choosing between a bunch of options that entirely miss an opportunity that never saw the light of day. Not to mention, from a cost-efficiency standpoint, starting the project on the right path the first time is far preferable to the all-too-typical (and expensive) iterative approach to naming.

### **DISCIPLINED LEADERSHIP = DISCIPLINED BRAND**

It's not enough to root the naming process in strategic vision if – at the end – you are prone to deciding quickly and from the gut. It's essential to commit to a consistent strategy, and to base every naming decision on the foundation you've laid – never on situational assessments. The long-term effects will be greater brand consistency, and continuous honing of the internal process.

### **THERE'S AN AGENCY FOR THAT**

The Naming Group exists to help you, CMOs specifically, correct the cycle, and empower naming with the same strategic direction you've given to other disciplines. We help you see naming in its proper role within the brand development process. Charged with a greater responsibility. Transformed from late-stage labeling to back-end strategic framework.

Starting with a brandwide plan will beget clearer, simpler decisions, higher quality, more consistent name candidates, and a stronger more consistent ecosystem of names, all working towards the same vision you've crafted for your brand. But it can't happen without a plan. Creating the infrastructure that equips your teams to inject that vision into every name has to start with you.

Your wheelhouse just got a little bigger.

By **Nina Beckhardt**, President + Founder, and **Jake Hancock**, Director of Strategy at The Naming Group

#### **About The Naming Group**

The Naming Group is an NYC-based brand naming agency. We partner with leading brands to create brandwide naming strategies, and the names that support them. Our focus on namespace strategy ensures that naming decisions are guided not only by what's best for the offerings we name – but also for the strength of our clients' brands as a whole. For more information about our philosophy, approach, and work for brands such as GM, Capital One, Sony, and Nestle, visit us at [thenaminggroup.com](http://thenaminggroup.com)