

You Name It!

What's in a name?

Plenty! Especially if it's your business or brand name.

Starting a new business should kick off a creative naming process before you register the business name. But there are other times when naming – or *renaming* takes place. Like a gal changing her name when she gets hitched. A rebrand can often better represent a brand's new promise.

Rebranding. Sometimes it's because of a merger. But businesses don't need to merge to change names. There are plenty of other reasons to rebrand: relaunch, reposition, restart. For example, a rebranding is required when a company name or logo becomes regrettably dated (too fat or racist, for example. Think **Campbell's Soup** kids or **Washington Redskins**).

In my neighbourhood, the county rebranded a few years ago, although despite the “community engagement” sessions, the output was basically just a (much-needed) new logo. And, despite the initial public dislike of the art work, the county quickly adopted it everywhere, which is really the best thing you can do for a logo – use it.

That's the great thing with names, they can be built in so many different ways. Some are acronyms, such as **BMTS**, some are the founder's names, **Munshaw House**, some names are inclusive, **North American Life** or geographic, **South Grey Support Services**, some are made up, such as **Google**, and others are appropriated, such as **Kodiak**.

If you are naming or *renaming* a business you don't want to be limited by your business name. For example, one recent rebrand on which **Make Hay** worked is [Georgian Bay Cremation Services](#), which switched its name from the Flesherton Cemetery Crematorium. Legislation changes prompted this business to rebrand, although it didn't select a new name, but merely brought its real name out from under the required operating name. A new logo was designed, a website built and direct mail campaign planned. The (re)newed name broadened the scale of the business and its reach – better representing the service offered.

In another example, I worked as the communications manager for **Metro Credit Union** in Toronto, one of the largest credit unions in the province – and one with growth on its mind. The name seemed to limit growth and so like many companies of the time, they selected a name that sounds progressive without having any specific geography attached to it – **Alterna**.

Recently a [Globe & Mail](#) writer pointed out how limiting it would have been for **Amazon** to initially brand as *Online Books*. That was the business they started in, but have outgrown merely selling books online.

But while you don't want to limit yourself, neither do you want to be so obscure that nobody knows what you do. *Zoobop* sounds fun, but doesn't give too much information about what it might be. A creative name often needs a descriptive or tagline. For example, **Rock Paper Scissors Printing & Publishing**. Descriptive and memorable at the same time is ideal. One business that nailed this is **Bin There Dump That** – clever!

Your values might also be communicated in your name. For instance, **FCUK** is a pretty out there name for almost any business. But traditional can come across in the structure of a name too. The country custom of putting bits of the husband and wife's names, for example **Ro-Bar Farms**, for instance conveys tradition. But off the barn, it mostly lacks as a brand.

And, you want to ensure that your name or rename is available for you to legally use.

But just because another business has your name, doesn't mean you can't too. In instances where geography or product offering are miles apart, same names are unlikely to be a problem. Did you know that there is a media company called **Plenty of Fish** and an online dating site by the same name? Not an issue.

Do consider the website name in your search for the perfect moniker. I don't like acronyms for website names: <http://www.ghss.bwdsb.on.ca/> is just awful! And keep in mind that you don't need to use the complete name in your web address either. I use **makehay.com** not makehaycommunications.com

If you plan to trademark or copyright your name, don't apply until you've secured the URL and its variants. Applications are not private and those who troll the sites will attempt to reserve your brand name before you do, so they can sell it you!

My last word is reserved for the scourge of naming (branding) – the Contest. Don't. This trivializes the importance of your name. If you must have a contest consider having the *hoi polloi* choose between, for example, three finalists that all meet previously selected criteria. Otherwise, you may end up with a dog named Barfy.