Looking to go offshore? Better get your brand name right. The importance of a strong and distinctive brand name should never be underestimated. A good choice can ensure your product is memorable and differentiated and can help with positioning, communicating key messages and unique selling points. It can also ensure trademark rights and linguistic and cultural attractiveness in every market of interest. A bad choice can lead to expensive changes further down the line. Easily said, but how should one go about creating a successful brand name? And what can be done to ensure it is relevant and attractive at home and abroad?

The internet is the single biggest reason for the need for internationally acceptable brand names. Increasingly confident consumers are more willing to research and purchase goods through the internet. It therefore makes good business sense for brand names to be immediately impactful, accessible, clear and globally relevant. Other drivers include the liberation of export markets and a rise in international travel.

Brand naming is complex enough in a single country. Finding an international name is best done with the help of specialists who have the experience and resources to ensure it is appropriate in every market. So how is it done?

Names that export well are easy to pronounce and have positive associations that are within the requirements of the company brief. Pronunciation tests are carried out to eliminate any obvious problems and checks are then made on similar words or trademarks in other countries. Any spontaneous associations with the name are captured and then analysed to see if there are any negative connotations. The suitability of the name against other brands in the sector in the relevant countries is then checked.

Trademark acceptability
A new brand name must also be searched in the trademark register of each country in which it will be used. These searches ensure your proposed name has not already been taken. A trademark agent will check in the classes of goods or services relevant to the new product or service. However, these trademark classes, as they are called, are notoriously broad, covering a wide range of products and services. So if you are launching a new mobile phone, you will have to check against all personal electronic devices, including computers, televisions and personal stereos. This means the trademark classes are extremely crowded. Finding a name that no one else has already taken is both a science and an art!

Once you have found a name that is legally free, you must register it. This involves making an application in the trademarks classes of each of the countries of interest. Once this application is made, you are free to use the name as a trademark.

Checking a name for export is a time consuming process and can take anything from three months to two years. Most this time is usually taken up by trademark searches, making it vital to think ahead and plan sound strategies.

When developing a name for overseas markets:
- Plan ahead: consider all export markets, now and in the future
- Invest: from the start, put time and resources into finding the right name.

With existing brands, either test the current name for export possibilities or create a new name to cater for all international needs.

Giving a product the wrong name, or one that does not translate well in other countries can be expensive, embarrassing and time-consuming so it is vital to get it right first time.

Some examples of names that somehow got launched:
- Kunto aluminium foil (Finland)
- Bonka coffee (Spain)
- Kräpp toilet paper (Sweden)
- Alu-Fanny aluminium foil (Norway)
- Bums biscuits (Sweden)
- Spunk confectionery (Denmark)
- Kumonit pencil sharpeners (Germany)
- Homo sausages (Japan)

If you are the latest Columbus sailing out to discover the New World, give it a decent name. Oh, by the way America is already taken.

— By Simon Luke
To be fair, many of these products were never intended for English-speaking markets, although the fact that many are now the stuff of legend and regularly do the rounds on comedy TV shows, demonstrates how inexorably the word about bad brands spreads.

It works the other way too. To English speakers the Ford Pinto might seem perfectly innocuous but any Portuguese speaker will tell you Pinto means tiny manhood. Toyota's high performance sports car MRII sounds to a French speaker suspiciously close to the word merde. General Motors discovered in the nick of time their best-selling small car Nova literally means won't go in Spanish. As a result it was renamed the Corsa for Spanish speaking markets.

One export market for which brand names are almost always translated is China. Brand names for China can be either translated directly into Chinese, or transliterated, where an acceptable near-equivalent is found. Transliteration is usually the best option, as translation can yield bizarre results. KFC's catch-phrase "It's finger lickin' good" was translated into Chinese as “Eat your fingers off”. Somehow, “7-UP” came out as “Raise your ancestors from the dead”. On the other hand, transliteration provides an opportunity to find the best possible Chinese alphabet equivalent for your famous brand. In the case of Ferrari, the chosen transliteration is “Magic Weapon Pull Power”. Now what could be more accurate a description of Ferrari than that?

**What type of name?**

Names derive from various sources. Internationality has led to the favouring of names with Latin and Greek origins. Many European languages are derived from one of these languages, making these names easier to transfer across continents.

Acronyms and coined names incorporating elements from one or more words are useful tools for avoiding translation difficulties, as they are less likely to have meanings in other...
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Journal of Marketing Vol 9 No 3 2003 ©

languages. Brand names using this formula include:

**IKEA** – an acronym of founder Ingvar Kamprad's name his farm Elmtaryd and his village Agunnaryd

**7-UP** – refers to the seven flavours of the drink

**Persil** – a combination of the product’s two main ingredients, percarbonate and silicate

**Adidas** – taken from founder Adi Dassler’s name purpose vehicle

**Jeep** – derived from GP meaning general purpose vehicle

**Rizla** – a combination of the French word for the rice in rice paper, riz, and the Lacroix family who created the brand

**Qantas** – stands for Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Creating a new word is a particularly effective strategy for minimising trademark difficulties. These are much more distinctive than descriptive names (for example, PowerBook) or words taken straight from the dictionary (Yahoo or Orange), and therefore they are more likely to be available as trademarks. Some examples:

**Google** – internet search engine name coined from googolplex meaning a very large number

**Vivendi** – global communications company name coined from the word vive, which suggests life and vitality in many languages, vive la difference!

**Novartis** – pharmaceutical company name suggesting innovation (nova) and expertise (artisanship)

**Thawt Technology** – (the digital certificate company Mark Shuttleworth sold to VeriSign) – a typically innovative and abstract new economy name. Distinctiveness and originality are critical qualities needed to ensure the name stands out among the mass of e-commerce brands

**Amarula** – incorporates the name of the Marula berry from which this liqueur is derived. Adding the initial letter A creates an original word that can be protected as a trademark.

Another way of standing out in the crowd is to choose a word completely out of context. Apple computers, Smile internet banking, and Penguin biscuits are examples of this. However, this approach is very popular and even the most off-the-wall ideas have usually been taken.

**Creating the Perfect Name**

New names should not be too constrictive and should allow for possible future strategic developments of the brand. It is also important for a name to fit in with the company’s existing branding strategy. The brand might, for example, need to highlight a common theme running through a range of product names. Consider three effective South African brands:

**Old Mutual** is resolutely traditional and reassuring. It uses old-fashioned language to suggest the company's longevity and therefore reliability in financial markets.

**Castle Lager**, like many beer brands, is a strong-sounding masculine name that suggests heritage. The impression is that the beer has taken generations to perfect. The masculine quality is important to ensure approval among male social groups.

**Limpopo**, like many tourist destinations, Limpopo is a brand that aids recognition and draws attention to the provinces African culture. Long before the Americans did the same with ‘I Love NY’. This technique was inadvertently pioneered in the 18th Century by Britain’s Dr Johnson when he put London on the pleasure-seekers map for all time by saying, “When a man is tired of London he is tired of life.”

Naming experts generate a range of potential names for a new product or service. Nomen uses a network of creatives and consultants to generate names through brainstorming groups and creative sessions. The name is chosen following feedback sessions with the client, legal checks and linguistic screening.

Some dos and don’ts for the client at the start of the name development process:

- Think imaginatively and outside of constraints
- Carry out careful trademark checks
- Make sure the branding strategy is durable
- Do extensive market research
- Gain inspiration and ideas from any existing names used by the company
- Test the name’s appropriateness for foreign markets
- Leave plenty of time to get everything done.

Above all, remember a brand name is an investment. Over time it becomes better known and reminds customers of any communications activities, such as an advertising campaign. Other elements of a brand may change but a good name will last forever.

Simon Luke is managing director of Nomen, UK. Nomen is a brand name specialist with 17 offices covering 10 countries. This coupled with its globally extensive network of associates means Nomen can offer complete global naming advice. For more information e-mail: lisa@nomen.co.uk.