What you need to know about...

Naming in the United States

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The U.S. is *huge*

In a big enough room, you might hear around 430 languages.

There are 340 million of us here, and 68 million people speak a language other than English at home.

The differences in attitudes, needs, and lifestyles can (and will) vary widely from one place to the next: the market you'll find in Portland, Oregon is likely different from the one you'll find in Raymondville, Missouri.

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But that means your canvas is vast

There’s no one naming style that dominates, nor will your name’s success hinge on it sounding “American.”

The key to success is knowing what you want your name to help you accomplish, and then making smart choices in an often-crowded landscape.

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It can be hard to overcome a linguistic challenge (but *not* impossible)

Your brand’s meaning in its home market might not land the same here. Some brands make a change; others just roll with it.

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A Mexican baked goods brand that's successful here, but whose name is a (typically insulting) term for a hot but unintelligent woman.

When it first launched, its potential to be pronounced as a homophobic slur made the name seem unsustainable. But it took the time to educate the market about its pronunciation, and it lives on today

The Japanese drink brand Calpis changed its name to Calpico for international markets because "Calpis" sounded similar to "cow piss" in English.

The brand's story of the name? "The name GOO.N comes from ぐんぐん (gun-gun). [This] refers to a baby's steady growth." They're currently selling in the U.S., but time will tell whether English speakers' less-positive associations with the word Goon (we use it to mean a fool, or a thug, or a third thing I'll let you look up yourself) force a change.

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Think truth, not trends

We move through trends rapidly, so basing naming choices on styles that seem in vogue (in your industry or outside of it) is rarely the way to go.

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Skip what's hot *right now* and start with a story you can stick to

Focus on what's true about your brand, and the parts of that truth that will resonate with your audience.

Many prominent brand names in the U.S. are simple real words (Apple, Amazon), reference a founder (Disney, Walmart), or are kind of descriptive but still unique (Microsoft, Costco).

But we embrace plenty of names that once seemed odd (Starbucks, Google, Nvidia), but grew to become household names.

Whatever path you choose, pressure test your name to make sure your target audience can pronounce it, and that you have a strategy to make it meaningful to them.

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It’s gonna be tricky, legally speaking

There are more than 3.2 million active trademark registrations (compare that to the number of real words in the dictionary).

This step might take longer than you think!
Be sure to factor that into your timeline.

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The U.S. operates on a first-to-use system, meaning you have to use the trademark in commerce to protect it. *No filing for a mark and then squatting on a name.*

A name that sounds great but that infringes on an existing trademark is a big no-go. *Prepare to consider a lot of names, and factor in time spent screening them for potential conflicts, before settling on "the one."*

Trademarks can be as much art as they are science. *Work with a skilled trademark attorney to develop a strategy that fits your risk profile.*

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If you use ~a different English~, we'll know

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If you use...

- Colour (instead of color)
- Litre (instead of liter)
- Diarrhoea (instead of diarrhea)
- Realise (instead of realize)
- Lorry (instead of truck)

...we'll know your name didn't originate here.

And that's ok! As long as you aren't trying to pass your name off as "Made in the U.S.A."

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Want more insights on naming around the world?

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Thanks!