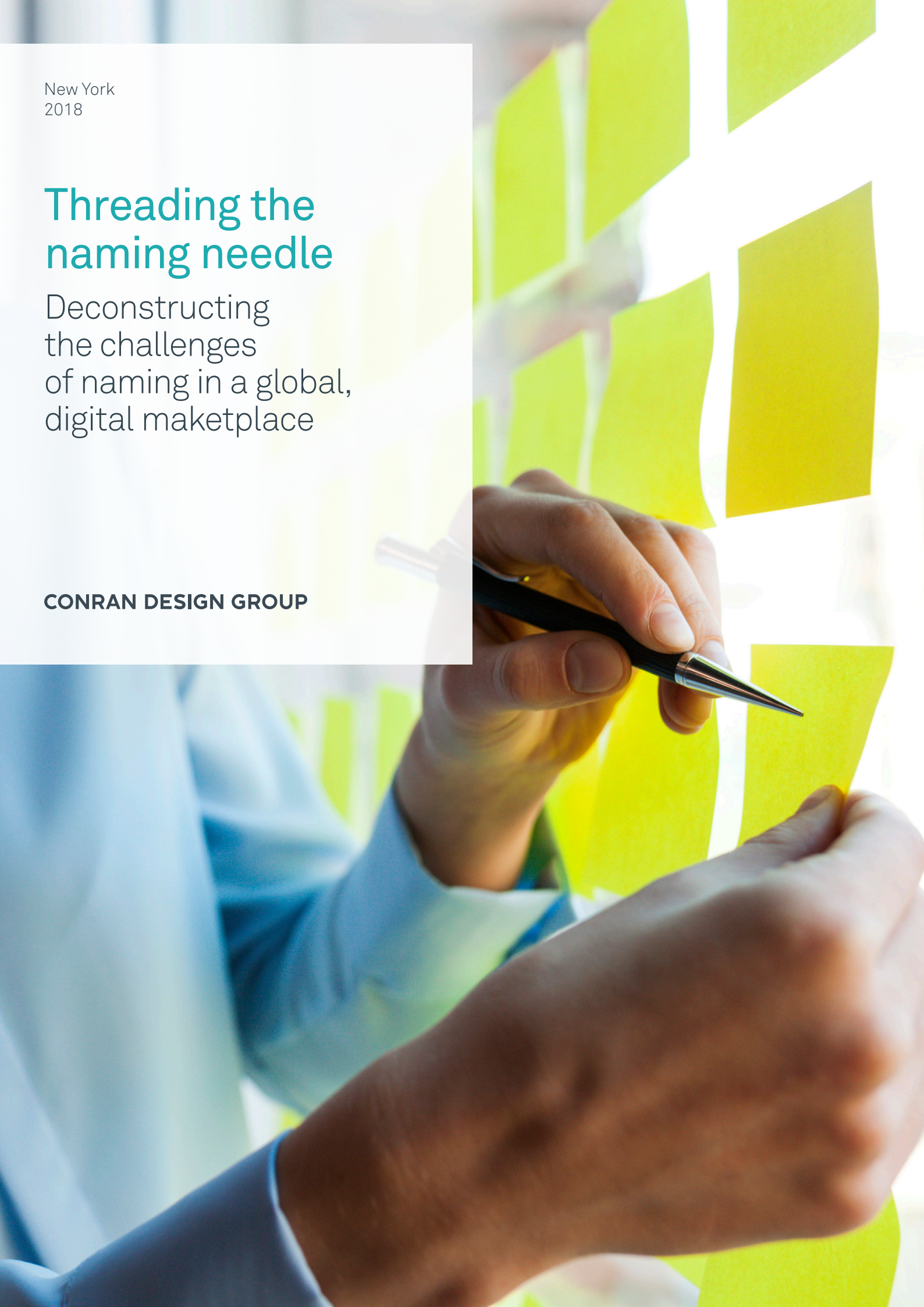New York
2018

Threading the naming needle

Deconstructing
the challenges
of naming in a global,
digital maketplace

CONRAN DESIGN GROUP

IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT GREAT CHALLENGES CAN LEAD TO GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS. TO THIS POINT, IN TODAY'S DIGITAL AND GLOBAL MARKETPLACE, DEVELOPING AND THEN TRADEMARKING A NAME FOR A PRODUCT, SERVICE OR COMPANY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE CHALLENGING. BUT WHY?

Prudent marketing professionals today understand that a brand's name is among its most important assets, and needs to accomplish many things. While names are expected to telegraphically deliver a brand's message, they are also asked to perform an array of key tasks, such as: building meaning, selling products, identifying features, conveying emotion, suggesting benefits, describing attributes, assisting navigation, explaining the relationship with another brand or creating covet. Clearly, names do a lot of heavy lifting, and that is why at Conran Design Group, we often say that 'Naming is the First, Great Public Act of Branding.'

Given the primacy of naming in today's marketing mix, it is instructive to examine why naming can be such an uphill battle. The following insights shed light as to the many challenges that exist along the way, and possible approaches to success.

1. Doing the math

First, names are subject to the immutable laws of supply and demand that have been largely exacerbated by the globalization and digitization of markets. To this end, we see more and more companies competing in a diversity of sales channels around the world – all vying for shrinking pools of intellectual property assets needed to help their products break through…names being chief among them.

Compounding this is the fact that applying for trademarks has been largely 'democratized' by electronic filings, which allow many more individuals, entities or companies to file for, and register, many more names and designs than ever before.

In 2017 alone, there were roughly 440,000 new trademark applications filed, with 225,000 trademarks being issued or renewed. Add to that close to 2.3 million 'active trademarks' that are likely taken and protected by their owners, and you find an ever-shrinking pool of prime naming real estate.

USPTO Trademark statistics (est.)	2017 Data
New trademark applications	440,768
New trademarks issued	225,008
Total 'Active' trademarks	2,316,139

Source: USPTO Database 2017

IF NAME DEVELOPMENT IS ANCHORED TO THE COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE NAME WILL EXIST, THEN THINGS CAN FALL INTO PLACE.

2. Brainstorming is NOT naming

To implore that marketers 'get creative' is not to suggest random 'brainstorming' conducted on a Friday night with a whiteboard, some colleagues and a few pizzas – it just doesn't happen that way. In reality, addressing the fast-closing naming aperture requires smart decision-making aimed at garnering 'ownable' names in light of seemingly dire mathematical odds. It's a bit more of a sober exercise (vs. the Friday night brainstorm) that necessitates a well-defined brief, spot-on strategy, nimble name generation, a time-tested naming process, and rigorous 'filters' that help expel weak names early, while enabling suitable names to rise to the top. In the end, naming is about securing name candidates that are differentiated, strategic and, importantly, available – something brainstorming just can't achieve.

3. Great names understand their markets

When we consider all of the functions, mentioned earlier, that marketers expect names to perform, it is no wonder that naming is associated with high levels of anxiety – 'Can my new name really do all that?' is an often unspoken fear that can keep product teams awake at night. But an argument can be made that if name development is anchored to the competitive environment where the name will exist, then things can start to fall into place.

Essential to this is discerning which 'type of name' (naming convention) is needed, which will inform what the name needs to achieve and how it will break through in the market. Arriving at the most appropriate naming convention rests on the following key questions:

1. What types of naming conventions exist within the category?
2. Who are the key target audiences, and in what priority?
3. Does the brand already have any equity in the marketplace?
4. What resources will be needed to invest in the name to build meaning and equity over time?

The chart below outlines the three distinct naming conventions that can serve as guideposts on the naming journey, along with a few examples:

	Real words	Coined words
Evocative names Names with no apparent relationship to the product	Apple Virgin Orange	SONY Hulu Xerox
Associative names Names that suggest a certain benefit or attribute	Twitter OFF! Amazon	Bitcoin Celebrex Band-Aid
Descriptive names Names that describe the nature or function of an offering	General Electric Under Armour Bank of America	YouTube AllState jetBlue

Evocative names

Evocative names, sometimes referred to as 'empty vessels', exist to create high degrees of differentiation, but require heavy investment to build intended meaning into them. For example, the name 'Orange', on its own, would not be recognized as a telecom provider in Europe had time and resources not been committed to defining this name and brand early on. Marketers are often desirous of evocative names, but change direction once they realize the level of effort (and money) it takes to build conceptual meaning into them.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE NEEDS TO MATCH THE 'EXPECTATIONS' OF THE NAME OR IT LOSES CREDIBILITY AND STATURE IN THE MARKETPLACE.

Key benefit
Securing evocative names can be easier in certain industry classes of trade – and with dedicated investment, talent and luck, can result in a truly differentiated brand.

Key challenge
Evocative names require huge levels of time and investment to build meaning and equity into the 'empty vessel' – this fact is usually underestimated and oversimplified by marketers.

Associative names
A large percentage of today's commercial names (especially in healthcare/ pharma) are associative, in that they provide 'some' linkage, either in their name roots (prefix, suffix or infix), pronunciation or spelling, to specific product attributes. A straightforward example of a 'coined' (manufactured) name would be Celebrex, a drug to treat the signs and symptoms of arthritis. Here, the name uses the prefix 'celeb', derived from Latin 'celebrare', meaning 'honoring an occasion through festivities', and by doing so, indirectly connotes a positive experience, or possibly a lifting of pain. Another associative example is Amazon, which is a 'real word' that conveys the idea of a very broad offering. Interestingly, when the company first launched as a small online bookseller, it probably did not 'live up to the name' as well as it does today.

Key benefit
Because many associative names are 'coined', and have some level of inherent meaning, they can require less investment can be easier to trademark. However, investment is still needed to build meaning into the name.

Key challenge
Importantly, in all names, and especially associative names, the business performance needs to match the expectations of the name, or it loses credibility and stature in the marketplace.

Descriptive names
Descriptive names (often real words) are intended to be very clear, literal and 'telegraphic'. As a result, descriptive names, if they are available, are a popular choice of many marketers because they require less investment to build meaning into. Under Armour is a name with true descriptive properties that telegraphically describe the nature of its unique clothing products – a strong, patented wicking fabric.

Key benefit
Descriptive names can reduce the amount of time and investment that goes into building a brand because the name provides a certain level of telegraphic differentiation from day one.
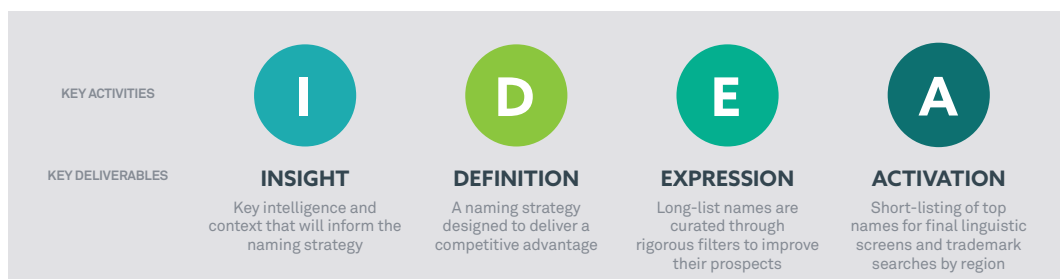
Key challenge
Because descriptive names are 'real words', they are in limited supply. This, coupled with their desirability, means descriptive names are often already registered for use. Further, due to their frequent use in society, descriptive names can become somewhat 'diluted' (used very widely) and thus not 'ownable' by any one company or individual.

ARRIVE AT 3–4 FINAL NAME CANDIDATES, SO THAT WHEN A 'FAVORITE' NAME BECOMES DIFFICULT TO SECURE (AND THIS HAPPENS OFTEN), THERE IS A BACK-UP OR TWO WAITING IN THE WINGS.

4. Invest in the right process

Of equal import to name type selection is working within a naming process that is considered, market-tested, rigorous and fosters creativity. A typical naming engagement will take a few months and include: immersion and discovery, naming strategy development, focused name generation/long-listing (by nomenclature experts), initial trademark screening, strategic shortlisting, final name curation and selection, consumer research, market linguistics and final trademark clearance. The three stage process below, provides key highlights as to the necessary steps and rigor needed to develop names properly:

KEY ACTIVITIES	**I**	**D**	**E**	**A**
KEY DELIVERABLES	**INSIGHT** Key intelligence and context that will inform the naming strategy	**DEFINITION** A naming strategy designed to deliver a competitive advantage	**EXPRESSION** Long-list names are curated through rigorous filters to improve their prospects	**ACTIVATION** Short-listing of top names for final linguistic screens and trademark searches by region

Naming: 6 keys for success

Success in naming is based on recognizing that name development is both a strategic and creative endeavor that has much more to do with planning than with impulse.

To succeed in naming, marketers should take the following into consideration:

1) Have a very focused brief that reflects serious market diligence as well as the features, functions, benefits and even aspirations of the product, service or company that is being named.

2) Estimate, with as much accuracy and detail as possible, the actual amount of time and funding that will be needed to build meaning and differentiation into the name.

3) To maximize the range of name candidates, name generation should be inspired by BOTH 'in-category' and 'out-of-category' conventions and analogs.

4) Invest in a process that includes preliminary trademark pre-screening, which can be done globally for as little as $50 per name, to highlight any conflicts early, while getting an initial read on availability.

5) Establish logical name selection criteria to drive final name selection based on how well the name:

   a.   Meets aspirational targets
   b.   Researches well with intended audiences
   c.   Delivers against its direct competitive set
   d.   Has a realistic chance of being available
   e.   Is culturally appropriate and linguistically sound

6) Arrive at 3–4 final names candidates, so that when a 'favorite' name becomes difficult to secure (and this happens often), there is a back-up or two waiting in the wings. ∎

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Key brand work:
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ABOUT US

Conran Design Group is a global design agency with a 60-year heritage, specialising in branding and corporate communications.

We believe in the power of design to drive strategic and commercial advantage. We use design to inform, inspire and engage people, shaping the interactions that challenge and influence beliefs and behaviour.

This is what we call Designing Advantage.

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