BIGCOMMERCE

How to Name a Business



Believe it or not, some of the most iconic brands once went by different names, and it's hard to imagine these companies becoming as well-known as they are now had they stuck with their original monikers.

In 1996, Larry Page and Sergey Brin called their initial search engine BackRub — named for its analysis of the web's backlinks, before landing on "Google" by accident. Netflix was founded as a DVD delivery service called Qwikster, but customers and investors disliked the name. In 2018, Weight Watchers rebranded itself as WW in a bid to disassociate from the negative connotations of crash dieting.

Naming a business may seem trivial, but it carries much weight. A great business name should reflect your business' identity and goals. Changing your business name is cumbersome and costly: you must notify the IRS, apply for a new employer identification number (EIN) and change licenses and permits. Ideally, your business name is forever.

It takes five to seven impressions for people to remember a brand, but it only takes people seven seconds to form an impression of your brand.

Having a memorable, catchy brand name that evokes the correct associations will help it stick — and brand recognition has enormous implications on your bottom line. Here are some strategies for choosing a business name wisely.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

Why Your Business Name is Important

Your business name sets the tone for what customers can expect from you. It also determines how easily existing and potential customers can recognize your brand.

It is the first thing customers see.

Your business name shapes your first impression on prospective customers (and investors). It will headline your advertisements and form part of your domain name. As such, it should be search engine-friendly. Choosing a name too similar to a competitor's or that is hard to pronounce will dent your discoverability online.

Names like 'Zappos,' 'Yahoo,' and 'Google' are catchy but meaningless, so they cost more money to brand. However, intriguing names tend to be more memorable.

It sums up everything about your business.

Ideally, your brand name conveys what products you offer and the general purpose of your brand. Think of the words you would use to describe the product, level of customer service and atmosphere (if you operate physical premises).

For example, Burrow is a furniture company specializing in custom modular sofas. The business name has a double meaning — it implies the furniture items are so comfy you want to burrow into them, but you can also use them to create your own cozy burrow.

It is your unique position in your industry.

A catchy business name differentiates you from the competition. The name should denote trust, authority and expertise within your industry. Don't pick a name that could be limiting as your business grows.

For example, Apple dropped part of its original moniker (Apple Computers) to reflect their diversified product offerings as the business grew., while Amazon ditched its initial trade name "Cadabra" after it was misheard as "cadaver."

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

Types of Business Names

Entrepreneurs generally take one of five approaches to name their company. Your ideal approach depends on your brand identity, industry and target audience.

Descriptive names.

Descriptive names specify the product or service and are ideal for positioning a brand clearly. While these names tend to be functional and utilitarian, they are less susceptible to misinterpretation.

While it may be difficult to convey storytelling and personality with a descriptive name, businesses entering a new market can benefit from it. However, note that it can be difficult to trademark businesses with names containing real words.

Suggestive names.

Emotive brand names evoke specific feelings that arise when a customer uses your product or service. Suggestive names use connotations (the idea or feeling that a world invokes) to convey the brand experience.

Creative business names are great for companies that stand for more than just the products or services they offer. Let's say you run an independent bookstore and you want to build a community of Indie writers. Choose a name that evokes your brand aspirations, even if you're not quite there yet.

Suggestive names are generally easier to trademark than descriptive names because of their originality.

Arbitrary names.

Many made-up brand names come from Latin, Greek or other foreign root words modified to embody the brand's personality. They are fun and memorable names that have no direct reference to a company's actual operations, but with enough repetition, customers will learn to associate the name with a specific product.

Acronyms/initialisms.

Acronyms tend to be used to shorten excessively long names that would otherwise be difficult for customers to recall, such as BMW (short for Berlin Motor Works). However, acronyms lack meaning, emotion and imagery.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

They are hard for audiences to remember and even harder to trademark. However, some of the world's biggest brands are acronyms containing an unrelated series of uppercase letters.

Businesses usually use acronyms out of necessity — a merger or change that forces the business to change its name but it wants to preserve its heritage — but it's not recommended for an ecommerce business.

Names based on other languages.

Some businesses use words from other languages and piggyback on their connotations.

For example, Uber is derived from the German word meaning "above all the rest." The name works because the company was founded as a better alternative to flagging a cab in the street by letting users summon a ride using their mobile phones.

Yoshinoya, the global Japanese restaurant chain, consists of three Japanese words meaning "luck," "field" and "house" and is derived from "Yoshino," the name of the owner's hometown.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

How to Name Your Business

Use a structured, disciplined approach to develop a list of potential names for your business. Don't rely on a gut feeling. Engage in market research, talk to potential customers, solicit feedback from friends and family and continue iterating until you find the name that sticks.

Brainstorm business names.

Use brainstorming techniques to develop a comprehensive list of potential business names. Familiarize yourself with the general naming ecosystem — how did your competitors come up with their brand names? Does your chosen industry favor certain naming conventions?

Think about household-name brands you recognize the most. For example, what does the brand name Kleenex bring to mind? What about Sharpie? You will need to do exploration and iteration to come up with the right brand name.

You can start the process on your own, but make sure to solicit the feedback of trusted advisors, friends and family members before going public.

Do a word dump

Start by jotting down all the relevant words to your brand and industry. Don't overanalyze. The point of a word dump is to come up with word vomit.

Set a timer (anywhere from 10-30 minutes) and try not to stop writing during that time — from descriptive words to root words in other languages to words that describe your product or service. Don't hold back.

Use a thesaurus

Review the list of words you generated from your word dump and use a thesaurus to find synonyms and antonyms.

Expanding your list gives you more options to choose from. Then you can cross out names that aren't relevant. However, don't limit yourself to adjectives. Some of the strongest-sounding company names are nouns.

Use a name generator.

Online business name generators suggest a list of potential business names based on just a few keywords. These name generators instantly check for domain availability; that way, you don't

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

choose a business name and then find that you cannot register a ".com" domain under your business name.

You can specify your industry, products and services and add other filters, such as adjusting the tone and length of your business name. The more keywords you use, the more diverse suggestions you'll receive. Try it more than once. Keep iterating until you find the business name that's right for you.

- BusinessNameGenerator.com: This website generates thousands of business name ideas based on just a few keywords. You can then narrow the results by selecting relevant industries and applying filters. The site lets you adjust the length, tone and overall catchiness of each name to find the perfect moniker.
- Namelix: This name generator helps you create a short branded name that is easy to remember. Most company name generators combine dictionary words to generate longer business names. If brevity and catchiness are what you're looking for, this one's a winner.
- Wordoid: If you're looking for a unique name, you might want to check out Wordoid. The tool helps develop made-up, yet catchy and meaningful terms to use as a business name. It's also linked to the GoDaddy domain hosting firm, to make it easy to buy a domain name if you wish.

Make a list of the best business names.

After doing a thorough word dump and generating as many potential names as possible, it's time to shortlist your name choices. Ditch any monikers that sound too similar to that of an existing business. Best-case scenario: potential customers might get you mixed up with the other business. Worst-case scenario: You might get sued for trademark violation.

Does the name make sense for the business?

Choose a business name that reflects your brand identity and makes your core audience feel like they've come to the right business for their needs.

If you're a laidback brand catering to a youthful audience, don't go with a straitlaced name that makes you sound like a law firm. Pay attention to the general cadence of business names in your industry.

For example, financial firms and management consulting companies have similar naming conventions of using the founder's name.

Does the name convey some meaning?

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

Your business name is the heart of your brand identity — especially if it originates from an interesting or touching backstory.

Some brand names are derived from ancient mythology — the name "Nike" comes from the Ancient Greek "Winged Goddess of Victory" — others are conceived by pure luck. LEGO comes from a contraction of the Danish phrase leg godt, which means 'play well.' The right name for your business leaves no doubt in customers' minds that you're the brand for them.

Is the name easy to remember?

An overly long name consisting of made-up words with no connection to your products or services will slip people's minds. Remember, it costs more to brand a business with an unrelated name.

Your marketing campaigns will not resonate if customers cannot associate your business name with what you sell. This will also put a damper on word-of-mouth marketing. Happy customers cannot refer you to their friends if they don't remember your business name.

Is the name easy for people to spell?

In the digital age, business names should be formulated with search engines in mind. When people search for your business online, can they find it easily? Hard-to-spell names are less indexable in search engine results, and it's more likely that people will misspell the name and fail to find your business altogether.

Does it look appealing?

Your business name will grace your logo, marketing collateral, social media accounts and other branded materials. The perfect business name must be visually appealing and sound pleasing when spoken aloud. Pay attention to the shapes of the letters. Is it easy to design your logo around it? Is it pleasing to the eye?

Follow naming rules for business structure.

While it's great to exercise creativity when naming a new business, don't neglect practical considerations related to your business plan and type of business. Each state has its own restrictions on business names—make sure to check with your local business bureau.

Your business can only have one "legal" name at a time — the official name you use when you file with the state to form your LLC or C-Corp — but you can have multiple assumed or DBA ("doing business as") names.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

For example, if your LLC's legal name is "Harwick and Sons LLC)," you can file a DBA to do business as "Number One Plumbers."

Limited Liability Corporations

Many small business owners structure their businesses as LLCs. This helps protect personal assets if a company faces legal action.

While restrictions differ between states, there's a common thread. Company names must include the phrase 'limited liability company' or the acronyms 'LLC' or 'L.L.C.'

You cannot use words that imply the company is a government entity (eg: federal, Treasury, United States) or words like "bank," "trust," or "insurance" unless legally authorized to operate as such by the appropriate government agency.

C-Corporations

C-Corps are the most common type of corporation. They are suitable for businesses with shareholders, directors, and officers working in association because they protect shareholders from being liable for the debts of the corporations (shareholder liability is limited to what shareholders themselves have invested).

A corporation's name typically must include words like 'Corporation,' 'Incorporated,' 'Company,' or 'Limited' or abbreviations like 'Corp.,' 'Inc.,' 'Co.,' or 'Ltd.'

Informal business structures

Businesses run by one or two people tend to identify as sole proprietorships or partnerships. There are fewer rules for these types of businesses, but you should still tread carefully.

Sole proprietorship

Sole proprietors can operate under the founder's surname or a fictitious name. If you use a fictitious name (by filing for a DBA), you must register your business with your local secretary of state.

A DBA lets you trade under an official brand name that isn't your surname. Registering your business name can make it easier to open a business bank account and get an employer identification number (EIN).

General partnership

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

General partnerships have two or more owners. Registered partnership names must include the surnames of the founders. If you want to operate under a different name, file for a DBA.

Check if the business name is available.

Before growing too attached to a prospective business name, ensure another business hasn't claimed it.

Domain availability

Ideally, your domain name matches your company name. If the '.com' domain name is taken, you might opt for a .org or .net domain, although studies show that people tend to trust .com domains more.

When looking up your business for the first time, they are also most likely to assume that your business is under a .com domain name, and if they can't find you that way, they may give up searching altogether.

Search federal trademark records

Search USPTO.gov to find out whether you can get a trademark or service mark for the name. Type in your business name idea and the search engine will tell you if that name is taken or is semantically similar to the name of an existing business.

Conduct a Secretary of State search

Search your local Secretary of State to determine if your business name is distinguishable in the Secretary of State's records from the name of an existing entity.

You can ask the Secretary of State to provide a preliminary determination on name availability, but you may need to wait for a final determination before you use it. You can also run a business entity name search on the Secretary of State's website.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

Register Your Business Name

To register a business name, you must first register your business to make it a distinct legal entity. Most businesses must file for a federal tax ID.

If you want to trademark your business, brand or product name, file with the United States Patent and Trademark Office once you've formed your business. If your business is an LLC, C-corp, partnership or nonprofit, you'll need to register with the secretary of state's office, a business bureau or a business agency.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

Guidelines for Business Name Ideas

Follow the above steps and you'll land on the perfect business name. Before you embark on the naming process, let's recap some crucial factors to keep in mind throughout.

Understand your business.

You need a solid understanding of your business — its purpose, vision, mission and target audience. The business name must reflect that and should be the guiding principle for your brand identity. A good business name conveys your business's benefits through evocative words or literal meaning.

Use descriptive words.

Adjectives are a great way to convey meaning. For example, if your business is known for producing high-quality, bespoke items, include descriptors like 'custom' or 'best' in your business name. Or if you're known for speedy services, words like 'instant' or 'rapid' convey your unique value proposition.

Be literal.

Don't make potential customers work too hard to determine what your business offers. They should recognize what you can provide simply by reading your name. This might mean including words that describe your product.

Use the word 'furniture' or 'home goods' in your business name if you sell furniture.

Choose a name style.

Choosing a name style keeps you consistent. Following common naming conventions in your industry may improve the stickiness of your business name.

- **Obvious/literal names**: A business name that clarifies what the company is about by using common words to explain it. Tells you exactly what the company does.
- **Mainstream words**: Using common everyday words and turning them into a brand. Instead of using made-up words, you'll use everyday words that evoke what the brand does without directly referring to it.
- **The owner's name**: Some companies use the founder or owner's moniker as the business name— especially in finance, law and business consulting.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

- **Made-up/unrelated words**: Some businesses use made-up names that may be harder to brand (it's harder for people to make the association unless your brand is super well-known) but they may be more memorable in the long run.

Avoid hard-to-spell names.

Names that are hard to spell won't stick in people's minds and are harder to search for online. People also have to type it in to send you emails. Avoid the danger of future misspelling on business cards, merch and marketing collateral.

Tell a story.

Some names are evocative and can tell a story of your firm's ethos and origins in just a few short words.

Get feedback on the name.

Seek as many second opinions as you can. As a business owner, you may be biased. Feedback is critical at all stages of business formation. Try to do market research and interviews with prospective customers to see what they think of the name.

Don't be too narrow.

Some major brands have made the mistake of choosing a name that is too narrow, suggesting they only sell one product. In 2018, Dunkin' Donuts dropped the 'Donuts' part of its name to emphasize its beverages and breakfast items. Avoid choosing a name that is too narrow and won't grow with you as your business scales.

Be careful about geographic names.

Geographic names might make you seem too localized, which is undesirable if you serve customers across the country or even in different countries. Out-of-state customers might mistakenly assume you won't serve them.

However, if localization is your unique value proposition, don't hesitate to emphasize it.

Choose a scalable name.

Finding a business name is about the future as well as the present. Choose something that will grow with your business, especially if you anticipate expanding your physical premises or catering to international markets in the future.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

The Final Word

Naming a business is a major responsibility that sets the tone for how customers perceive your brand. Following an ordered approach, researching the market and using online name generators will help set you on the right track.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

FAQs About How to Name a Business

What are recent trends in business names?

Short branded names consisting of made-up words are on the rise. Many startup names are limited to 4-6 characters. Businesses are increasingly turning to generic words that may be unrelated to the business but are easy to remember.

Should you name your business after yourself?

If you run a sole proprietorship or partnership, then your business name must feature your name, unless you file a DBA that lets you operate under a separate name. Other business types (C-Corps and LLCs) are not required to be named after the founder.

Can I sell my trademark or buy someone else's?

You must operate a business using your trademark before you can sell it. You cannot sell a trademark if it was only registered as a placeholder intended for future use. The trademark must be displayed on all products you offer for sale. You can buy another person's trademark — this is known as "trademark assignment" — however, the process is legally complicated and expensive. You must buy all company assets, product lines, or the whole business linked to the trademark to purchase an existing trademark.

Is my trademark application public?

Yes. When you register for a trademark, it becomes public record. When filing for a trademark, you must submit your name, domicile address, and email address to receive correspondence. Your domicile address and email address will be publicly viewable. However, you can specify a domicile address that is different from your mailing address and/or create an email address specifically for the trademark filing so that your personal email address is not on display.

How do I know if a business name is legally available for use?

Before finalizing a business name, it's crucial to make sure it is legally available. Conducting a thorough search of federal trademark records, state business registries, and domain availability can help determine if the name is already in use or if there are similar ones that could lead to confusion. Additionally, seeking legal advice or consulting with a trademark attorney can provide further clarity on the legality of the chosen name.Before finalizing a business name, it's crucial to make sure it is legally available. Conducting a thorough search of federal trademark records, state business registries, and domain availability can help determine if the name is already in use or if

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE

there are similar ones that could lead to confusion. Additionally, seeking legal advice or consulting with a trademark attorney can provide further clarity on the legality of the chosen name.

Can I change my business name after registering it?

Yes, it is possible to change a business name after it has been registered, but the process can vary depending on the business structure and jurisdiction. Generally, changing a business name involves updating official documents, such as articles of incorporation or registration certificates, and notifying relevant authorities (for example, the IRS and state business bureaus in the U.S.). It is important to consider the potential costs and logistical implications associated with a name change before proceeding.

What should I do if the desired domain name for my business is already taken?

If the domain name you want for your business is already registered by someone else, you may need to explore alternative options. This could involve modifying the name to include a relevant keyword or using a different domain extension, such as .net or .org. Additionally, you can consider reaching out to the current domain owner to inquire about purchasing the domain, although this approach may not always be feasible. Ultimately, choosing a name that aligns with your business and brand identity is essential to maintain branding consistency and visibility.

Growing your high-volume or established business?
Start your 15-day free trial, schedule a demo or give us a call at 1-866-581-4549.

BIGCOMMERCE