



how to name your cafe or restaurant

“Not long ago I had an email from someone wanting to launch a chain of restaurants starting in Dubai but spreading worldwide. This is a laudable business objective and I receive similar proposals quite often. So far none I can think of have succeeded.

A few weeks later I was copied in on a circular email from the same person with a questionnaire containing a list of new brand names. The intention was to elicit feedback and choose a name based on popularity. The names were hopeless.

Surveys like this are next to useless anyway

since they dependent on personal tastes, which are normally prejudiced by comfort and convention. To roll out fast a new offer has to be unconventional and edgy. People will often react against such edgy ideas in a survey but then adopt them in practice. As Henry Ford said “if we had asked the people what they wanted, they’d have said faster horses”.

So what’s the best way to choose a new brand name? Surprisingly there’s more science to choosing names than there is art so you can adopt a systematic process that almost guarantees success. The key is to set aside enough time because it’s going to be tough.”

Wally Olins is probably the world's foremost expert on branding. Here is what he once wrote about naming a business

“Like symbols names are emotive. Creating and introducing a new name is difficult and complex for the following reasons:

First names have no real life or meaning until they are put into a context, so it is extremely difficult for the people going through the process to appreciate the power of the name until after the event.

Second, individual preferences and feelings are very important.

Third, a very large number of names are already registered and is it difficult to find ‘free’ names.”

I've found this to be very true so to help me guide people to choose good names I use the following criteria. You can use them too.

A name should

1. Be easy to read and pronounce, preferably in any language

Will most people be able to spell the name after hearing it spoken? Will they be able to pronounce it after seeing it written? A name shouldn't turn into a spelling test or make people feel ignorant.

2. Have no disagreeable associations

This is a common mistake so try to avoid negative words or connotations. ‘Chock Shock’ would not be a good name for a chocolate bar.

3. Be suitable for use as your outlets diversify into different activities

4. If possible, relate to the offer.

The last two can be mutually exclusive. McDonalds is a name that does not relate to the activity of its

outlets. Pizza Hut does. Pizza Hut could not easily sell burgers but McDonalds has sold pizzas; both are successful. First, decide if you want to diversify your offer, if not don't worry about 3 and concentrate on 4. If you do want to diversify then you'll need a neutral name that does not relate to your offer. Instead you can fulfil both criteria with a name that relates to the core values of your business. Try to come up with unique core values. If the name would look as good or better on another type of business it does not relate enough to yours.

5. Be registerable, or at least protectable

This is complex and can be slow. Specialist lawyers will check the name register for a fee. You should pay them to do this. Many multinational organisations have banks of already protected names and if you inadvertently use one they may have the legal right to stop you and take your profits. At the very least you'll pay a lot to fight them off. Common words can't be protected (but logos using them can be trademarked) so try to invent new words or spellings if you can.

6. Not date or go out of fashion

7. Be idiosyncratic

The last two tend to go hand in hand, be brave and be edgy!

8. Be something with which a powerful visual style can be associated

Ask your designer to do some rough logos. If they need to add a lot of graphic frills to explain what your outlet does then I'd suggest you start over or get another designer. Most of the best brands have simple logotypes without complex symbols.

9. Have charisma






Ugly doesn't sell, remember this if you invent new words or spellings too.

A very few names will fit all these criteria but you'll find that if you keep them short and they trip off the tongue then you'll be on the right lines.

Summary

Anyone can come up with the right name but it may take a long time to arrive. The skill is in resisting the temptation to let time pressure force a poor choice early.

Don't adopt a name that doesn't meet all the criteria and don't worry about who likes it. If you conduct a survey make sure you ask people to judge the name against the criteria and not on personal tastes. In fact if your friends like it'll be too conventional.

Shortlisted Name	Does it meet the criteria? (Yes = Positive, No = Negative)										
Explanation of Name	Easy to Read	Easy to Pronounce (in any language)	No disagreeable associations (in any language)	Suitable for use as organisation expands (is off-category)	Registrable or Protectable	Not Date	Relates to the activity (or values) of the organisation	Idiosyncratic	Capable of association with a powerful visual style	Charismatic	Are all criteria met?
Seared	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	No
The Brompton Grill	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes*	Yes	Yes	No	The Brompton Grill	No	No
Salamandar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
The Kitchen	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes*	Yes	Yes	No		No	No
Saute	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	No
Grilled	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	No

* subject to checking not a registered trademark

this is a worksheet we used to help us make a logical and strong choice of name for a new grill bar and restaurant.

