

THE GLOBE AND MAIL BESTSELLER

*"The lessons, 3tools and 3 rules can be applied to any organization.  
If you have an emerging brand or an established brand, read this book."*

John Warrillow

Author, *Built to Sell*

# Brand

## It ain't the logo\*



\* It's what people think of you™

ted matthews  
with andris pone

# About the Authors



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**THE LIST BESTSELLING  
BUSINESS BOOKS**

1. *Brand: It Ain't the Logo\**  
*It's What People Think of You*, new  
second edition,  
Ted Matthews and Andris Pone,  
Instinct Brand Equity Coaches.

2. *Passion Capital: The World's  
Most Valuable Asset*, Paul Alofs,  
McClelland & Stewart.

3. *Start with Why: How Great Lead-  
ers Inspire Everyone to Take Action*,  
Simon Sinek, Portfolio, \$16.

4. *What Got You Here Won't Get  
You There: How Successful People  
Become Even More Successful*, Mar-  
shall Goldsmith, Hyperion.

5. *Building Team Power:  
How to Unleash the Collaborative  
Genius of Teams for Increased  
Engagement, Productivity and  
Results*, Thomas Kayser, McGraw-  
Hill.

6. *Art of Managing Professional  
Services: Insights from Leaders of  
the World's Top Firms*, Maureen  
Broderick, Pearson Prentice Hall.

7. *Customer Experience: Future  
Trends and Insights*,  
Colin Shaw, Qaalfa Dibeehi  
and Steven Walden, Palgrave  
McMillan.

8. *Two Americans: Truman,  
Eisenhower and a Dangerous  
World*, William Lee Miller, Knopf.

9. *Borrow: The American Way of  
Debt*, Louis Hyman, Knopf.

10. *The Advantage: Why Organiza-  
tional Health Trumps Everything  
Else in Business*, Patrick Lencioni,  
Wiley.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Consistency, Management and Time</b>	<b>9</b>
	It took me the better part of a 37-year career in marketing communications to convince myself that my definition of Brand was the right one – and to start convincing others.	
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>What “Brand” Really Means</b>	<b>19</b>
	Properly understood, the Brand has exciting potential to be the operating principle for everything your organization ever does.	
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Be Remark-able</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>Brand-Building Tool #1: Be Remark-able</b> To break through the noise and reach your target market – and to avoid online wrath or irrelevance – your only option is to have a Brand worth talking about.	
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Own a Position</b>	<b>35</b>
	<b>Brand-Building Tool #2: Own a Position</b> To stand out in our overcommunicated world, you've got to establish and own a unique, honest, meaningful and clear position.	
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>A Brand's Worst (and Next Worst) Enemies</b>	<b>43</b>
	At this very moment, there are people conspiring against your Brand. They may be keen up-and-comers or some of your most trusted long-term associates. One thing is for certain: they must be stopped.	
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Build a Foundation</b>	<b>55</b>
	To keep your Brand focused, effective and safe from the constant threat of change, it must be formalized and carved in stone.	
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Be the CBO</b>	<b>65</b>
	Because the Brand lives and dies with the actions of every employee, it's got to be owned by the CEO – the only person with the power to make delivering it everyone's responsibility.	
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Marketers: Surrender Your Brand</b>	<b>73</b>
	If the marketing department truly wants the organization to live and breathe the Brand, they've got to give it up – to the CBO.	
<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Listen to Your Stakeholders</b>	<b>79</b>
	Ask your stakeholders what they think of you. It takes humility, but it's the most cost-effective and underrated way to take your business to the next level.	
<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>Evolution, Not Revolution</b>	<b>89</b>
	The only thing tougher than establishing your stakeholders' thoughts is changing them. But when change is absolutely unavoidable, please: don't do anything rash.	
<b>Chapter 11</b>	<b>Branding is a Process, Not an Event</b>	<b>95</b>
	It takes time and persistence for your Brand to sink in with stakeholders. But losing hard-won Brand equity can happen in the blink of an eye. So pass on the Super Bowl approach – and stay focused on the long run.	
<b>Chapter 12</b>	<b>Deliver Great Experiences</b>	<b>105</b>
	<b>Brand-Building Tool #3: Deliver Great Experiences</b> Because every stakeholder interaction either adds to or detracts from your Brand, you've got to deliver at every touchpoint.	

<b>Chapter 13</b>	<b>Make the Story Live and Breathe</b>	<b>115</b>
	Strong Brands are profoundly rich with elements that cannot be captured in a single Brand Foundation. But these attributes are every bit as vital to the Brand's sense of identity.	
<b>Chapter 14</b>	<b>Be the Mythographer</b>	<b>123</b>
	Although it's vital that formal Brand components be conveyed verbally and in print, they can only achieve full clarity and viral power when ingrained in stories.	
<b>Chapter 15</b>	<b>Great Names Mean Business</b>	<b>131</b>
	Brand naming is one of the most cost-effective opportunities available to tell your story and connect with stakeholders. Because the Internet makes naming more challenging than ever, committing to a rigorous process is essential.	
<b>Chapter 16</b>	<b>Inspire the Team</b>	<b>131</b>
	Building your Brand from the inside out is the best way to ensure that your employees will instinctively deliver it to the world.	
<b>Chapter 17</b>	<b>Stop Giving</b>	<b>139</b>
	Focusing your charitable activities on a single cause will help you face the complex challenge of finding and keeping employees and customers – by telling them exactly what you stand for.	
<b>Chapter 18</b>	<b>Mine the Equity</b>	<b>147</b>
	Many of the strongest Brands hold out their heritage with pride. But due to panic, neglect or the passage of time, too many Brands deny their full potential by ignoring their history.	
<b>Chapter 19</b>	<b>Protect Your Brand</b>	<b>155</b>
	Enlist yourself and those around you to stay on the lookout for threats to your Brand. And be sure to look in the mirror.	
<b>Chapter 20</b>	<b>Ride Your Brand Through the Storm</b>	<b>163</b>
	Consistently observing strong Brand discipline in good times will carry your Brand through heavy seas – provided your problems do not conflict with the heart of the Brand promise.	
<b>Chapter 21</b>	<b>Make Them Want You</b>	<b>171</b>
	The most underused capability of Brands is also the most promising for the future: their ability to attract and keep the people you want most, and filter out those you don't.	
<b>Appendix A</b>	<b>Brand Foundation: Instinct Brand Equity Coaches</b>	<b>17</b>
	Afterword by Scott Chapman, Chief Brand Officer, Instinct Brand Equity Coaches Inc.	
<b>Appendix B</b>	<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>Appendix C</b>	<b>Index of Brands</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Appendix D</b>	<b>Book Re-order Form</b>	<b>183</b>

# [15] Great Names Mean Business

Brand naming is one of the most cost-effective – and underused – opportunities to tell your story and connect with stakeholders.

**“Given several hundred million dollars and the ability to sustain heavy levels of spending behind a brand, you can make a generic, descriptive, uninteresting name stand for something and sell at the shelf – sometimes.”**

**Carol L. Bernick**  
Chairman  
Alberto-Culver

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What's a Zoosk?

It's a Brand that wasted millions on advertising because its name is meaningless. It's possible that because of that advertising, you know that Zoosk is a dating website. But decide for yourself: if you ran a dating site and wanted to get the most bang for your communications buck, would you want a name like *Zoosk*, or would you prefer *Match*, *eHarmony* or *Plenty of Fish* – names that hint strongly at what these Brands are, what value they offer and how they are different from competitors?

Great names mean business – and names like *Zoosk* just don't do the job. Or rather, the jobs:

1. Be remark-able
2. Communicate the Brand Foundation
3. Integrate with the positioning statement
4. Be distinct
5. Be memorable
6. Inspire and attract stakeholders
7. Leverage an existing naming system, or create a new one
8. Be workable into a suitable domain name
9. Pass linguistics
10. Pass legal

As we'll see, this is a very tough list to fulfill.

## **Job 1: Be Remark-Able**

Great names boost your bottom line by being remark-able. In our crazy world of hyper-messaging and hyper-choice, they make it easy for people – potential and actual employees, customers and all stakeholders – to understand who you are and what you're offering. They make it easy for people to decide if they want to buy in or opt out, and for your advocates to tell the story to others. They are deep reservoirs of meaning that you can access for telling your story now, and long into the future as you write new chapters.

Word-of-mouth being less expensive and more effective than paid communications, great names are one of the most cost-effective methods of communicating value.

## Your Feelings

A quick word about your feelings: they don't matter. That's the sometimes very challenging reality you must accept when naming a Brand. It doesn't matter what you're naming – an organization, product, service, program, business unit or anything else – the question is not whether you subjectively “like” or “love” a potential name. You have to be objective – because for many reasons, you must be willing to accept a name other than your first choice. In our overcommunicated world, the relevant question is whether the name does the jobs – thereby cutting expenses and driving revenue.

## Job 2: Communicate the Brand Foundation

Before you can name something, you have to know what it is. Which means building a Brand Foundation for it. If you try to name your Brand without first knowing what it is – without knowing what you are trying to describe – you will end up slapping together a partial Brand Foundation on the fly. With an incomplete understanding of your Brand, there's a very good chance you'll end up creating a *Zoosk* that fails to tell your story.

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**Before you can name something,  
you have to know what it is.**

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Telling stories is of course the single most effective way to communicate a Brand's meaning. Compose your Brand Foundation with wording that sets up stakeholders to tell your stories with ease. Then, using your Foundation's language to brainstorm, arrive at a Brand name with exactly the same storytelling potential. Your new, remark-able name will allow people to quickly get a sense of your Brand and be in a position to tell others about it.

## Crumb-y

Dan Hoffman and Chris Borowski decided to open an upscale café-restaurant in Toronto that featured fresh-made-daily gelato. The name they were going to pick was *Cones*, inspired by the New York bakery *Crumbs*. But wait: what made Chris and Dan's venture different and highly remark-able was their

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combined 50 years of work experience at luxury hotel Brands including Hyatt and Four Seasons. Cones said absolutely nothing about that. Any customer conversations about the name (there would not have been many) would have quickly hit a dead end – without reference to the café's origins in fine hotels and the expectation that the Cones experience would live up to that pedigree.

Value of the *Cones* name to the bottom line? Absolute zero.

Dan and Chris were easily convinced that the best name for their venture was in fact *Hotel Gelato*, with the positioning statement *Stay for dessert*. An especially exciting benefit of the name was the potential it unleashed for the venue's theme and décor. Dan and Chris had no plans for their café to evoke a stylish boutique hotel until the *Hotel Gelato* name was presented to them. Now the place has funky chandeliers, banquettes and clocks showing not the times at international capitals, but at some of the world's most prominent hotels. The bustling café has attracted a loyal group of customers and even an internationally-covered celebrity drop-in from Tom Cruise and daughter Suri.



*Hotel Gelato* demonstrates that Foundation-based, remarkable names don't just inspire opportunities to perpetuate the Brand through storytelling, but also drive alignment of every aspect of the Brand experience.

## Just What You Need

The Brand name need not reference every element of the Brand Foundation. You will find that some elements – the position, for example, as with *Hotel Gelato* – provide more fodder for naming than others. As was the case with the value Brand of Canadian Tire – Canada's largest retailer, with annual sales in the range of \$10 billion. The company's executive leadership gave us a ring after reading this book's first edition.

Unlike several competitors, including Walmart, Canadian Tire did not have its own value Brand. So it sought an in-house label to apply across a wide range of product categories. The Brand position was that it would offer similar quality to the competitive national Brands but at a lower price, and with fewer "bells and whistles."

After considering hundreds of names and dozens of positioning statements, *LikeWise* was the choice that expressed the position most clearly, by conveying the value Brand's "like," but not identical, qualities when compared to the national Brands. The chosen positioning statement – *Just what you need* – reinforced the fewer-bells-and-whistles aspect of the position, and through a double entendre, tells consumers that LikeWise is exactly what they need. The name has been rolled out to hundreds of products and could eventually adorn everything from spark plugs to lawn furniture.

### Job 3: Integrate with the Positioning Statement

Notice that with *Hotel Gelato* and *LikeWise*, the positioning statements capitalize on the opportunity to continue the story told by the name. *Stay for dessert* uses layers of meaning to enhance both the "hotel" and "gelato" aspects of *Hotel Gelato*. *Just what you need* reinforces the "like" but not identical features of the national Brand.

Then consider the name *BlackBerry*. It opens up all kinds of opportunities, which BlackBerry has mostly squandered, for telling stories that perpetuate the Brand. However, to their credit, BlackBerry created a support program, called *BlackBerry Jam*, for people who develop applications for BlackBerrys. Then they came up with *Jam Sessions*, an initiative for developer collaboration. Beautiful. So why can't they come up with an enduring positioning statement – one more integrated than past attempts like *Love what you do*, *A bold enhancement* or *Act on inspiration*?

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**The name you want, even if it's a word  
you (think you) made up, is probably already  
in use by someone else.**

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### Job 4: Be Distinct

Your Brand is unique. Your name should be too. So please don't add to the infinite number of names that copycat Apple's system of names starting with i. Same goes for anything ending in *-ia*, *-opia*, *-icious* or *-city*, which were inspired by the likes of *Expedia*, *Fruitopia*, *Bootalicious* and *Travelocity*, but have now been done. To death. They're just not differentiating anymore.

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If you have any names like these on your shortlist, cross them out or risk sounding stale and contrived.

Fact is, distinctiveness is a seriously high bar when you consider that the name you want, even if it's a word you (think you) made up, is probably already in use by someone else. This could present legal issues if you operate in the same industry or jurisdiction as your twin, but the challenge is even greater than that.

For example, now that we have the Internet and Google, people will find out that your ad agency in Ohio has the same name as an ad agency in Alberta (one that might even rank higher than you in search returns). Ad agencies are supposed to be creative, and a name that isn't unique knocks your brilliance down a notch. Even if you're not in a creative industry, your thoroughly thrashed-out Brand Foundation is supposed to have a strong difference, which implies a different name.

## **Job 5: Be Memorable**

It should go without saying that if people can remember your Brand's name, it will serve you much more effectively. The qualities that make a name memorable overlap with several of the other jobs – it needs to be remarkable, distinct and communicate the Brand Foundation, for example.

In addition, memorable names are almost always:

- Short (they have one, two, or three syllables)
- Meaningful (by conveying multiple layers of meaning)
- Easy to spell and pronounce
- Pleasing to the ear

And finally, memorable names definitely DO NOT have initials.

## **The Initial Mistake**

Choosing a name with initials is a good way to make your life miserable. A set of initials has no personality, no emotion, no visual imagery and is very difficult – a pain, really – to remember. Rest assured you will end up constantly repeating and explaining your name to everyone who is trying to understand 1. What the heck it is and 2. What the heck it means.

Initial names are successful when earned, not created. So why do otherwise smart businesspeople slap initials on a logo and think their work is done? Because very successful companies like GE, BMW and UPS surround them. People see this successful Branding and think they can emulate it. What they forget is that companies like these have earned the right to use the short form. Often it was their customers who started using the convenient shorter version long before the Brand itself formalized the use.

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**Initial names are successful when earned,  
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Of course, we all know that *GE* stands for *General Electric* and *HP* stands for *Hewlett-Packard*, because these Brands have been around forever and have spent infinite amounts of money to build awareness.

But please take a moment and tell me what these abbreviations mean:

- *AMD*
- *AME*
- *CNS*
- *FPL*

All of these are real organizations. But it's unlikely you have any idea who these Brands are or what they do, because unlike GE or HP, they have not spent billions, over decades, spreading the word.

Have you?

### **Keep it Short**

Think of almost any well-known Brand name, and it will be brief – two or three syllables at most. If the Brand name you're thinking of is longer than three syllables, chances are very good that it's been shortened by customers or by the Brand itself – like *Federal Express* to *FedEx*.

Pick a short name for your Brand, or people will shorten it for you. And then you'll probably lose the meaning you worked so hard to convey.

## Kinect

*Kinect*, the name of Microsoft's controller-free video game, conveys many layers of meaning in just two syllables. *Kinect* of course is derived from connect. It's a memorable association, because players are connected to Kinect in an entirely new way. They do not hold any kind of controller. The game console scans your body with an electric eye, and then your movements (say, the way you throw punches in Kinect's boxing game) are interpreted through your character in the game. Thus *Kinect* is also derived from *kinetics* – defined as "the branch of mechanics...concerned with the study of bodies in motion."

*Kinect* is also short. It is easy to spell even though it's misspelled. And like many of the world's most successful Brand names (think *Disney*, *Google*, *Kraft*, and *Toyota*), it sounds pleasant and powerful by beginning with a "plosive" letter (those letters including d, g, k, p and t).

## Job 6: Inspire and Attract Stakeholders

Remember: when you're choosing a name, your feelings don't matter. The feelings of others? That's a different matter entirely. That's because great, remark-able names have the power to inspire and attract.

But it's tough to be attractive when you have a name like *Retirement Residences Real Estate Investment Trust* (or *Retirement Residences REIT* for "short"). This was the unfortunate label of a publicly-traded company with 25,000 employees and 240 properties throughout Canada and the United States.

Then they ceased being a REIT, so they needed a new name. It was a rare opportunity to rid the company of an ineffective name that everyone shortened and no one outside the organization could remember. Most importantly and worst of all, the name said absolutely nothing about why any child should entrust their aging and vulnerable parent to this company's care.



Yet this company did care, deeply, about its residents. Their Brand position was expressed as *The pinnacle of caring*. They also had a positioning statement: *Enhancing lives*.

Very often, employees will at first hate their organization's new name. People are very resistant to change, especially when it's forced on them. This is what we cautioned the company's CEO to expect. But when he announced

to staff that the company's new name was *Revera*, they cheered. Rooted in the Brand's reverence for human life, *Revera* was a clear celebration of what guided these caring individuals in their jobs every day.

### **Job 7: Leverage an Existing Naming System, or Create a New One**

How will a new Brand name leverage and add value to the others in your portfolio? This is the fundamental question of Brand and naming architecture.

An effective architecture makes it easy for customers to buy from you – by making it easy for them to understand the value of each offering and the differences between them. For example, Apple's decision to name its tablet *iPad* leveraged the equity of a very well-established naming system – that of the *i*-prefix epitomized by *iTunes*, *iPod* and *iPhone*. By signalling to consumers that they should expect the same kind of magic as those products, *iPad* as a name saved Apple millions in marketing.

Great names also create a rich reservoir of future naming and storytelling opportunities. Winnipeg's decision to call its reborn NHL team the *Jets* (instead of the *Moose*) was crucial to honoring the club's legacy. It also created a flexible platform for telling the *Jets'* story long into the future. Consider what the *Jets* called the big party to launch their triumphant return: *The After Burner Social*. Perfect. What they'd call a *Moose*-themed party, we're not so sure.

### **Job 8: Be Workable into a Suitable Domain Name**

As of 2012, more than 350 million URLs, or domain names, were registered, and the World Wide Web was growing by 150,000 domains every day. A considerable portion of these domains are owned by resellers whose reason for living is to extract big bucks from you. For these reasons, it is extremely difficult to develop a Brand name that: 1. Is available for sale; 2. Is available for sale at a price you can afford.

But don't get too stressed about it. It is not the job of the name to be available as an URL. Instead, it is the name's job to be at least workable into a suitable URL.

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Even that challenge can be difficult. But a creative workaround can almost always be found. Porter Airlines, for example, decided to use *flyporter.com* when *porter.com* was unavailable. High-tech firm ReVera owns *revera.com*, so for Revera, we bought *reveraliving.com* – which, because it says something meaningful about the Revera Brand, might even be considered an improvement over *revera.com*. In similar fashion, Square, a payment system that allows anyone to accept credit card payments with their smartphone, uses *squareup.com* – a very clever call to action.

This may seem counterintuitive, but web addresses are becoming less important by the day. Most people will find you through Google (which processes 1 billion searches every day), not by typing domain names into their browser's address bar. If your website has a reasonably effective SEO (search engine optimization) strategy, you should be easily found.

## Job 9: Pass Linguistics

It may seem obvious that being free from offensive or inappropriate meanings is a vital job. Yet there are many missteps. Just one example is the *Lumia* cellphone (by Nokia), which in Spanish slang means “prostitute.”

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**It's always a challenge to develop a Brand name that won't offend or annoy at least one human being somewhere on this planet.**

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It is always a challenge to develop a Brand name that won't offend or annoy at least one human being somewhere on this planet. But your first linguistics checks should be done against your native language. Not only is there an infinite and growing amount of slang you probably don't know about, you simply never know how someone might interpret your potential name.

Or abuse it. Pretty much any Brand name can be distorted into a derogatory (and often accurate and funny) nickname. *Jet Blue*, for example, became *Jet FU* (“eff you”) when a flight attendant told off a passenger and then went down the emergency slide with a brewskie in each hand. Then there is *Calpice* for a beverage sold in Japan, which has been distorted to “cow piss.”

When it's all said and done, the best way to protect your name from abuse is to live up to its promise every day.

Shortlisted names that survive the native language check should then be checked, by a qualified linguistics firm, against other languages relevant to your target market. There is a good chance that one or more names will be disqualified at this stage, as was *Truis* in our process with *Revera* – *Truis* found to sound like the insulting “female pig” in French.

### **Job 10: Pass Legal**

As we know, there is an excellent chance that one or more names on your shortlist are in use somewhere else in the world. So it can be a question of which names are least likely to attract a legal challenge from parties already using it.

Research in Motion, for example, named a new BlackBerry operating system *BBX* (incidentally, a meaningless name and a lost opportunity to say something about the Brand). They were sued by a company already using that name for a piece of software. RIM was forced to rename its operating system *BlackBerry 10* (another lost opportunity), and received a lot of negative press – a debacle they could have avoided with a simple Google search.

Any name on your shortlist should pass this standard: it should be distinct from all Brands within its competitive set, and distinct from well-known Brands outside its competitive set. If a Google search found *BBX* to be the name of a bicycle instead of a piece of software, the next step would be a formal legal check done by a trademark lawyer.

Ideally, *BBX* would have been just one name on RIM's shortlist. Hopefully, one or more of those names would have survived the legal check, and from those the final choice could have been made.

Once you make your final choice, start using it absolutely as soon as possible: date of first use is a critical factor in any trademark dispute that can still come your way. Then seek further protection by starting the process of registering the name as a trademark.

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## **One Way Among Many**

Great names can be a big boost to your bottom line: they convey the essence of your Brand story, thereby decreasing your reliance on other forms of marketing communication. Integral to this equation is the power of names to inspire employees – which, as we'll see in the next chapter, is one way among many.