HELLO
My Name Is
Awesome

How to Create Brand Names That Stick

ALEXANDRA WATKINS
Praise for Hello, My Name Is Awesome

“Zappos.com originally started out as ShoeSite.com, but that limited our potential future growth. A company’s name can be vital to its success. Reading the tips in this book can help anyone avoid the pitfalls.”

“Insightful, irreverent, and eminently practical, Watkins’s Hello, My Name Is Awesome should be required reading for anyone naming a brand.”
—S. Christian Wheeler, Professor of Marketing, Stanford Graduate School of Business

“This awesome piece of writing is worth bottling, shaking, and stirring into your brand-name strategy either online or offline. I love the way Alexandra weaves her voice and humor into a very clear message to distill what you are about into a business name. It can be applied to your brand name and domain name. Her process is coherent and creative. A brilliant book, I couldn’t put down.”
—Jeff Bullas, blogger, strategist, and speaker, Forbes Top 50 Social Media Power Influencer 2013, and Huffington Post Top 100 Business Twitter Account

“I was skeptical about a how-to book on naming products and brands. Alexandra Watkins convinced me otherwise. Her book is a fun read with lots of practical advice.”
—Patricia Roller, angel investor and former Co-CEO, Frog Design

“Your company or product probably needs all the help it can get. Watkins helped me name my firm, and I’m constantly told what a great name it is. Don’t pick a name until you’ve read Watkins’s book—you’ll want to have a name that you love forever!”
—Charlene Li, founder of Altimeter Group, author of Open Leadership, and coauthor of Groundswell

“The type of hands-on practical wisdom rarely found (but desperately needed) in the academic community.”
—Michael Webber, Dean of the School of Management, University of San Francisco
“This is the perfect book for kick-starting entrepreneurs, brand managers, and practicing creatives.”
—Pat Hanlon, founder and CEO, Thinktopia, and author of Primal Branding

“This book is packed full of practical, real-world advice you would never get from a regular textbook.”
—Dale J. Stephens, founder of UnCollege and author of Hacking Your Education

“In the current crazy business climate, where standing out and being remembered are critical to success, your name had better be awesome. This is the best book on the subject.”
—Nell Merlino, founder and President, Count Me In for Women’s Economic Independence, and creator of Take Our Daughters to Work Day

“We’ve got a terrible name. No one can spell it. No one can pronounce it. Don’t make the same mistake we made. Read this book and let Alexandra Watkins guide you away from the ‘we thought we were being clever with our name, but now we just look silly’ syndrome.”
—Matt Ruby, founder and CEO, Vooza
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ALEXANDRA WATKINS
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The desperation to find an available domain name has gotten so extreme that a grammar-checking and proofreading company is calling itself Grammarly. Even more cringe-worthy is its ridiculous domain name: www.grammar.ly. In case you missed the memo, -.ly is the country-specific domain extension for Libya. Serious.ly. I’ve been to Libya and even I didn’t know that.

Using common sense rather than blindly following trends, especially those started by fashion-challenged engineers, is critical when it comes to domain names, also known as URLs. (To refresh your memory, URL is the abbreviation for universal resource locator. This is another example of what happens when engineers are allowed to name things.)
It Didn’t Stop Facebook . . .

Many successful online businesses, including Dropbox (get dropbox.com), Square (squareup.com), Basecamp (basecamp hq.com), Box (box.net), and SlideShare (slideshare.net), started off with an imperfect domain name before hitting it big. They then spent undisclosed sums to purchase the exact match domain. Facebook, which started out as thefacebook.com, reportedly paid $200,000 in 2005 for facebook.com. SlideShare and Square continue to use their original domain names as their official URL. Ironically, Flickr, whom I curse for starting the looks-like-a-typo trend, eventually broke down and purchased flicker.com.

Google Eliminates the Problem

Think about what you do when you accidentally type the wrong URL into your web browser. For instance, if you want to go to the website for Delta Faucets, you type in “delta.com.” But you accidentally end up at Delta Airlines. Whoa! What do you do? Book a plane ticket to Poughkeepsie? Have a meltdown because Delta Faucets doesn’t own delta.com? Refuse to do business with them because they greatly inconvenienced you? No. You simply search for “Delta Faucets,” and instantly find them. And you probably don’t even notice what their domain name is. You don’t care. No one does.

Put Yourself Out of Your Misery

Most people believe that the first thing they must do when naming a business is to go to a domain registrar (e.g., GoDaddy) to make sure the domain name isn’t taken. And if an exact match isn’t available (and they don’t have thousands of dollars to buy one that’s parked), they think they have to dismiss the name entirely. Countless great names have been killed that way. Worse, countless bad names have been conceived for the same reason. I know that many terrible names are the result of the URL being available for $9.95. (Note: I use the amount of $9.95 throughout the book as an average price of any available domain.) Here are some likely suspects:
3 Strategies to Get a Good Domain Name for $9.95

Here are three simple strategies that will help you nab a domain name that people can spell, pronounce, and understand.

Strategy #1: Add Another Word or Two
Bliss, the wildly popular brand of skin care and spas, couldn’t get Bliss.com, which is in use by Glam Media, so they got Bliss-World.com. Pure happiness.

If you’re a scrappy startup, self-funded, or simply don’t want to fork over big bucks for a domain, a second word is the way to go. Adding a modifier to your name in the form of an extra word or two is now a common and perfectly acceptable way to get an available domain name and help your customers find you through search engines.

Imagine that you have come up with a clever name for your new candle company: Fireworks. You are devastated to see that a fireworks company is using www.sells.Fireworks.com. Do not extinguish your brand name! If someone trying to find you ends up at Fireworks.com by mistake they will not give up. It takes seconds to go to Google, type in “Fireworks candles,” and find your website.

What about people too lazy to go to Google, you ask? People looking for candles don’t randomly type “Fireworks” into their web browser. (Just as people looking for naming services don’t randomly type in EatMyWords.com.)
If you want strangers to find you on Google, make sure your website is rich in real content (as opposed to unnaturally cluttered with keywords), so you are attractive to search engines. A good copywriter, SEO (search engine optimization) pro, or SEM (Search Engine Marketing) expert can be of tremendous value here.

The customers who want to do business with you already know your name. Maybe they read about your candles in a magazine, enjoyed them in the home of a friend, or saw them in a shop while on vacation and didn’t want to lug them back on the plane to Poughkeepsie.

In this case, an obvious domain name to get would be FireworksCandles.com. Not only does adding a descriptive word reinforce what your business is, the descriptive modifier will help search engines find you.

What if FireworksCandles.com is parked by someone who is selling it for $5000? Unless you have money to burn, don’t do it! Just try some different words with it, such as FireworksShop.com, FireworksStore.com, or BuyFireworks.com. Those domain names don’t sound like company names, and no one will think your business is named Buy Fireworks. But they will know how to find you online.

To turn your domain name into a call to action, try using a verb in front of your name (e.g., EnjoyCoke.com, GetDropbox.com, or GoIncase.com). Here are some verbs and short words you can use to help find an available domain name:

Buy ____  My ____  ___ Co
Drink ____ The ____  ___ Global
Drive ____ Try ____  ___ Group
Eat ____ Shop ____  ___ Inc
Enjoy ____ WeAre ____  ___ Online
Get ____ Your ____  ___ Store
Go ____  ___ App  ___ Tech
Strategy #2: Use a Creative Phrase

A creative phrase as a domain name can reinforce your brand, aid in SEO, and make people smile.

When I named a frozen yogurt store Rehab, the client got the domain name, GetMeToRehab.com. Not only is it a fun call to action, teens love to say it, and the URL doesn’t clutter up the T-shirts—it makes people want to wear them.

As demonstrated with the candle store, it’s easy to find an available URL simply by adding a word to your name. While that’s perfectly acceptable, a more creative technique would be to use a catchy phrase instead. In the case of Fireworks candles, I would suggest one with a little romantic spark. For instance:

- FireworksInTheBedroom.com
- FireworksHappen.com
- ISmellFireworks.com
- LightMyFireworks.com

Again, these domain names will not be confused with your company name. They will make people smile, reinforce your brand, and make your URL super sticky.

Speaking of unforgettable URLs, every January I attend the Fancy Food Show in San Francisco. For two and a half days, I meander up and down the aisles, grazing on cookies, chocolate, crackers, candy, cheese, and countless carbs and calories. While the dizzying displays of deliciousness are certainly memorable, most of the names are not. But I will never forget what I saw in 2012, emblazoned on a banner at the Peanut Butter & Co. booth:

www.ILovePeanutButter.com

That sign stopped me in my tracks. I loved it so much I took a picture. But I didn’t need to. ILovePeanutButter.com is forever etched in my brain. That’s the power of using a catchy phrase for your domain name. Again, Peanut Butter & Co. is the company name. And they have that domain name, peanutbutterandco.com, too. But which is easier and more fun for them to say when
they tell people their website and email addresses? Which is more of a conversation starter on their business cards? Which is easier for people to remember? Which one makes people smile? Clearly the company knows, because if you type www.PeanutButterAndCo.com into your browser, it automatically redirects to www.ILovePeanutButter.com.

Strategy #3: Get a .net or .biz Extension

While a .com extension is the most desirable one for business, don’t automatically rule out alternate extensions such as .net or .biz. Just as we ran out of 800 numbers and transitioned to 888, 877, and 866 without batting an eye, no one will think your business is untrustworthy if you have a .biz or .net name.

When I started Eat My Words nearly ten years ago, the .com domain wasn’t available, so I bought EatMyWords.biz. I had hundreds of expensive business cards printed with the .biz URL. (I put the .biz part of the URL in hot pink ink to make it pop.) Six weeks later, EatMyWords.com became available. I snatched it up for $1200, but I kept the old business cards and still use them without apology. No one has ever commented on it.

5 Domain Name Secrets

Here are some secrets I’ve learned after years of dreaming up domain names for my clients.

Secret #1: Not All Names Are Taken

My clients have secured these exact match domain names and many others for $9.95:

- BreedTrust.com (pet services review site)
- BoldMatters.com (personal development)
- RickshawRepublic.com (restaurant)
- IHaveABean.com (specialty grade coffee)
- GardenConfetti.com (microgreen shakers)
Secret #2: Make a Lowball Offer
If your dream domain name is parked or listed for sale, it doesn’t hurt to inquire about the price and make a lower offer. Our urban storage client, Boxbee, negotiated its domain for a few hundred bucks.

Secret #3: Buy the Misspellings
If you have a word in your name that people often misspell (e.g., mortgage, vacuum, library), in addition to the correct spelling of your domain, buy common misspellings of it. You can simply have those incorrect URLs automatically redirected it to the correct one. That way, people will get to your website even if they misspell your URL. And they will be none the wiser. Really.

Secret #4: URLs Don’t Need Keywords
Google no longer favors keyword-rich domain names (e.g., bestspas.com, cheapinkcartridges.com, travelbargains.com). These kinds of names are very hard to trademark because as descriptive phrases they don’t identify the source of the goods or services. If a catchy brand name or domain name has the right SEO, contains relevant content-rich text, and is lightly peppered with targeted keywords that blend into your copy naturally, it can easily top Google results. Content should be written for customers first and search engines second. For best results, hire an SEO expert and a crafty copywriter.

Secret #5: Longer Names Are OK
The popular belief is that a short domain name is better than a long one because it will be easier to remember. That’s not always true. According to a recent article in Forbes, DollarShaveClub.com has net sales of around $1.1 million each month. And how can anyone forget the fabulous name of the online furnishings store PreviouslyOwnedByAGayMan.com?

If a longer name is more descriptive and easier to comprehend, it will be more memorable than a short, meaningless name. For example, rcbn.com is short but completely meaning-
less. It won’t mean anything to potential customers or a search engine because there are no real words in it. However, if that is an acronym for a business named Rapid City Book Nook, then RapidCityBookNook.com would have meaning for human eyes and search engines. So short isn’t always better.

Short names became popular for .coms, giving everyone the false impression that a short domain name was essential. While it may have been good to have a short name years ago, now it’s not important because web browsers magically auto-fill addresses while we type them. And what good is a short name if it’s completely meaningless, hard to spell, and impossible to pronounce?

A recent check of a secondary domain name seller revealed many four- and five-letter domain names for sale. How many can you pronounce? How many would be spelled correctly with voice recognition software?

Aacax  Jouee  Teliq
Akke   Joxly   Tuova
Azrio  Kryse   Umiro
Bhib   Oivo    Vius
Calq   Ooay    Xaca
Duqa   Paxxt   Ziavo
Exoot  Takaj   Mozid

All of the above empty-vessel names are listed for sale for thousands of dollars. Whoever buys them will have to spend even more money making them actually mean something.

5 Silly Ideas to Steer Clear Of
Here are some amateur mistakes to watch out for.

Silly Idea #1: Spell It Creatively
While I covered this in SCRATCH, I must drill this into your head because it’s by far the biggest mistake people make when naming their company. The problem with having a brand name
like Naymz, Takkle, Flickr, or Speesees is that you will forever have to spell it when you say it because it isn’t spelled how people hear it. And voice recognition software won’t understand it either.

If you and your employees have to spell your name out loud for people, you are wasting everyone’s time and apologizing for it over and over and over again. Resist the temptation of getting one of these domains just because it’s available for $9.95.

**Sil.ly Idea #2: Use an Obscure Domain Extension to Spell Your Name**

While it’s tempting to create a domain name using a country code Top Level Domain (ccTLD) extension such as .me for Montenegro, .it for Italy, .us for United States, and .io for Indian Ocean Territory, those names are truly troublesome. In addition to being difficult to spell, ccTLD domain names can be hard to pronounce, especially when unaided by a visual identity. How do you pronounce Copio.us? Is it “Copio dot U S” or “Copious”? Equally troublesome is that the human eye is trained to stop when it reads a period. So a name like Copio.us causes people to stop reading. For all the wrong reasons.

A few years ago, rather quietly, the social bookmarking web service del.icio.us renamed itself Delicious because the domain name was so problematic to spell. The company explained the name change this way: “We’ve seen a zillion different confusions and misspellings of ‘del.icio.us’ over the years (for example, ‘de.licio.us’, ‘del.icio.us.com’, and ‘del.icio.us’), so moving to delicious.com will make it easier for people to find the site and share it with their friends.”

One final word of caution about getting cute with a ccTLD: You run the risk of your website getting shut down if the government finds your content offensive. In 2010, vb.ly was seized by NIC.ly (the domain registry and controlling body for the Libyan domain space) because the content of the website was in violation of Libyan Islamic/Sharia Law. Now if they would only shut down Grammar.ly.
Silly Idea #3: Use .org for a For-Profit Business

I personally find it unethical for companies to use the .org domain extension, as I believe those should be available only for nonprofit organizations and NGOs. Using or squatting on a .org name is the bad-etiquette equivalent of illegally parking in a disabled parking space. Unfortunately, there are no restrictions on who can buy a .org domain.

Silly Idea #4: Domain Name = Trademark

Just because you own a domain name does not mean you own the trademark. The two are unrelated. I recently consulted for a client who spent $45,000 on a domain name only to find out later he could not legally call his company that name. Ouch! You should never purchase a domain name without first investigating if it is identical or similar to an existing trademark or service mark. Consult with a trademark attorney before you go too far in the domain process.

While researching trademarks for a client, I discovered the data analytics firm Company X, who bought its domain name in 2012, raised $9.3 million in funding, hired a few dozen employees, yet never bothered to trademark the name. Company X is a common name, and I’m not even sure it could get the trademark. That’s incredibly foolish and naive. One day the company may receive a certified letter from the lawyer for a previously established Company X that claims that the domain name infringes on that company’s federally registered trademark. It may issue an immediate cease-and-desist order prohibiting the use of the domain name and all references to the trademark. And it could insist that the company transfer the offending domain name to the original Company X and pay damages equal to all profits to date. Unfortunately, the above scenario is not uncommon. A third of the new business calls we get are from companies facing trademark infringement who are being forced to change their name—not to mention all of their branding—on everything from business cards to building signage.
Silly Idea #5: Don’t Look before You Leap

Before you pounce on a domain name, make sure the words mashed together don’t spell something unintentional, which is called a SLURL—a clever portmanteau of Slur + URL.

The dating website PlentyOfFish should have looked at their domain name more closely, as it also spells PlentyOffish, which is what some of my girlfriends refer to it as because of how off-putting some of the men can be in their messages.

Law firm Ferreth and Jobs didn’t think this through when they bought ferrethandjobs.com. A few other mistakes:

- penisland.com (PenIsland)
- molestationnursery.com (MoleStationNursery)
- therapistfinder.com (TherapistFinder)
- michaelspornanimation (MichaelSpornAnimation)
- lumbermansexchange (LumbermansExchange)

You’ll find many more at slurls.com.

Domain names are important but should never be your primary focus when naming your company. Work on creating a memorable brand name, then start looking for a domain name. With the above tips, there’s no reason why you can’t have both.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Founder of naming firm Eat My Words, Alexandra Watkins is a recognized expert on brand names with buzz. An animated guest on TV news shows, she is frequently quoted in the press and has been featured in leading business publications, including the *Wall Street Journal, Inc.*, and *Entrepreneur*. Alexandra is a popular speaker at MBA programs and has been a guest presenter multiple times at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, San Francisco State University, and USF’s School of Management and its alumni association. She has also presented to Procter & Gamble alumni, UnCollege, In-House Agency Forum, General Assembly, and many co-working spaces.
Alexandra first got hooked on naming when Gap hired her to create cheeky names for their first line of body-care products. Soon after, she broke into the business by talking her way into branding powerhouse Landor via a Match.com date. With her fresh, unconventional naming style, Alexandra soon became a go-to resource for countless branding and naming firms around the country. And Landor sent her enough business to open her own firm. Since then, she’s generated thousands of names for snacks, software, sunscreen, social networking sites, sportswear, shoes, sugar scrubs, serums, and seafood. (And that’s just the S’s!) She’s also named lots of things that make people fat and drunk, including a nationally recognized bacon cheeseburger (which, ironically, must remain nameless).

Prior to Eat My Words, Alexandra was an advertising copywriter, working at leading ad agencies up and down the West Coast, including five years at Ogilvy and Mather, where she helped launch Microsoft Windows and learned the language of Geek Speak. In the mid-nineties she jumped on the dot-com gravy train and rode it until it crashed in her SOMA backyard. Alexandra took the money and ran, spending a year in Australia, New Zealand, Bali, and Fiji. Upon her return, she discovered her passion for naming things and soon after started Eat My Words.

Alexandra gets her passport stamped as often as possible. She has eaten her way through forty-five countries on six continents where she’s sunk her teeth into local delicacies, including barbequed squirrel in Tanzania, ostrich carpaccio in South Africa, stewed camel meat in Libya, and lobster marinara in Cuba. Her favorite food is Jif peanut butter, which she once survived on for two days on the remote island of Amantani in Lake Titicaca, Peru.

She is currently planning her next adventure.