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What's In A Name?

Finding That Just-Right Name For Your New Tanning Salon

By Matt Morgan - LookingFit.com

Choosing a business name is the first and most important step any small company can take. How will the name look on the sign above the door? How will it stand out in the Yellow Pages and where will it show up in the directory? Will the name entice customers to visit the salon or cause them to avoid it altogether? The answers to these questions--and more--are part of the name game.

Few businesses take the time necessary to come up with a successful business name, consultants agree. Naming is just like every other step of running a business, in that owners should do it as well as possible, says Chris DeMassa, president of TradeMark Express in Los Altos, Calif. "It's the face of your business. It's what you're going to be recognized for and it's how people are going to remember you."

In fact, a name is more important for small businesses than for large ones because the small businesses tend to have smaller budgets for other types of marketing and therefore must rely on their name more for recognition in the market, says Hal Meyer, CEO of Wakefield, R.I.-based Naming Systems.

Nan Budinger, principal of Metaphor Name Consultants in San Francisco, agrees. "It's a way to make a good first impression and to immediately communicate something that's important and distinctive about who you are and what you're offering," she says.

A business should be named for its audience and not for the owner. "What is it that your audience needs to know and understand about your business for you to be appealing to them?" Budinger asks. "Cute in-jokes among your family and so forth have no relevance here."

The name also should stand up in the long-term, Budinger says. "Avoid terms that are going to date you and make you sound silly three to four years down the line. Think of it in terms of groovy. That term dates you immediately, and it makes you sound very foolish two seconds after groovy was inappropriate. You don't want to name yourself with verbal bell-bottoms."

Some say anything goes, however, as long as the name works in the industry. "There are businesses that have clichés or that have cutesy names," Meyer says. A business such as Krispy Kreme "carried off" its name, he says. "You want something that's memorable and distinctive," Meyer continues. "If you're naming a business, figure out what the safest thing is to call it and go the totally opposite direction. Get the craziest, wackiest, most far-out thing that you can possibly create and use that, because that will cause people to remember it."



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Trademark Issues

The craziest, wackiest name also is less likely to be used by another company. Trademark issues could cause a huge snag for a small business, so doing the preliminary research is crucial. Search the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (<http://www.uspto.gov>), which has a database of registered and pending trademarks as well as a how-to page that explains the process of acquiring a trademark.

"It's a really good idea these days to check to see if the trademark is available, because you don't want to invest in having all your signage, your stationary and all of this done to find that a national chain owns the trademark on your name and that you will therefore need to change it," Budinger says.

"It's crazy not to do research," DeMassa adds. "We see a lot of people who never do searches. They figure that their use is so small, that it's not a problem. That's not true. They're affected by products, also. They don't know that. Products are much more likely to affect them, and they're going to be sold nationally."

Also, the tanning industry is mature, DeMassa says, meaning there are many creative names already in use and not many left for the taking. For that reason, it's important to make sure a possible name isn't being used by another business.

Because of the sheer volume of trademarks on the state level, DeMassa recommends hiring a search company or attorney to assist in the naming process. "There's no way to search it otherwise," he says. Naming companies have more experience in research and also can use their talented staffs in the naming process.

Between \$2,000 to \$5,000 will get unlimited naming, unlimited legal research, access to a trademark attorney and application preparation at TradeMark Express. The company generates a list of creative business names first, then does the due diligence on those names. Other companies will find out which names are available and put together a list from there, DeMassa says.

Meyer says the cost will be between \$5,000 and \$50,000 depending on the size of the company and scope of the naming program. With so much riding on a business name, the money it costs to hire a naming professional is probably well-spent. At the very least, future salon owners should dedicate an appropriate amount of time to the naming process if they choose to do it on their own.

"It should be taken seriously, with some effort put into it," DeMassa says. "Try to accomplish something more, something that stands up well with the competition, that accomplishes some of your marketing plan. It's a step to be taken. Why not take the right step?" Original article: <http://www.lookingfit.com/articles/281mplace.html>.



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