

HOW-TO come up with a name

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April 13, 2008

Abstract

This document will describe the process I follow when determining the name for something. Its aim is to outline a method that can hopefully be used in most name-deciding cases. In the appendices, an example of how to find the name of a website domain is given.

1 Introduction

This is a step by step practical guide that was produced while trying to come up with a name for a website. The process can - with perhaps considerable adaptation - be used to find a name for whatever other project. Note that the order of the steps is not that important and is simply the one I followed. Also, the purpose of this guide is not to limit its users but rather to provide a roadmap. If at any time you feel you're more productive by ignoring it (or going against it!), by all means follow your instincts and do so.

2 Concept

It is assumed - and it is not a trivial assumption - that whatever it is we are naming has a sound concept behind it. This means it has been thought through and worked on to the extent that it is clear whom it is aimed for, what its purpose is and how it is to accomplish that purpose. These are all questions that in practice are not always answered - or are assumed to be given an answer as things develop.

So if that process has not taken place for the project (for lack of a better term) we are naming, at least some thought has to go in it during the naming procedure. In other words, we need to consider its purpose and how the name will serve both it and the receiving audience. To answer that broader question we can break it down to a number of more specific questions. These vary depending on the project but examples include:

- Is it something the targets identify easily with or should it be obscure? In other words, should the name be simple or contrived?
- Would we like it to sound strange or should it be easy on the tongue?
- Will it be serious or playful?
- Should it be long and imposing or short and witty?

- Should it include names (not an obvious decision!)?
- Should it be made of existing words or can it be something new entirely?

3 Related keywords

Make a list of all the relevant keywords you can think of - these will be the building blocks of the process. Make sure to keep all words that come to mind - don't exclude anything at the moment. It might be useful to split those words grammatically (nouns - 'objects', verbs - actions, adjectives - specifying the other two categories) - this will be of use later when trying to combine them.

3.1 Websites:

- <http://dictionary.reference.com> - to find the exact meaning of words (they tend to have slightly different meanings than what we think!)
- <http://thesaurus.reference.com> - when for some reason (rhyme, length, sound, etc) the word we have in mind is not good enough the thesaurus can give alternatives
- <http://allwords.com> - to find words starting with two or more letters (very useful for creating alliterations or reminding yourself of words)
- <http://onelook.com> - to find words including certain series of letters - allows for wildcard use too

4 Phrases & idioms

These are sets of words that have an already established popularity and connotation - anything based on them will automatically gain some of their strength - assuming 'based on' is not taken to extreme distances! Quotes in Latin is a good example of such well-known phrases.

4.1 Websites

- <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/index.html>
- <http://www.idiomsite.com/>
- <http://www.yuni.com/library/latin.html>

5 Brainstorming

The fun part! Cut, mix, slightly or hugely distort everything to turn words and phrases into something clever. Do this with a friend or two for added gain. Sometimes revolving around a favourite or central word/theme might prove helpful. Wordplay will also come natural.

6 Length

Having put a few ideas on the table it might be time to see how they will be eventually combined. And a main factor in this case is length. Websites and brands should probably be one or two short words in length. Companies and organisations can more easily be larger. Also, consider the 'initialisation' of the name: would you like your name to turn into 'KGB' as acronym?

7 Narrowing down

Having played around with the words a bit it should be relatively easy to isolate those that have a nice ring to them. Or at least to exclude those that are horrible. Narrowing them down to 2 or 5 or 10 possible answers you can actually bring yourself to give to someone who asks 'What's your project's name?' is a good way to cull some of your options. And this can make a difference in the next step.

8 Online presence & availability

If whatever you're looking a name for is to have an online presence - as most things have these days, first you should look up if the domain is already registered. Other considerations include how easy it is to confuse or misspell a domain name and whether it is likely to result in some sort of copyright infringement (i.e. don't use something similar to what's already taken). If online presence is especially important, availability in major social networks and services may also be considered.

8.1 Websites

- <http://whois.net> - look up domain names
- [http : //en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top - level_domains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains) - remember if greatname.com is not available, greatna.me might be!
- <http://leapfish.com> - for high-end names you can get estimates of domain name values here

9 Ask for opinion

By this step there are probably a few options you have shortlisted and you can't really differentiate between them. Now might be a good time to ask your friends and family what they think. Make a list of emails with people that might be possible users of the project you're naming but also people who have little familiarity with the field. Present them with the naming problem and offer them a simple multiple choice question between your shortlisted items. Make sure that sending you feedback is in total a matter of minutes (reading the problem, typing a few words and clicking send). Also ask them to include their reasons why if they can be bothered. Collect their feedback, weigh their answers based on their relevance and background and let their consensus weigh

in on the tough decision. At the end of the day, however if the feedback points towards a name that you feel doesn't suit your project, feel free to have the final say. It's you who'll be working on the project after it's been named, after all.

A Example: Spellchecking Website

Our example website is about a simple page where a visitor will be able to compare the results from a search engine for a number of words or phrases. The comparison will be made between the number of webpages returned - an indicator of the popularity of the items. Such a popularity is a quick way to check the correct spelling of a word or syntax of a phrase and that will be the object of the website: to decide on the right use of a set words when one has no dictionary or spellchecker at hand (or can't be bothered to use one). In fact the aim of the website is to make it easier to use it than any other means.

Elaborating on the concept, the website will consist of only two pages: the initial search page and the results page. The initial page will consist only of the logo/name (which we are looking for), two text fields and a 'Go' button - nothing else. Obviously the choice of name is doubly important as it will dominate the webpage. Special care will be given so that upon load the cursor will appear immediately on the first field and both fields will have autofill (using say, the previous 10 most popular results). Once a letter is typed in the second field a third field will automatically appear next to it to allow for comparison of more than two items - and so on until the visitor hits 'Enter' to submit their terms. The results page will be equally minimal and include two things: the two (or more) terms accompanied by the numbers of their results in the top half and a set of ads related to those keywords for the bottom half. If possible, the term with the highest number of results will be copied directly to the visitor's clipboard (and a notification to the effect will appear).

At the bottom of both pages an 'About' link will be placed leading to a page with contact and author information as well as a FAQ.

Given the full project description and targeting we can proceed to find a name for it.

A.1 Concept

The website is **aimed at nearly everyone** who uses an internet-enabled computer in their everyday office work - apart perhaps from linguists and other experts who might need something more specialised. As such, it's meant to have an as broad appeal as possible - something **simple** and **easy to remember**. It should probably be **short and funny**, made up of a combination of familiar words (so, no heavy wordmaking should be allowed) that is **culture-independent** (which should also probably exclude most names). Since the service will be practically about word or phrase comparison it should somehow be **language-related**.

A.2 Related Keywords

- Nouns #1: **word**, phrase, tongue, language, speech, **diction**, **term**
- Nouns #2: **crowd**, people, many, all, plethos, plural, group, party, **mob**, mass, herd, horde, pack, swarm, peons
- Nouns #3: scales
- Verbs: compare, spell, check, contrast, search, choose, poll, balance, probe, **weigh**, measure, rule, value

- Adjectives: quick, simple, ubiquitous, smart, immediate, lightning, fast, verbatim

Words in **bold** indicate our favourites.

A.3 Phrases & Idioms

wisdom of the crowds, crowdsourcing, word for word, tongue in cheek, scripta manent, keyword, can of words, tip the scales, turn the scales, in other words

A.4 Brainstorming

choose words	crowdiction
mobspell	mobpare
mobcheck	mobtrust
(we) weigh words	wordscapes
wordpoll	hoipolloipoll
spellwell	masspell
web for word	plurulism
google rule	google wisdom
dictionmany	term mob
terminallogy	

A.5 Length

Two words is the ideal length - although one might also be an option, if it's hard with two.

A.6 Narrowing Down

crowdiction mobpare wordpolls/ing wordweigh dictionmany terminallogy

B Online presence & availability

All of the above (narrowed down) names are available with the .com extension.

C Ask for opinion & Decide

We finally decided on and registered the **wordpolls.com**.