

Article from "Sekret Firmy"

Dear Vincent, should I spend lots of money on researching a brand name?

Yours sincerely, A.S., Moscow

Dear A.S.,

Brand names mean something, don't they? I suppose they do. To the educated amateur, "Wash and Go" is pretty much an instruction leaflet posing as a brand name and Heinz Tomato Ketchup does not need a lot of explanation to the casual shopper. The name has to say what it is and does, doesn't it? And naming research will ensure that the customer can understand that.

So naming research can be very easily justified and suitably large amounts of money spent looking for a name of the breathtaking originality of Terry's Chocolate Orange. It certainly provides a sure way of diverting money away from what's really important and will while away some amusing hours with short business trips abroad while the design company (or whoever) finds out the real meaning of your proposed names and how well they express the core and inner meaning of your brand. For a large fee. But they do take you out to dinner afterwards.

Let us for a moment consider real, big, successful, American, consumer brands. In the light of the axiomatic need for researching a brand name given above, if we were now to establish a worldwide chain of "family restaurants" based around the most American of foods, the hamburger, would we really choose to give it a Scottish family name?

Likewise, if bringing to market a brand of jeans that would become part of the social history of the world, bringing all the values of rebellion, freedom and youth to simple work wear, would we choose the name of a German Jewish tailor? Again: a cigarette which stands for freedom, cowboys, the Arizona landscape, would we light upon the name of a small English country town to encapsulate those values?

So what research, exactly, came up with the name McDonalds, and what values did it encapsulate?

In 1948, brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald converted their barbecue drive-in in San Bernardino, California, into a limited-menu, self-service drive-in. By 1954, Dick and Mac still owned that single hamburger stand in San Bernardino. It was then that they were approached by one Ray Kroc who in the same year had mortgaged his home and invested his entire life savings to become the exclusive distributor of a five-spindled milk shake maker called

the Multimixer. Having heard about the McDonalds running eight Multimixers at a time and, he had packed up his car and headed West to see what all the fuss was about.

On arriving, Mr. Kroc had never seen so many people served so quickly and, spotting an opportunity like no other, he pitched the idea of opening up several restaurants, convinced that he could sell eight of his Multimixers to each and every one. Slightly confounded by Dick's response of "Who could we get to open them for us?" and in an attempt to sidestep the one barrier to selling all those Multimixers, Mr.Kroc replied "What about me?" He opened his first restaurant at 400 N. Lee Street, Des Plaines, Illinois, in 1955 with a proud first day's revenue of \$366.12. To put this into some kind of context, in addition to the \$461,000 to \$788,500 which McDonald's currently estimate a new store will cost, a US franchisee currently pays an initial fee of \$45,000 to the McDonald's Corporation for the franchise. The original Multimixer can still be seen in Des Plaines as the site is now a McMuseum.

Importantly, Ray Kroc did not rename the restaurant to something more research friendly like FamilyBurger but it still seems to have survived. Of the more appropriately named Multimixer, however, we hear very little. Ray Kroc did not waste his money on researching a name for his restaurant, his dream was Multimixer sales. And the more than 30,000 McDonald's restaurants in 119 countries, I presume.

And the research on Levi's? As thorough as that done by Ray Kroc. In 1853, at the age of twenty-four, young Mr. Levi Strauss came to San Francisco to open a west coast branch of his brothers' New York dry goods business. He had spent a number of years learning the trade in New York after emigrating there from his native Germany and had seen an opportunity in selling supplies to the throngs of miners who arrived daily in the big city to outfit themselves before heading off to the gold fields. Over the next twenty years he built his business into quite a successful operation – certainly, it was a good business model to take money off the miners before they went looking for gold.

One of Levi's many customers was a tailor named Jacob Davis. Originally from Latvia, Jacob now resided in the rather sunnier Reno, Nevada, and regularly purchased bolts of cloth from the wholesale house of Levi Strauss & Co. Jacob's other claim to fame was, it seems, that he had a rather ungainly and dispractic customer who kept ripping the pockets and flies of the trousers that Jacob made for him. After some time repairing trousers for free, Jacob one day hit upon the idea of putting metal rivets at the points of strain in the trousers so that he would only see his customer when he was actually buying something.

Trousers with rivets in delicate places, though perhaps not immediately appealing when described as such, were an instant hit with the good folks of Reno and the farmers of the hinterland. Naturally, worried that someone might steal this great idea, Jacob decided he should apply for a patent on the process but, having spent so much time repairing trousers for free, he didn't have the \$68 that was required to file the papers. He needed a business

partner and he immediately thought of Levi Strauss. Jacob suggested to Levi that the two men hold the patent together. Levi, who as an astute businessman saw the potential for this new product, agreed to Jacob's proposal. On May 20, 1873, the two men received patent no. 139,121 from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. On the subject of astuteness, it worth noting that, while Jacob Davis was in charge of manufacturing when Levi Strauss & Co. opened its two San Francisco factories, it was Levi's name on the doors and Levi's name on the jeans.

No thought about what the name stood for - just a great product with tested consumer demand and a very high level of mouth-to-mouth marketing.

And finally, Marlboro. Surely they did some work on the name?

In 1902 Philip Morris, an English tobacconist, established a New York based corporation selling cigarettes, among the brands was one named Marlboro. In 1924 Philip Morris remarketed Marlboro as a women's cigarette, which was marketed as "as mild as May." The filters on some Marlboro cigarettes were red to cover lipstick smears and later ads would famously show babies telling mothers what a great cigarette Marlboro is. After great success, the brand's sales began to diminish and it was finally taken off the market during WWII, being reintroduced as the safer cigarette brand in response to growing health concerns in the '40's. However, this seems to have been pretty ineffective as, by 1954, Marlboro had less than 1% of the cigarette market.

In the '50's Marlboro spotted a customer base rather different to their old one: older addicted males afraid of cancer. In 1955 Marlboro was reborn again, this time with the idea of healthy masculinity and the "Tattooed Man" campaign showed Marlboro smokers as lean, healthy, avid outdoorsmen smoking filtered cigarettes (gasp!). Within a year sales were up 50 fold: Marlboro was back thanks to the Marlboro Man. As the Marlboro Man images were rotated, public responses to the various Marlboro Men were monitored and the cowboy Marlboro Man was much more popular than any other Marlboro Man image so in 1963 Marlboro decided the cowboy alone was the "Marlboro Man."

The name, it is claimed, has its origins in the Marlborough St., London, factory of Philip Morris. However, it is worth remembering that among the New York based Philip Morris's brands, were included the names Cambridge and Derby and, given the existence of other brands such as Kent and Chesterfield, we may assume that early 20th century Americans rather liked the sound of quaint English names or else tobacco manufacturers were simply using the Ordnance Survey map of Great Britain as a guide to brand names. Certainly the brand has been able to hold three very distinct positionings during its history and has not had to change livery or name in the process. The name has been filled by the brand, not the other way round.

Today's visitor to the town of Marlborough will see few horses or campfires unless respectively ridden or lit in moments of youthful exuberance by the

scions of the captains of industry who make up the local Public School, and few are the cowboys in the tea rooms of the main square.

One cigarette brand that is reputed to have considered the impact of the name on the consumer is Camel, though this story remains apocryphal. It is whispered that in the early days of RJ Reynolds, there was a need to find a name for a new cigarette that was to be a blend of Turkish and American tobaccos. Having lost their road maps of the UK, Messrs. RJ Reynolds decided to look elsewhere and, during a particularly wearing meeting, the President stood and walked to a window where he saw a circus parade pass by and spotted the eponymous animal walking past. With the certainty that only senior executives have and which comes from the sure knowledge of being paid more than anyone else in the room, the President said "We'll call them Camels". This produced the expected response from the embryonic marketing department: camels are smelly, dirty, bad-tempered things and certainly do not convey a positive brand image. A junior at the table then piped up with what should have been the killer comment on the name: "Sir, there are no camels in Turkey". Regrettably, he was the last of his nation to have any knowledge of geography (note that the parochial sport of Baseball has a World Series) and so his logical comment was met with the remarkable but yet unarguable response from the President, "OK, put a pyramid on the pack then". In 1913 Camel was launched as a blend of Turkish and American complete with picture of camel and pyramid. Its subsequent history need not be retold here but ably demonstrates that the name has not conditioned our perception of the brand, to the extent that even with Joe Camel they have never looked Bactrian.

One area of naming research which does pay dividends is the disaster check in export markets. Some years ago I was working with a pharmaceutical company called Pharmacia (good name!) on a new OTC brand introduction to be called Cyclo-Q. Cyclo-Q was a product to combat "women's problems". We had a very well worked out positioning concept, advertising concept, packaging and all the other necessities and were testing these with focus groups across Europe. To cover off possible issues of embarrassment, the moderator was asked to ask finally "and would you be able to ask for this in a pharmacist?" In all countries the concepts were met with a very positive response. Until we got to the last item. In Germany they thought it sounded a bit like Zyklon-B (the gas used in the camps – though Umbro did, in fact, market running shoes by the name of Zyklon in Germany, but to an understandably limited market) but even so this did not seem to be a problem for them. In France, however, they laughed in a rather embarrassed way and said that it would be difficult. Suddenly it came to me – cycle au cul, cycle on your bum, is not a great name for any brand, but one to ask for by name in a pharmacy? We changed it to Cyclo-F as the Swedish for girl is flicka. As good a reason as any.

Tales of good names which, like fine wines, do not travel abound. Vauxhall's Nova did not do too well in Spain where 'no va' simply means doesn't go. Similarly Ford's Pinto did not sell well in Brazil where the word refers to a man who is not sufficiently developed in the sporting goods department. But this

problem is not limited to cars: I once met a man from Seagram's who marketed Irish Mist in Germany (where 'mist' means dung). He said it was difficult to get the Germans to drink it, but apparently the agent for Body Mist had an even more difficult job. Clairol's Mist Stick curling tongs were also a failure in Germany.

Names do not make brands, brands make names. The brand fills the name with meaning through association, usage and communication, not the other way round. Over the years I worked on fourteen different name change projects for Mars - confectionery and petfoods - where the name change happened with consistency of packaging and an increase in media weight. The result in each case was not loss of sales, but rather an increase in sales as would be expected with the increase in media weight. The name is not the brand.

So, names do not have to define the brand, but they must not stand in its way. Even so, do remember that the UK company Carphone Warehouse maintains its market leadership in retail mobile phones though the carphone is long a piece of history.

Spending money on naming research, with the honourable exception of disaster checks in export markets, is really an entertaining way of wasting money. The moral is to think the unthinkable: the brand name itself doesn't matter – it's the brand that makes it matter.

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