

## Name that brand

Retailers that approach the private brand naming process thoughtfully will be better able to build consumer trust and loyalty.

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A badly chosen brand name can kill a product or product line. 7-Up soda, for example, likely would not have survived had it retained its original mouthful of a name: Bib-Label Lithiated Lemon-Lime Soda. And the fast failures of Colgate Kitchen entrees and Bic underwear prove that a brand name that works successfully in one segment doesn't necessarily extend well to another.

But sometimes the reasons for brand name failure are not so obvious. Retail private brand teams, therefore, need to understand how to fine-tune the brand-naming process so they can build brands that truly connect with their shoppers.

### Study your shoppers

As store brands evolve, brand name is becoming more important to overall program success.

"We now need to communicate about brand and value," explains Rachel Bernard, vice president, verbal strategy for New York-based CBX. "Consumers aren't looking to buy private label products anymore; they're buying into private label as a brand and as a concept."

And the brand-naming process begins with consumer insights. Retailers need to gain an understanding of how consumers (particularly their own shoppers) view both their banner brand and their private brands, Bernard says.

“They should also understand how their customers shop across key categories,” she adds. “Are they focused on price in paper products yet care more about benefits in hair care products, for example?”

Retailers also should gain insights into which categories are most important to their most valuable shoppers. Some categories might warrant a “new name that tells a distinct story,” Bernard notes.

Insights gleaned from consumers will help direct retailers not only in brand naming, but also in determining how many unique brand names they need, Bernard says.

Roger Beahm, co-executive director of the Center for Retail Innovation at Wake Forest University School of Business, Winston-Salem, N.C., agrees, but adds to the list of shopper insights needed.

“You need to think about them not just demographically, but also in terms of psychographic considerations — what’s important to them, what they value, what their lifestyles are like, what they connect with,” he stresses. “Behavioral characteristics, too — how often they buy, what places they shop, how much they buy on different shopping occasions.”

Of course, retailers also need to think about the product or product line itself. They should ask themselves, Beahm says, about the product’s “story” — how the product is going to be different and relevant to their target shopper audience.

#### Create and test

The next step is the creation of a set of potential brand names. Such names must consider both the target audience and the product benefits, Beahm notes.

“One might argue that the benefit [the product is] going to deliver is even more important than the target audience itself in terms of being reflected in the brand name,” he says.

“Your brand name should be suggestive in some ways of the benefits to your target customer if you can make it suggestive.”

It’s not always possible to create such a name, reinforce the brand and its uniqueness, increasing appeal to the target audience.

Bernard also points to the importance of “creating a cohesive narrative and experience” across the portfolio and across the store in the brand naming process.

Also consideration-worthy in the naming process are the six criteria marketing professionals typically rely on to evaluate a brand, Beahm says. The brand should be 1) meaningful, 2) memorable, 3) likeable, 4), transferrable in terms of line or category extensions, 5) adaptable and 6) able to be protected from a legal standpoint.

“So once you’ve got your list of, say, a half dozen name options, you’ll want to weigh them against those criteria,” he says. “How well do they meet the criteria? Where do they fall short?”

Beahm stresses that a brand name seldom meets all six criteria, but the more it can

meet, the better.

Next on the agenda should be testing among consumers — something Bernard calls important, but infrequently accomplished well.

“Normally, consumers are asked ‘What do you think of this name?’, and their responses are reduced to ‘I like it’ or ‘I do not like it,’” she explains. “Brands should make sure to communicate the brand attributes, vision for the future and encouraged behaviors in addition to the name when testing. That way, consumers will be able to evaluate the name more strategically than basing their assessments on personal anecdotes and feelings.”

For his part, Beahm has found focus groups to be valuable to the testing process. Such groups could evaluate potential brand names against the six criteria, as well as evaluate other brand aspects such as packaging, packaging colors and more. But he also advises retailers to perform such testing within the retail environment, where the product is on a shelf or a hanger, and also allow employees to weigh in.

“It’s hard to get a name agreed to by everyone,” he says. “But names are those kinds of things that you put up, and the good ones stick and the bad ones fall to the ground.”

Finally, once a retailer identifies a brand name that scores positively with a large percentage of its target audience, it needs to champion that name inside its organization, Beahm stresses. That championing is part of building consumers’ brand knowledge and awareness, which ultimately will be key to the brand’s success. Knowledge of the brand encompasses what the brand/product is, what it does and what it stands for.

“It’s not going to matter what criteria you use if you stop with the name,” he adds. “If you don’t build knowledge, you’re not going to create equity and, ultimately, loyalty.”

Banner name or not?

Traditionally, many retailers have used the retail banner name as their store brand name — or part of their store brand names. But recent years have seen a number of retailers moving away from this brand naming convention.

“Both strategies can be very effective,” says Rachel Bernard, vice president, verbal strategy for New York-based CBX. “In fact, many retailers choose to deploy both strategies. Deciding which is best for a particular situation starts with the ‘masterbrand’ — consider loyalty and equity.”

Although he’s not completely against the retail banner name being used as the store brand, Roger Beahm, co-executive director of the Center for Retail Innovation at Wake Forest University School of Business, Winston-Salem, N.C., does note that traditionally, brands are associated with a specific category or related categories.

“So it’s oftentimes better, for a number of reasons, to use different brand names on different products when they are in unrelated categories,” he says. “And allow each brand to stand on its own, to build its equity, to develop its own loyal following and to

earn that trust with the customer. If you do that, you are going to be able to protect yourself better competitively against premium brand promotions and advertising.”  
By Kathie Canning, Store Brands

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