

# Naming Your New Business

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The business name you choose can make the difference between success and failure. I'm not trying to be overly dramatic, but today, when word-of-mouth, Internet searches, and social media are all key to marketing success, a name that's not memorable, hard to say or spell, or unclear as to what the company does, can doom your business before it ever gets off the ground.

The first step in choosing your business name is deciding what your business is all about. What does your company do? Who are you targeting as customers? What brand image are you seeking to create?

Now start brainstorming different name possibilities. Lots of novice business owners name their companies after themselves, but it's almost always best to choose a name that clearly conveys what the business does. If you're launching a pizza restaurant, for example, a name like "The Pizza Place" instantly tells customers what the business does, as compared to a name like "Hennessy's."

Also keep your future goals in mind. A pizza chain named Beachside Pizza might work in Southern California, but what if you expand to inland states like Nevada or Idaho? Along the same lines, the word "pizza" might be too limiting if you ultimately want to add a full range of Italian menu items. Last, but not least, consider the image you want to convey. Is your restaurant a casual, family place or a white-tablecloth dining establishment?

In today's online-centric world, it's crucial to pick a name that's available as a domain name or URL. Before you get too attached to a name, search online to find out if the URL is registered to anyone else or if it's up for grabs. Remember, if your business name is too long, customers won't want to type it into a search engine so you may want to come up with a shorter version.

Once you have 10 to 20 names you like fairly well, assess whether each name is easy to say and spell, how it looks on a sign, whether it could possibly have any negative connotations, and how it compares to competitors' names (you don't want to appear like a copycat).

After completing these steps, you should have a short list of five to 10 names that meet these criteria. Visit [www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov) to do a preliminary trademark search and make sure the names aren't taken.

Don't rush. Live with the name for a bit to see if it feels right. Survey potential customers, friends and family, or enlist a designer to come up with logos with various names and determine which you like best.

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