COMPANY NAMING
(When names speak volumes)

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Abstract

The paper looks into the problem of naming companies in Romania, and how company names may influence the image it may convey to business partners and/or clients. It is a research on going behind the name to discover whether it can truly communicate the intended message. Also, it will show the close relationship between the marketing and branding process and the chosen company name.

Keywords: company naming, reference, referent, signifier, signified

Very often, especially in the case of start-up companies, the most difficult part of the marketing and branding process is to find an appropriate name for the company, a name that will make a first impression on the business partners and clients, and hence the very first interface one can see.

Also, through marketing and branding, companies want to achieve successful referencing, in terms of delimiting and limiting the signifier-signified pair of the linguistic sign. The market needs to be taught through marketing and branding and the appropriate referent-reference liaison requires permanent and dynamic (re)adjustment according to the services and products of the company and trends of the market. Sometimes, circumstances in a certain market can change greatly the intended referent-reference of a company. For example, in the case of the German company Adidas, branding and marketing was not necessary as it was the very first company of its kind to enter the Romanian market. The only competition at that time were the local sport shoes manufacturers, that were bearing no real branding name, and quality was not even close to that of Adidas. It was an easy win for Adidas, and soon every youngster started talking about the "adidaşi". By the time real competition showed up, the borrowed term had already replaced the local old terms "ghete/pantofi sport" and "tenişi" – shoes for playing tennis, almost entirely. Every similar type of shoes started to be called "adidaşi". A quick search on Google shows that the signifier nowadays goes beyond the intended limits, and "adidaşi" refer even to competition like Puma and Nike, and even to cheap replicas (*adidasi ieftini*):



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Resellers of sport shoes also act in accordance with the searches on the search engines and even online start-up companies will use the borrowed term for domain names such as: adidasi-online.ro, adidasimania.ro, adidasinike.ro. The borrowed termed *Adidas* has turned from a hyponym into a hypernym. So, although this worked well for the company in the beginning, it has no or little effect on the current Romanian market. As a response to the broadening in meaning of the term "adidaşi", the marketers at Adidas added the term "originali"- genuine, also used by consumers when looking for the Adidas brand.

A somewhat similar history happened in the case of Xerox. There were words such as "xeroxuri" – used as a noun to refer to photocopies, and "a xeroxa" – as a verb, meaning to make photocopies. Nowadays, these terms are used less, and the terms "copii" and "a copia" are considered more appropriate. In the case of Xerox, the referent has reflected much more accurately the position of the company on the Romanian market, and, although it has had an impact even on the Romanian language, the referent is nowadays restored to the initial limits, as Xerox refers now almost exclusively to services and products offered by the Xerox company. Yet, at informal level, the two borrowed terms are quite commonly used regardless of the copy machine used for photocopying.

The history of the word "pampers" is another good example of how a particular brand ca turn into being used to denote a general class of products. Although in Romanian the semantic meaning of the English term is lost, it functions with the meaning the company had in mind. Very often other brands of diapers are now called in Romanian "pampers" or "pamperşi".

An interesting case is that of Dero, (**de**tergent and **Ro**manian), a Romanian brand for detergents. It is quite often used to denote any kind of detergent.

But as one can see from the examples above, a company name can act as a referent only if there is a marketing process behind it. There is a history behind such brands as Xerox, Yahoo!, Google, Microsoft, Alfa Romeo, Kodak and so on. On the Romanian market these and other company names have a meaning on the Romanian market, they already are referring to those particular companies and their products and services. On the other hand, a company like Inditex, which has no presence on the Romanian consumers market, could refer to either an Indian fabric company in the fashion industry, or a large industrial textile manufacturer. But according to http://www.inditex.com/enc, we would be only halfway right, as Inditex stands for **In**dustrias de **Di**seño **Tex**til, S.A. and it is a Spanish brand with exposure at global level. Start-up companies are somewhat facing with the same challenge of building an identity on a market by choosing a name that represents them and also conveys the intended message.

According to marketers there are several issues to take into consideration when naming a company. The name should be:

- straightforward and simple so that it is easy to keep in mind (some suggest that it should be a maximum of length of 2 syllables)

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- simple spelling and conveying some sort of meaning
- describes the category of the business
- suggest products and/or services offered
- show how the company differentiates from the competition

However, when picking a company name one should also consider several other concerns, such as if the business is going global or staying local, keep a limited number of business activities or planning to extend, remain a small company with up to 10 or forecasting to expand. Other variables may also apply.

Basically, company names can be categorized into nine types, depending on the approach of choosing a company name.

A. Invented names

This type of names are at first are complete blanks, referents without reference, because without no history there cannot be any reference. Usually these names have an impact though, as they sound distant, corporate-like, and neutral – because there is no back reference. In terms of branding, using a coined name it is an advantage as through marketing one can set the appropriate delimitations: Meebo, Simpy, Appia SRL, Lasco SRL

B. Descriptive names

This is probably the most common category, especially with the development of online business, where it is very important to communicate to the potential clients the service or the products to be sold. These names are difficult to be branded though, as they already have a general meaning and most often they are a category of products or services. So, although they clearly state the type of business, they do not stand out as the referent is a hypernym for particularised brands. On the web usually these companies are affiliates of top brands, targeting general audience, and using in their names keywords with the best hit rates in the search engines, or niche key terms.

Subtypes can be:

- names related to services: credit.com, Mariaj SRL, Funebra SRL
- names related to products: lens.com, jewelry.com

Descriptive names in a different culture can have the power and impact of invented names, yet they keep their descriptiveness for those who are aware of the source language, these are the borrowed terms.

C. Proper names

This is also a popular type of name category and it can be of several subtypes:

- surnames: Hewlett-Packard, Grundig, Maggi, Oltean Prodlemn, Danciu Prodcomserv
- first names: Mercedes, Danone, Garmin, Dora Medicals, Cristina Com Prod, Ana Maria srl,

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- geographical names: Adobe Systems (creek in the US), Fuji, Prutul SA(river in Romania), Dacia (old region), Muresul SA(river)
- fictional names/mythology: Nike, Hera Tour SRL, Reea SRL

First names and family names show the roots of the company and are common especially for companies with local exposure. Geographical names refer to the place of origin of a company and it can be a river, a mountain a region etc. Fictional names are often used to throw an aura of mysticism and maybe tradition.

D. Metonymic names – real repurposed words

This type refers to totemic images that are intended for linking the properties of certain signified objects with the same signifier in order to transfer features and qualities of the initial signified to the image of the future company. They are easy to remember as there is already an employed meaning available through language and culture: Greyhound, Mustang, Blackberry, Ursu Brun Srl, Lupul Negru srl

E. Acronyms

For the people who are not familiar with the significance of each of the initials, the company name will have the same impact as in the case of the invented names: AUDI, BMW, FIAT, BBC, BRD, BCR, and even if clients make a connection between an acronym and the products it stands for, the words behind the letters may remain unknown to most of the clients.

F. Composite names

It refers to combining two or more words into composite names that partly convey the meaning of the parts that make up the final term. Examples: Nortel, YouTube, Haribo, Nissan, Oltchim, Petrom, Ventrust, SIF Goldring SA. If we consider the last example SIF says what the business activity of the company is, financial institution, while *goldring*, although used as an English compound word, it is conveying to most its Romanian clients the message of *fortune and luxury*.

G. Misspelt words sounding the same as real words

They function much like the descriptive names but due to intentional misspelling they may stand out from the category they are naming. On the other hand, marketers may sometimes target commonly misspelt words for the sake of simply targeting those who misspell certain words: digg, Google, flickr, nite.com, okazii.ro. In Romanian, teenagers often use "k" to shorten the "ca" group of letters.

H. Borrowed words

These may function as invented names but they may echo quality and if it is a term known in the community it can also bear the power of descriptive names: AltaVista.com,

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avantimediagroup.com, Avanti Media Grup SRL, Royal Food srl., Venture Group srl, AquaServ, Kontroll SRL.

I. Moving names and phrases

These names want to trigger feelings like compassion or relief, or inviting to action: Animal Planet, Save the Planet, ineedcredit.com, vreaucredit.ro, Funda□ia Pentru Voi.

From the examples for each category, it can be noticed that naming companies in Romania, generally follows the same patterns. However, looking at the company names listed at listafirme.ro one can notice that there are many company names that are using borrowed terms mainly from English but also from German, French, Italian and Spanish. The rate of borrowed terms seems to be rather large and an explanation could be that those particular companies or they want to get international exposure, or they have a foreign partner, or the shareholders and founders are foreign. On analysing the business activity of some of these companies, one can notice that they conduct business only locally or nationally and have not shown any sign of getting to an international level. Hence, they meant to convey to clients novelty and foreign aura, by which the client can be subconsciously influenced into believing the company sells goods and services of high quality.

Sometimes, Romanian companies went even further, by actually "borrowing" international brand names: Spar SRL. This was a common strategy in the early 1990's when commercial laws were less restrictive. Another tactic was to use a name that is very close to an already established name, often varying just by a letter or sound. By such naming strategies the company names connote that the two companies are the same, or one is the subsidiary of the other, or the representative of that company. With the development of business in Romania, it is getting harder and harder to find available one word names, and even less probable to find one syllable one word ones.

All in all, companies employ different naming strategies depending on their future plans and in order to have a good start in business and the name is the very facet the clients or partners come in contact with. Hence, the importance of choosing the company name cautiously.

Also, the same as with international companies, most companies fail to meet all or some of the terms of naming their companies. Yet, that is no major drawback if the marketing department is successful in the branding campaign.

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