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GUEST COMMENTARY

THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK BRAND-NAMING FIRMS *By Gary Martin*

AS EVERY PRODUCT MANAGER KNOWS, creating a new brand name is one of the most cryptic of all tasks. Legal availability is a nightmare, due to overcrowded trademark registers worldwide. Pronunciations and translations of brand names across national borders are unpredictable. And added to that, there's a brand-naming pandemic: regulatory authorities in the US and abroad are rejecting one-third of all the new names submitted to them for approval.

Still, the brand name is arguably one of pharma's highest-impact commercial tactics. Companies know that brand names function as the brand's first sound bite—and in the pre-marketing phase, that's akin to millions of free sales-pitches. To help companies deliver on this critical endeavor, many capable brand-naming firms have risen to the challenges.

To pick the best fit for them, product managers need to scan the heart and soul of brand-naming firms to discern the right "anatomy." Here are three questions to guide you to the right diagnosis.

1. What is your firm's overall approach to pharma brand naming? Brand-naming is brand-building, whether it's for a new biotech with a \$1 million-a-month burn rate, or for Big Pharma. To develop names that resonate, naming firms must understand the pharma world you live in. If they don't, they will miss opportunities and waste your time by developing names that violate regulations in regions vital to you.

You also want to hear that the firm's approach to brand-naming considers all the complex parts of the brand, from its science all the way to its place in the modern media

environment. If you choose to do business with them, will they be on a path that inspires and provokes, or one that pushes mass-produced names down an assembly line?

Ultimately you want experienced global branding consultants who understand how to devise compelling brands in addition to how suitable names are created.

2. What role do brand-name safety/regulatory evaluations play in your process?

Brand name rejection due to name safety and regulatory evaluations is easily the number-one concern among product managers. Because of this, naming firms often tout their “regulatory expertise.” But beware. Too often naming firms default to selecting brand names they think have strong regulatory-approval appeal—at the expense of creativity and distinction. You should never feel as though you have to throw out the baby (interesting, different names) with the bath water (unemotional, “acceptable” names). It would have been a shame if a meaningful, strong brand name like Erbitux (an epidermal growth factor receptor inhibitor for treating cancer) had been stamped out due to the initial regulatory concern that “‘erb’ suggested herbal medicine.”

3. In your opinion, what constitutes quality in a pharma brand name? Here’s another defining question to draw out a firm’s core principles—and perhaps yours too. If you think any suitable and well-liked brand name will do, you may be willing to buy snowballs in Alaska.

Missing from the equation of suitable and well-liked names is usually the deeper wisdom of what constitutes quality brand names. Besides being grounded strategically, quality names are original, bold, and often difficult to embrace at first. Quality names generally express ideas you may not have imagined initially. Quality names cause you to pause for a fraction of a second: Viagra, Enbrel, Luxiq, Iressa, Marqibo, and Veletri are a few brand names demonstrating this powerful craftsmanship.

All brand-naming firms are not created equal. Consider these questions as “preventative medicine” to help you hire a strong, healthy firm.

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