



Naming: 3 Valuable Approaches for Startups

By [Gary Martin](#) in December 17th 2012



Naming your company, your products, your technology—and let’s not leave out naming your children too—is not only essential, but it’s also fun to do.

That may be why there’s a multitude of articles and blogs that serve up tips on how to create the “perfect” corporate name, or how to conjure up the best product names. You may know of VC’s who birth new corporate identities right at the boardroom table. Although this rash tactic usually

leads to a slippery slope, there are some exceptions. One favorite of mine is **ALZA**, the pioneering pharma and drug delivery company name coined and founded in 1968 by none other than *AL*ejandro *Z*Affaroni.

But the point of this post is to provide a different slant on naming for start-ups. As I see it, what's most important to life-science start-ups is not *how to name*, but *how to use naming strategically* to your advantage. That is, to get more attention from investors, more interest from investigators, and ultimately more value to your bottom line so your scientific discoveries can become products that help patients and benefit society. Don't you agree?

It bears mentioning that entrepreneurs usually demure when naming or branding comes up, especially at an early developmental stage. The reason is that they are passionate about their science, so their priorities and budgets are directed to the scientific and product-development side, and not to the commercial and consumer branding side. That's understandable. There would be no start-up to speak of without the science and technology to deliver the next "biomedical innovation."

However, the twist is that today every company and every start-up is already consumer facing. Facebook, Twitter and blogs such as this one demonstrate that corporate visibility is on display 24/7. Witness the unfortunate case of Beef Products Inc. (BPI), a U.S. beef products wholesaler who thought they operated under the radar, but who learned otherwise when the sobriquet "[pink slime](#)" went viral. Plant closings and layoffs followed, nearly ruining the company. It was as if the knell of the social media axiom was ringing, "if you don't define yourself, someone else will for you." Conceivably, this crowd-driven misbranding can also threaten life-science start-ups who fail to define themselves sufficiently.

So, how can naming help start-ups as they progress from test tube to YouTube®? First off, begin naming early before someone else does it for you. Second, think of naming as a tool to help achieve your goals, both scientifically (by branding your science) and commercially. And third, use naming to help define and communicate your key messages and unique differences. Here are three naming approaches that start-ups can use right now:

- **Name your clinical trials and build your scientific position.** The clinical trial phases present excellent opportunities for planting the seed of a novel molecule or for suggesting unique mechanisms or messages. Two recent examples demonstrate: Boehringer Ingelheim's Phase III clinical trial for the treatment of COPD is named **TOViTO™**. **TOViTO** contains the bookend letters "TO" to signal the dual agents being studied, *Tiotropium* (trade name Spiriva) plus *Olodaterol*. Roche's clinical trial study is named **NEOSPHERE**, an acronym for "Neoadjuvant Study of Pertuzumab and Herceptin in an Early Regimen Evaluation." The **NEO** prefix effectively points out the novel **NEO**adjuvant (pre-surgery) setting for the therapy.
- **Name your technology and leverage it in your products.** ALZA is worth mentioning again for its many innovative drug delivery technology discoveries. And in several instances the delivery technology was leveraged in branded products by incorporating part of the technology name into the brand name: **VIADUR®** used **DUROS®** technology; **Durogesic® DTrans®** is from **D-Trans®** technology; and **Adalat® Oros/XL** uses **OROS®** technology. This naming practice helps start-ups promote technological leadership

and product reliability.

- **Name your products with global brand names.** Brand names function as free sound bites for your products (even before marketing approval). They can be crafted to encourage a patient message, such as Amgen's **ENBREL**® was from the message “**ENa**bling **REL**ief”, or names can be shaped to signal a scientific link, like Genentech's **PERJETA**® which shares the *PER* prefix with its INN, *pertuzumab*. These brand names are assets that also convey credibility, thoroughness, and commercial progress for their owners.

Life science start-ups are passionate about their scientific discoveries. By taking a proactive strategic approach to naming, they can better appeal to investors, attract potential partners and communicate with the healthcare community so that their scientific dreams can advance to commercial reality.

Your thoughts and stories are welcomed in the comments section below.

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