

# INTRODUCTION

“Hello, my name is Alexandra.” Sounds simple enough. But people often butcher my name: “Alexandria,” “Alexandrea,” “Alexia.” And much to my annoyance, the 100 percent male version, “Alexander.”

What about your first and last names? Are they tricky to spell? Difficult to pronounce? Hard for people to remember? This trifecta of trouble is rampant among brand names: Sur La Table, Iams, Flickr, Saucony, Eukanuba, Xobni. Those are just a handful of head scratchers that consumers struggle with. But unlike the name you were born with, or married into, these easily bungled names were intentionally created by companies. At the time, these businesses may have thought they were being clever. But even after being in business for years, these brands still have to explain, spell, pronounce, and apologize for their names.

I am going to prevent you from making the same mistakes.

As the founder of a nationally known naming firm, Eat My Words ([www.eatmywords.com](http://www.eatmywords.com)), I have spent nearly a decade creating names for everything from consumer electronics to cupcake stores. Clients including Disney, Microsoft, and Wrigley hire my firm because they have discovered what I have known for years—the kind of brand names that resonate the most with consumers are names that people *get* and like. We want to feel clever not clueless. (Have you figured out what Xobni is yet?)

I’ve packed this book with firsthand knowledge that will enlighten and entertain you. You won’t find any junk science, branding jargon, or linguistic mumbo jumbo. And I haven’t included the etymology of famous brand names. Sure, those stories are interesting. But this is a how-to guide, not a history book.

Instead, you will get practical, up-to-date advice, such as

making sure that Siri and voice recognition software spell your name correctly. You'll read never-before-heard stories of naming triumphs and train wrecks. And you'll see dozens and dozens of eye-opening name examples—the good, the bad, and the so-bad-I-gave-them-an-award. I am not afraid to name names.

I break down the brainstorming process by walking you through how to come up with dozens of fantastic name ideas using the very same tools, techniques, and resources that I use every day.

My creative and fun techniques for coming up with names can be learned by anyone, even the most left-brained engineer. How is that possible? I don't use linguistics to create unfamiliar words. Instead, my approach is purely conceptual. It's based on what I've learned after spending more than twenty years as an advertising copywriter: clever ad headlines get noticed, get buzz, and get sales because they make strong emotional connections with consumers. Brand names can have that same effect.

Before we jump into brainstorming name ideas, you'll learn how to objectively evaluate names using the SMILE & SCRATCH test, a checklist based on my philosophy that a name should make you smile instead of scratch your head.

## SMILE: The 5 Qualities of a Super-Sticky Name

- Suggestive** — evokes something about your brand
- Meaningful** — resonates with your audience
- Imagery** — is visually evocative to aid in memory
- Legs** — lends itself to a theme for extended mileage
- Emotional** — moves people

## SCRATCH: The 7 Deadly Sins

- Spelling challenged** — looks like a typo
- Copycat** — is similar to competitors' names
- Restrictive** — limits future growth
- Annoying** — is forced or frustrates customers
- Tame** — is flat, descriptive, uninspired
- Curse of Knowledge** — makes sense only to insiders
- Hard to pronounce** — is not obvious or is unapproachable

This filter is kind of a no-brainer, right? Yet you'd be surprised how many brand names fail this test. (How does *Xobni* do?) Everything in this book is that simple.

And by the time you finish the last chapter, you will have everything you need to create awesome names on your own.

I'll admit that some of my colleagues think I'm crazy for sharing my secret sauce. They worry that I may cannibalize my business by showing "amateurs" how to do what I get paid the big bucks for. While I don't think the book will put me out of the name game, I do hope it will put me out of my misery by preventing more bad names from happening to good people.

*Alexandra Watkins*

P.S. If you haven't figured it out yet, *Xobni* is *in box* spelled backward. Just don't ask me how to pronounce it.

*This page intentionally left blank*

## CHAPTER 1



### The 5 Qualities of a Super-Sticky Name

How do you react when you see or hear a name you like? You smile. We enjoy names that surprise us, entertain us, and make us feel smart because we *get* them.

Names that make us smile are infectious. They are the ones we talk about, tweet, and repeat because we like other people to smile, too.

I love seeing the grin on someone's face when I say that I named a Spanish language school in Colombia *Gringo Lingo*. I get the same reaction when I mention the robotic vacuum I named Neato. And most people laugh out loud when they hear about the Church of Cupcakes.

Imagine if before people were even customers of yours, they