

**COMPLETELY REVISED AND UPDATED**

New Tools, Triumphs, and Train Wrecks

**HELLO**

My Name Is

**Awesome**

# How to Create Brand Names That Stick

**ALEXANDRA WATKINS**

*"You are nuts to name your company or product without consulting this book first."*

—Dan Heath, coauthor of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Made to Stick*, *Switch*, and *Decisive*

## Praise for *Hello, My Name Is Awesome*, Second Edition

"Top 10 Marketing Book."

—**Geoffrey James, Contributing Editor, Inc.**

"How do you find the right name for your brand or company? This is what Watkins does for a living—her company is responsible for naming a wedding brunch service Bloody Married and a frozen yogurt franchise Spoon Me—and her clever examples and advice will spare us all from putting the wrong foot forward."

—**Adam Grant, Wharton Professor and author or coauthor of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Give and Take*, *Originals*, and *Option B***

"Your brand is in a relentless fight for attention. This must-read book shows you how to prepare for battle and win with the strongest name possible."

—**Nir Eyal, bestselling author of *Hooked* and *Indistractable***

"Zappos.com originally started out as ShoeSite.com, but that limited our potential future growth. A company's name can be vital to its success. Reading the tips in this book can help anyone avoid the pitfalls."

—**Tony Hsieh, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Delivering Happiness* and CEO, Zappos.com, Inc.**

"Insightful, irreverent, and eminently practical, Watkins's *Hello, My Name Is Awesome* should be required reading for anyone naming a brand."

—**S. Christian Wheeler, Professor of Marketing, Stanford Graduate School of Business**

"Fantastic book! Funny, down-to-earth, and practical, it's chock-full of solid branding principles and huge 'ahas' cleverly delivered with humor and fun. A classic example of blending wit and wisdom to make a message stick. Well done!"

—**Tim Gard, CSP, CPAE, Hall of Fame Speaker**

"The insight and processes that Alexandra Watkins reveals in *Hello, My Name Is Awesome* not only have direct application to your naming process but also have direct application to thinking about your company from your customers' perspective—not what you sell but why someone will decide to buy it. There is true wisdom here—intelligence plus experience—which makes it safe and dependable

for you. There is true entertainment here—passion and provocation delivered without any reasonable restraint—which makes it a fabulous reading experience. My own company works with successful organizations in over ninety countries, and every one of them would be made measurably better by applying these unique concepts. My advice: get this book before your competitors do.”

—**Stan Slap, CEO, SLAP, and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Bury My Heart at Conference Room B* and *Under the Hood***

“Your company or product probably needs all the help it can get. Watkins helped me name my firm, and I’m constantly told what a great name it is. Don’t pick a name until you’ve read Watkins’s book—you’ll want to have a name that you love forever!”

—**Charlene Li, founder of Altimeter Group, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Open Leadership*, and coauthor of *Groundswell***

“A fascinating examination of why some brand names are forgettable and others are abominable. This is the best guide ever to the art of great naming and should be required reading for all startup CEOs who ‘have a great idea’ for their company name!”

—**Jay Baer, founder of Convince & Convert and coauthor of *Talk Triggers***

“I was skeptical about a how-to book on naming products and brands. Alexandra Watkins convinced me otherwise. Her book is a fun read with lots of practical advice.”

—**Patricia Roller, angel investor and former Co-CEO, Frog Design**

“The type of hands-on practical wisdom rarely found (but desperately needed) in the academic community.”

—**Michael Webber, former Dean, School of Management, University of San Francisco**

“We’ve got a terrible name. No one can spell it. No one can pronounce it. Don’t make the same mistake we made. Read this book and let Alexandra Watkins guide you away from the ‘we thought we were being clever with our name, but now we just look silly’ syndrome.”

—**Matt Ruby, founder and CEO, Vooza**

“This is the perfect book for kick-starting entrepreneurs, brand managers, and practicing creatives.”

—**Pat Hanlon, founder and CEO, Thinktopia, and author of *Primal Branding***



# How to Create Brand Names That Stick

SECOND EDITION

**ALEXANDRA WATKINS**



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

# Hello, My Name Is Awesome

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To my awesome mom, Joan Casale.

Thank you for being there  
for every chapter of my life,  
and every page of this book.  
Again.

*Say my name.*

—Walter White, *Breaking Bad*

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# WHAT'S NEW, PUSSYCAT?

Since this book was first published in 2014, I've amassed enough new stories, eye-opening examples, and lucrative brainstorming sources to practically write a new book about brand names. That's what this fifth-anniversary second edition feels like.

More than 50 percent of the content here is brand spankin' new. Not "new" as in I was too lazy to add anything of substance so I regurgitated the old content and fattened up the pages with extraneous fluff. Nope. New as in I was hell-bent on writing a bigger and better book because I had so much valuable new material to share and wanted to give you the Fort Knox of naming know-how. This is solid gold, Baby!

Here are just a few of the many updates:

I've doubled the number of brainstorming tools and techniques, digging deeper into the hidden treasures of the online goldmine. You'll discover that it's never been easier to come up with loads of creative names quickly. My new list of 10 Bonus Brainstorming Sources includes a little-known website where you'll discover more

than 1,200 idea-inspiring name generators. (You'll be surprised at what looking at mutant species names will spark.)

You'll find even more secrets and strategies to nab an available domain name. Not the verbal vomit that looks like someone got drunk and played Scrabble. You'll learn how to get a domain name that people can actually pronounce and spell. And I'll show you how to get great domain names without having to fork over big bucks. You'll be inspired by all the creative solutions people have come up with, including one for a turkey company that will make even vegans smile.

I've made a significant modification to my 12-point name evaluation filter, the SMILE & SCRATCH test. The M in SMILE, which formerly stood for "Meaningful," now stands for "Memorable." (The importance of your name being meaningful is woven throughout the book.) You'll learn how the names we are most likely to remember are associated with words and concepts we already know. I illustrate this with several amusing stories and personal anecdotes, including tales of a teetering tiki bar and my encounter with a surfer dude named Coconut Joel. Plus, you'll read about a name millions of us have exclaimed with glee. (Hint: it kinda rhymes with macaroni and is just as much fun to say.)

This book tells so many cautionary tales of massive fails that it could have been titled "Hello, My Name Is

Bonehead.” Wait until you read about the blunder Whole Foods made when they partnered with a restaurant in 2018. (Perhaps you saw the news headline: “Come for the racism. Stay for the disease.”) Diseases run rampant throughout this book. I suppose I could have also titled the book “Hello, My Name Is Infectious.”

The antidote to ill-fated names is of course awesome names, of which you will find plenty. In fact, one of them is the name Plenty. This vertical-farming startup raised more than \$200M in funding after it changed its name from one that was holding it back. There’s no holding back companies with some of the risqué names you’ll read about, including a nail salon in San Francisco with a name that would make your father blush.

This new edition also covers B2B (business-to-business) names. You’ll soon rethink the common belief that business-to-business names can’t have a sense of humor. You might also become a fan of Jimmy Buffett, even if you aren’t a Parrothead. You’ll get a kick out of the names of new 55-plus communities inspired by his songs and laid-back lifestyle.

Finally, I’m most excited for you to read my brand new chapter, Corporate Creativity. Even if you don’t work for a big company, you’ll enjoy reading how companies, from LinkedIn to McDonald’s, are using creative names around the office to add personality to everything from cafeterias to conference rooms. You’ll devour those

names faster than a bowl of Fleetwood Mac 'n' Cheese.  
(Honestly, that's the name of a meeting room.)

Enjoy *Awesome 2.0*!

*Alexandra Watkins*

P.S. Please don't whiz by the Preface. It has your name  
written all over it.

# PREFACE

Pop quiz!

When someone sees your new brand name, how do you want them to react?

- A. Exclaim, “I freakin’ love it!”
- B. Struggle to explain it, as if they’re reading hieroglyphics
- C. Go back to looking at their phone
- D. Throw up a little bit in their mouth

Obviously, you should be shooting for choice A (for Awesome). Your brand name makes a critical first impression. Even more than your shoes.

How many times will someone see, say, or hear the name of your brand in its lifetime? Do the math. The number of impressions is incalculable.

No other investment you’ll make in your business will last longer or get used more than your name. Getting it wrong can have painful consequences.

Just like jumping into a relationship before you really get to know someone, you may not discover the faults of

a poorly chosen name right away. You'll be too caught up in everything else you need to do to launch a new product or company. It won't be until after you've started to build a future together that you realize your name "has issues." And you'll be forced to find ways to justify it. Like the bizarrely named baby clothing company Speesees. Here's how they explained the idiotic spelling: "s-p-e-e-s-e-e-s is the way a baby would spell *species* if a baby could spell." (Really? Really.)

I don't want you to make a decision you will forever regret. Luckily, when you read this book, you will no longer be oblivious to the obvious.

The eye-opening stories here will help you avoid countless unforeseen naming pitfalls. You'll read what happened to companies that thought they had a creative name but later realized it was a mistake. Like Bawte, whose name, a bastardized spelling of the word *bought*, could also be misheard as the word *bot*, both by humans and bots. Or American Scrap Metal, which may have had its domain name, [americanscrapmetal.com](http://americanscrapmetal.com), emblazoned on everything from trucks to T-shirts before they noticed it could be read as "Americans Crap Metal."

As the Chief Executive Boss Lady of the naming firm Eat My Words, I've been involved in hundreds of naming projects over the past two decades. This book is packed with the most important information that you

need to know. I sure wish I had known everything in the book when I was starting out.

You'll learn how to create love-at-first-sight names that are so awesome that people will want to buy merchandise featuring it. Imagine that. Someone paying you to advertise your brand!

I'll show you how to come up with dozens of creative ideas. Coming up with names will no longer be frustrating or daunting. It will be easy and exciting. By simply following my framework, you will succeed beyond your imagination.

If you want more assurance that this book will help you create awesome names, consider the story of Janice Pappas, a SAT math tutor who read *Hello, My Name Is Awesome*. She studied the book cover to cover, then took a crack at the Ultimate Dream Job Challenge (found on the EatMyWords.com website). Countless amateurs have taken the test over the past 14 years with only a handful being good enough to get hired. Statistically, Janice had a better chance of winning the Hunger Games. (I rarely see any new names that melt my butter.) Janice aced the test, submitting some of the most delightful names I have ever seen. She now works for Eat My Words. Sweet.

This book works for everyone because it's based on a clear set of best practices and a proven process. It's easy to follow because I break down all the information into fun-size brain candy. It's meant to be devoured. And it



has been. The reviews on Goodreads and Amazon prove it. (Unfortunately, despite an Amazon review titled “A very dope book,” my publisher refused to let me rename this updated edition “Hello, My Name Is Dope.” Considering how many times I’ve named cannabis companies, this really killed my buzz.)

Speaking of weed, creating names does not involve doing bong hits. Nor is it a science. Yet naming firms spout ridiculous jargon about “verbal identity engineering,” “rigorous methodologies,” and “computational linguistics.” Does any of that sound even remotely imaginative? Consumers don’t fall in love with brand names created by artificial intelligence, linguistic voodoo, or mangling the alphabet. Mechanical name mutations don’t resonate with humans because unfamiliar names lack the critical “feel-good factor” that is the emotional connection we crave.

We connect with the most powerful brand names because they are based on familiar concepts we understand and appreciate. Obsession perfume. Kryptonite locks. Hollywood Hair. These kinds of names speak volumes.

As an advertising copywriter at Ogilvy & Mather, I learned how to use words to capture the attention of consumers. Just as an arresting print ad headline will turn heads, generate buzz, and spark sales, brand names can have the same magical effect.

This is my bag of tricks.

# INTRODUCTION

“Hello, my name is Alexandra.” Sounds simple enough. But strangers often butcher my name. Alexandria. Alexia. Alexa. And, much to my annoyance, the manly version, Alexander.

What about your first and last name? Are they tricky to spell? Difficult to pronounce? Hard to remember? This trifecta of trouble is rampant among brand names: Xobni, Sur La Table, Iams, Flickr, Saucony, and Eukanuba. Those are just a handful of the head-scratchers consumers struggle with. But unlike the name you were born with or married into, these companies chose to start out with names that are easily bungled. At the time, they may have thought they were being clever. But even after being in business for years, they find themselves having to explain the name. How to spell it. How to pronounce it. What it means. Anytime you have to make excuses for your name, you’re apologizing for it. And when you apologize for your name, your brand is devalued.

I’m going to prevent you from making any of these mistakes.

Amazon, Coca-Cola, Disney, Frito-Lay, Google, Xerox, and other big brands hire my firm because they have discovered what I have known for years—names that resonate most with consumers are delightfully unexpected yet easy to understand. We instantly “get” them, like a snappy punch line. No one wants to feel clueless. (Have you figured out what Xobni means yet?)

I’ve filled every page of this book with practical, first-hand knowledge. There are no wasted words. 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.

My techniques for coming up with memorable brand names can be learned by anyone. Even the most uptight actuary can unleash their inner creative beast to come up with terrific names that everyone can spell, pronounce, and understand. I don’t believe in creating names that are unfamiliar, unrecognizable, or unintelligible. Who cares that the name Hiranyagarbha means “cosmic intelligence” in ancient Sanskrit?

The most powerful names get noticed, get buzz, and get sales because they connect with consumers on an emotional level, making us feel good. Traditional naming firms have yet to figure this out. This is how I was able to make a name for myself. When I started out, I worked as a professional namer for big branding firms

like Landor and Interbrand. It baffled me that instead of hiring conceptual writers from advertising to create names, they recruited people from academia. What can a degree in theoretical linguistics possibly teach anyone about making emotional connections with consumers?

You will find no pedagogical examples in this book, just dozens of true stories about real names. The good, the bad, and the “so bad I gave them an award.” I am not afraid to name names.

I’ll break down the brainstorming process by walking you through how to come up with dozens of creative name ideas using my most trusted tools and treasure troves.

Before we jump in to brainstorming name ideas, you’ll learn how to objectively evaluate names using the SMILE & SCRATCH test, a checklist based on my philosophy: 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

**Memorable**—makes an association with the familiar

**Imagery**—aids memory through evocative visuals

**Legs**—lends itself to a theme for extended mileage

**Emotional**—moves people