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One of the first things our new clients want to do is to change their business names. It can be disaster or windfall. Your business name is very important and a simple change can have a big effect. A drastic name change can destroy all the recognition you have carefully built up, but a careful tweak can send a strong message. Choosing a good business name seems to be a formidable task for most of us and we often get it wrong. Maybe it's because we like our own names so much or it's because we think we need to be cute or something.

We've seen some incredibly silly names for businesses. They appear to be chosen almost at random, as if it didn't make any difference. Well, it does!

Your name should reflect your market niche, your identity, and be able to easily reach your customer base. In most cases your own name means very little to your customers. For example, "Gallagher & Associates" means nothing. It says nothing. If you watch a lot of TV, maybe you know of a comedian named Gallagher who breaks open watermelons with a huge wooden mallet. Beyond that Gallagher means nothing. " S?

Foods

" also says nothing. By now most of us have heard of them, however. Of course, S? gives a better message for food products than W's full name, Wormer!

Think of a Chinese restaurant called Foo's Rush Inn. What about the hair styling center called Curl Up & Dye

? Then there's

Nice To Be Kneaded Massage Center

.

Three Sheets To The Wind

is a shop for bedding supplies. Get your hair pieces at

The Wig-Wam

and on and on.

Silly names to be sure. Memorable, maybe. But would you shop there? Okay, what are the secrets? Here are seven.

1. Make sure that your name tells what you do. Our absolute favorite is Jiffy Lube. It not only tells you exactly what they do, but a benefit to you is implied.
2. Make your name expandable. If you say you're Allied Software you'll never be able to sell hardware products.
3. Avoid name trends. For awhile everything was something-rama, then it was something-land, now it's something 'R Us.
4. Make it an easy name. Easy to say, easy to spell, easy to remember, and make it easy to tell others about you. Practice it. Print it. Look at it. Do you really like it? Maybe it's okay.
5. Is it clear, what it is that you do for your customers? Acme Shoe Repair, we all understand. The Transactional Feedback Reengineering Management Group is very puzzling.
6. With your name, is your niche claim understandable? We like the east coast fast-food home delivery chain called Hot 'n Now. And, does your name fit your logo, your slogan, your overall identity? Does it work? Are you sure?
7. If the Yellow Pages are an important source of customers, should you be Aaacme or Aardvark Printers?

Your business name is crucial to your overall marketing effort. Even if you've been in business for several years, it's not too late to look again at your business name. Chances are that you've violated two or three of the seven suggestions we've listed. By the way, if you make the change carefully, your faithful clients will follow you and most will be very happy that you chose a new name that they could relate to and clearly understand.