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Finding the right name is harder than ever

*Recently released figures show Minnesota on pace to register more business names than last year.
Plus: the top ten best local brand names.*

Minneapolis, MN – Businesses that have tried to register a company name in Minnesota lately have noticed that it's getting harder to find an available name. Numbers just out show a 2.6% increase in registration of business names during the first half of 2008 over the same period last year.

A tight economy and layoffs means that even more people are starting their own business. Because the Internet has lowered the cost of entry into the market for small businesses, trademark registrations have never been higher, with more than 2.5 million names trademarked in the U.S. and at least 3 million more internationally.

"Finding an available name is tough," says Devon Thomas Treadwell of Minneapolis-based Pollywog, a naming and branding agency. "There's a general feeling among branding experts that we're running out of available names."

How should a marketer respond?

"The easy way out is to invent a word to use as a brand name," she says. "But invented names are often meaningless and weak, hobbling the brand for its entire life. Plus, it's expensive to teach an audience what a brand name means. Those are marketing dollars you could be spending elsewhere."

Instead, Thomas Treadwell recommends finding a name that has instant meaning.

"Look for a name that makes a connection to your brand promise," she said. "To get there, you'll have to dig deep, past the obvious choices that are likely already taken to words that link to your brand in unexpected ways."

About Pollywog: Pollywog works with brands in their formative stages, helping companies with the initial steps of positioning, naming and brand identity. Principals John Stucker and Devon Thomas Treadwell have more than 35 years of agency experience including Campbell Mithun, BBDO, J. Walter Thompson, Young & Rubicam and Bozell. They have worked on many leading brands, including the Walt Disney Company, Paramount Home Video, Coffee-mate, 3M, H & R Block, Southwestern Bell, @Home, Berlitz, Best Buy, Harmon AutoGlass and Mexicana Airlines.

TOP 10 BEST LOCAL BRAND NAMES

- 1. The Electric Fetus** — This Minneapolis record store has been around for almost 40 years, which makes the boldness of the name all the more impressive. As is common for provocative brand names, the Electric Fetus name has been roundly criticized. *National Lampoon*, among others, called it the absolute worst name for a business. Unless, of course, it happens to be the pre-imminent indie record store in Minnesota. For customers looking for out-of-the-ordinary CDs and vinyls, the store's name effectively says, "Nothing is too weird for us."
- 2. Geek Squad** — Taking a cue from "Revenge of the Nerds," Geek Squad proudly owns the pejorative term for someone who's smart yet socially awkward. But let's face it—when your computer's on the fritz, who you gonna call but a geek? "Geek Squad" combines the ideas of technical expertise and on-demand service into a tight, two-syllable name. The use of a disparaging term gives it punch and memorability. Beyond its name, Geek Squad embraces 360-degree branding, maintaining a consistent personality from its funky Geekmobile to its agents' high-water pants. It's one of our favorite local brands.
- 3. Woof Dah** — A blend of "woof" and "uffdah" (a Scandinavian exclamation of surprise or sensory overload), Woof Dah is an absolutely perfect name for a Minnesota doggie daycare service.
- 4. Wild Rumpus** — With a name inspired by the wild things' dance in Maurice Sendak's classic picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, this children's book store in Linden Hills could not be more aptly named. The name beautifully communicates that this is a place where kids can be themselves and have fun, not to mention find some of the best children's books available. From the kid-sized door-inside-a-door entrance to the bountiful bookshelves to the cats and chickens that freely roam among the customers, Wild Rumpus does not disappoint.
- 5. Toro** — The Toro Motor Company was created in 1914 to make engines for the Bull Tractor Company. When its parent company folded shortly afterward, Toro reinvented itself first as a WWI steamship engine manufacturer, then as a maker of cultivators for farming, and finally as a lawn care expert. It's been going strong-like-bull ever since. Toro is an early example of an evocative brand name—a name that borrows positive connotations from a word that already has meaning. Spanish for "bull," Toro evokes traits you want in a lawn mower: power, energy, endurance. Easy to say, easy to spell, short yet loaded with meaning, Toro is a brand name that was far ahead of its time.
- 6. Flutter** — Bridesmaid dress boutique on Lake Street. "Flutter" charmingly evokes the ruffles and lace of a bridal gown as it floats down the aisle, not to mention the skip-of-the-heart emotion of one's wedding day.
- 7. Origami** — Opened in 1990, Origami was the Twin Cities' first sushi restaurant. Origami's well-chosen name leverages all the positive connotations of the fine art of paper folding. Artful. Delicate. Quintessentially Japanese. It's an apt metaphor—and an elegant way to introduce Minnesotans to raw squid wrapped in seaweed.
- 8. Surly** — The owners named this Brooklyn Center brewing company for the way they felt when they went to a bar and found it had no "good beer." It also describes the demeanor of the brand's many devoted customers when they run out of Surly beer. The name gets points for being extremely distinctive in the beer category, which overflows with dull, descriptive names. The company name also sets the tone for the names of its family of brews, including Furious (a hoppy, fire-hued beer), CynicAle (a Belgian-style ale) and Darkness (a dark-colored Russian stout).
- 9. The Bad Waitress Diner** — A fun and provocative name for a retro-themed Minneapolis self-serve diner. Customers write down their own order at their table and bring it to the register to pay. The food is then delivered to the table by the diner staff. But water, coffee refills and flatware? Not so much. Customers have to fetch those for themselves. So you are, in effect, your own bad waitress.
- 10. butter** — Could there be a more seductive name for a bakery? The moniker evokes the melt-in-

your-mouth pastries and natural, organic foods that have made this South Minneapolis establishment a local favorite.

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