



Make People Love Your Brand Instantly

The Powerful Attraction of Love-at-First-Sight Names | [Alexandra Watkins](#)

People would kill for my job, but it's not always glamorous.

Take last week. I was attending an event sponsored by a tax audit conglomerate. (Not exactly a hotbed of creativity, but I was there to network.) Scanning the sea of suits for a familiar face, I saw one across the room – a sharply dressed gentleman whose name slipped my mind. He recognized me and waved me over to his group. Glancing at his name badge, I smiled and said, “Hi Ted! Remind me how we know each other.” Without missing a beat, he exclaimed, “Hand Job!”

I broke into a smile. The group burst into laughter. I implored Ted to tell everyone what he meant.

“Alexandra is a brand name guru,” he said, “Hand Job is what she named a nail salon.” More laughter. Some people in the group already knew Hand Job. (In San Francisco, it's notorious.) One guy said he always takes visitors there for “shock value and souvenirs.” Another said he read about it in a magazine. And a woman whipped out her phone right then and there to make an appointment. That's the power of a love-at-first-sight name. Even if you're not a customer yet, you already feel affection for the brand.*

* Okay, you may be one of the .001% of people who don't love the name Hand Job. I'm sorry you're so easily offended.

Provocative names disrupt. They catch our attention, generate buzz, get Tweeted and repeated. Big Ass Fans, RocketBallz, Spanx, Virgin, and the furniture consignment store, Previously Owned By a Gay Man are unforgettable. One of my new favorites is TMI Colonics. (Their tagline: “We really know our shit.”)

Love-at-first-sight names needn't be risqué, they just need to make us SMILE.

Names With High Smileage

A Pea in The Pod

Baconator

Bed Head

Big Bertha

Chubby Hubby

Dreamery

Gentle Dental

Hard Candy

Hope in a Jar

Mayday

Munchery

Nerd Wax

Scrub Daddy

Scuba Do

Snuggly

Son of Baconator

The Body Shop

Three Jerks

Under Armor

Voodoo Doughnut

Yummy Tummy





What do these names have in common? They're familiar words that appear in delightfully unexpected ways. They surprise us, entertain us, and give us a happy little jolt of dopamine.

I love seeing someone break into a grin when I say I named a Spanish language school, Gringo Lingo. I get the same reaction when I mention a GPS for dogs, Retriever; a robotic vacuum, Neato; and a community garden crowdfunding platform, Seed Money.

Most people laugh out loud when they hear about the Church of Cupcakes. The Church's bestselling t-shirt reads, "Forgive me Father for I have binged." The owner calls herself, "The Church Lady." And the vanilla cupcake was christened "The Missionary." Do customers eat up deliciously sinful names like these? Hell, yes!*

News Flash: *Consumers don't instantly love brand names created by software programs, scientific processes, linguistic voodoo, "verbal engineering," or mangling the alphabet. Mechanical name mutations don't resonate with humans because unfamiliar names lack the critical "feel good factor" and emotional connection we crave.*

*OMG, are you offended again? Good Lord.

What's the secret ingredient in the love potion? EMOTION!

I read in *Fast Company* that half of every buying decision is driven by emotion. How many times have you purchased a bottle of wine just because the name rocked? If you shop by the label, as many wine buyers do, it's hard to resist playful names like Fat Bastard, 7 Deadly Zins, Layer Cake, Educated Guess, and Cat's Pee on a Gooseberry Bush.



Birds do it. Bees do it. Even B2Bs do it.

Most B2B firms fear that if their name is unconventional, they won't be taken seriously. Listen scaredy cats, you need to let go of that old school way of thinking. Why should you believe me? I run a B2B firm with a playful name, Eat My Words. For more than a decade, our name has been a magnet for attracting clients, employees, and reporters.

A clever business name is your welcome mat. It suggests, "We're lots of fun and you're going to love working with us!"

B2B names that make us smile on contact get remembered.

Here are 5 super sticky ones:

Fresh Blood (healthcare marketing)

Work From Om (yoga for workplaces)

Bike Curious (corporate bike consultancy)

Basecamp (collaboration platform)

Eat My Dust (janitorial company)

I know... you're concerned that a non-traditional name won't convey credibility. It doesn't have to. Would you buy a used car from Trusty Automotive? Probably not. It sounds disingenuous. A more effective way to prove your brand is credible is with a quality product or service, gushing client testimonials on your website, and an actively engaged social media presence.

“ *B2B names that make us smile on contact get remembered.* ”

Perhaps the best example of a grin-inducing B2B name comes from whipsmart attorney, Leila Banijamali.

When Leila started saying her last name out loud to potential clients she realized she would be making a big mistake naming her practice after herself. People had no idea how to spell or pronounce Banijamali, let alone remember it when they needed an attorney. Leila is proud of her last name, yet she knew using it for her law firm would be problematic. So she enlisted our services.

Leila wanted a breakthrough name that evoked her firm's core strengths: foundational legal support for creative agencies and emerging growth tech companies. The name had to be approachable to her clients, the ever-so-coveted Millennials. It could not sound like a bunch of old geezers worked there.

You've probably noticed that many law firms use a string of partner names, each one fighting for supremacy. Like one of the entertainment law firms that represented Michael Jackson. Their name was a mile long...



Ziffren, Brittenham, Branca, Fischer, Gilbert-Lurie, Stiffelman, Cook, Johnson, Lande & Wolf

That's 10 names. For a 23-person firm. There are far more interesting ways to name a law firm.

Focusing on the strengths of Leila's practice, our creative team ideated around the concepts of "foundation" and "support." Those are two rich veins for name ideas. We explored metaphors for architectural elements, structures, and strength.

To fuel our creativity, among other things, our team ate our collective body weight in Jelly Belly's. After three weeks, we landed on what we determined to be a name that fit perfectly: **Bedrock**

I recently checked with Leila to see how the name has affected her business...

Once we became Bedrock, the confidence in our brand shot up. So did our revenues. We started landing more interesting work and clients that are a better fit for us. I'm certain that without a magnetic name, we wouldn't have attracted as much business ... People are delighted with our name because it isn't trying to be self-important. It shows our brand is not about the firm's partners, it's about the client experience."



If a law firm can enjoy success with a love-at-first-sight name, any business can. Objection over-ruled.

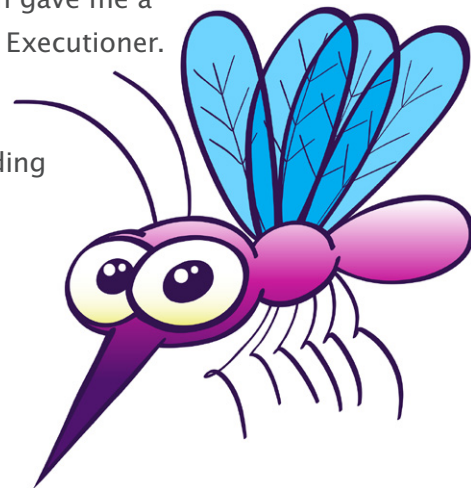
A love-at-first sight name can spell the difference between someone choosing your brand over a competitor's brand. *Even if your price is higher.*

Last August, for three sleepless nights, I was under attack by a relentless mosquito. I was fighting a losing battle, and desperately needed to put one of us out of our misery.

Searching for relief on Amazon at 2 a.m., I discovered the perfect weapon: an electric mosquito zapper that looks like a squash racquet. (Squash. How ironic.) Amazon gave me a choice of four similar products: BugKwikZap, Elucto, Zurgon, and The Executioner.

Which of these names do you think makes the strongest emotional connection with people suffering from a blood-sucking mosquito feeding frenzy? (Hint: it's the name that sounds like a total badass.)

Yep, The Executioner. Ding! Ding! Ding!



The Executioner conjures up an empowering brand experience; “You’ve eaten your last meal, little f*cker! I’m going to incinerate you into oblivion.”

BugKwikZap, Elucto, and Zurgon don’t electrify our emotions like The Executioner.
(Tip: if you have a strong product, don’t give it a weak name.)

Even though the Executioner was the priciest of the four, its name was irresistible.
It spoke volumes and conjured up exciting imagery.

I’m happy to report that not only is The Executioner a killer name, it’s a killer product that’s fun to use.

Now I kinda look forward to mosquito hunting.



Road Rage: The Bicycling Industry

Bike gear is one of my favorite things to shop for, and it's not just because I love the slimming effects of Spandex. When it comes to names, the bike industry is fun and fearless. From pumps to pin locks, the names provide a constant source of creative inspiration. Here are ten bike-related brand names that ring my bell. What turns your crank?

Joe Blow (bike pump)

Kryptonite (locks)

Nutcase (helmets)

Fahgettaboudit It (lock)

Grease Monkey (degreaser wipes)

Blazing Saddles (bike rentals)

Shift Happens (bike repair)

Pinhead Locks (pin locks)

Joy Ride (bike shop)

Spin Doctor (tools)



A Tantalizing Name Can Melt an Ice Queen

I was once so gobsmacked by a name that I shelled out thousands of dollars on impulse.

Many moons after my dad passed away, my mom gave me her beautiful diamond engagement ring. She told me to sell it if I ever needed money. It sat in the back of my jewelry box for years, until I had to get an updated appraisal for my homeowner's insurance. Off I went to KTD Jewelers, or as I like call it "The Candy Store." The owner, Linda Kha, studied my mom's ring through her magnifying loupe, exclaiming that the emerald cut diamond was striking: "Alexandra, you should let me put this in a new setting and make you a right hand ring." Hmmmm. I hadn't thought to do that.

Linda took out a dazzling setting, which featured two magnificent baguette diamonds and a halo of baby pink sapphires. The setting was a showstopper. The price was a heartstopper. As tempting as it was to have my mom's ring re-blinged, I couldn't justify spending a small fortune on something I had no intention of buying when I walked in the door.

Just as I was about to say, "Maybe another time," Linda slid the ring on my finger, declaring, "Now that's a boss lady ring!" Damn, I thought. "The Boss Lady Ring"! I loved the sound of that name. Suddenly, I deserved it. Sold!



Cha-Ching: How Engaging Names Increased Sales 25%

Hotel Vitale on San Francisco's waterfront is a sexy place to tie the knot. But the services listed in its wedding guide were in need of some verbal Viagra. Here's how we made four of the lackluster names instantly more appealing:

~~Rehearsal Dinner~~ > Meet the Parents

~~Post Reception Bar Rental~~ > Last Call for Alcohol

~~Post Wedding Brunch~~ > Bloody Married

~~Coed Bridal Shower~~ > Shower Together

Previously, a couple planning a wedding may have skipped over a tame name like Post Reception Bar Rental. But nothing says "party time" like Last Call for Alcohol. And while Post Wedding Brunch sounds anticlimactic, Bloody Married sounds like a blast.

All of these names bring levity to the overwhelming task of wedding planning, and make everyone smile. Even the parents footing the bill.





Name metrics usually can't be quantified.

With refreshed branding, advertising, and PR, a new name usually isn't the single reason for escalating sales.

However, Hotel Vitale can attribute its 25% sales increase solely to the name makeover. How? The names were simply words listed in a guide. Nothing else changed.

Restaurants can also increase sales simply by adding a dash of emotion to menu item names. Which sounds more mmm mmm good, "Chicken Soup" or "Grandma's Chicken Soup"?*

* If you're a vegan or vegetarian, I realize you'd probably prefer Grandma's Tofu Soup.

You Had Me at Spoon Me

Seth Adam Smith has the kind of “good luck” story every aspiring author dreams about. In 2013, when he was a mild-mannered intern at Berrett-Koehler Publishers, he penned a little blog post, “Marriage Isn’t For You.” It struck a nerve. But not for the reasons you may think.

In what was essentially a love letter to his wife Kim, Seth’s message was simple yet profound: “True marriage (and true love) is never about you. It’s about the person you love—their wants, their needs, their hopes, and their dreams.” Seth’s post had been viewed more than 30 million times and sparked a book deal. You can imagine my surprise when, after hearing me speak about brand names at a conference, Seth excitedly told me a name I’d created played a role in romancing his wife. He tells it best...

“Kim and I had been friends since high school, but after college I was anxious to move out of the ‘friend zone.’ After months of wrestling with my own nerves, I asked her out. To my great surprise, she said ‘yes’! Not wanting to waste the opportunity, I took Kim to ‘Spoon Me,’ a frozen yogurt shop that recently opened. I must confess, my motivation for going to Spoon Me was less for the actual frozen yogurt and more for the suggestive hints offered by its name. It gave me a wonderful, yet tactful, opportunity to suggest to Kim our relationship could have a ‘sweeter side.’ It worked! A few months later we were engaged.”

Spoon Me isn't the only Eat My Words brand name that's inspired wedded bliss. The founder of Smitten ice cream shops, Robyn Sue Fisher, told me, "We've had many first dates at Smitten that turned into engagements at Smitten. Our name definitely connects people to love."

What does your name inspire?

Evil Genius

Silicon Valley is a hotbed of disruptive companies. To make sure I don't miss any news, every Friday I thumb through our local business paper. Some of the companies I read about have names that look like they were created during Drunken Scrabble. How the heck do you pronounce Xobni, Tcho, or ooooooc?*

One of the strangest names I've seen is Vungle. Rhymes with fungal. (Tip: You want your brand name to be infectious, not sound infectious.)

* If you must know, Xobni is pronounced Zob-knee, Tcho is pronounced "cho," like Margaret Cho, and ooooooc is pronounced "Five O C," kinda like Hawaii Five-O, but not really.

One Friday afternoon, I came across a company name that made my day: Super Evil Megacorp

I hightailed it to their website.

“Founded in 2012 and with \$41M of venture capital raised to date, Super Evil Megacorp is determined to shatter preconceived notions about tablet gaming... one noob at a time.” Nice! Majorly fun and majorly funded. I poked around their site and bought a t-shirt in the Super Evil Megastore. (Tip: If you want your name to make a valuable impression, monetize it with merchandise. Hand Job underwear, anyone?)

Wouldn't you love to hand out a business card that read Super Evil Megacorp? Equally fun, each card says, “This certifies that you had a genuine encounter with Super Evil Megacorp and that no anti-matter weapons were used on you. This time.” I bet no one ever tosses that card after a networking event. (Can you say that about your business card?)

I had a lively conversation with Super Evil Megacorp's Marketing and Communications Director, who phoned me from “The Lair.” “No one ever forgets our name,” she said. One of the name's biggest fans is Apple. At a recent iPhone launch, the Super Evil Megacorp logo was featured smack in the center of the main keynote slide. Talk about making a valuable impression.

Do Go Changing To Try and Please Me

If you've already settled on a brand name, especially one created out of desperation to find an available dot com, you may be thinking, "Compared to Super Evil Megacorp, my name blows!" Well, yes, it probably does. Cheer up, Charlie. It's almost never too late to rebrand with a name that's more magnetic.

You don't need to worry about having an exact match domain name. Why? The Internet ran out. Yep. No more good dot coms. (Tip: Can't get the dot com you want? Just add a modifier like Tesla did with TeslaMotors.com.)

But how will your customers find you if you change your brand name? Easily, through a seamless website redirect to your new site, press announcements, and an email blast.

If one of your former customers is off the grid, deep in the jungles of Madagascar with spotty Internet access and they miss the memo, they can still find you. It's called Google.

Hakuna matata, my friend.

If you're concerned about the brand equity you have in your current name, gaze into your proverbial crystal ball. How long is your brand's life expectancy? If it's many more years than it has been in existence, that's fantastic.

You have countless future customers who will only know your brand by its appealing new name. Your current name will eventually be ancient history, like Datsun, Marky Mark, and your cringe-worthy high school nickname.

When you shed your old name in favor of an awesome new name, you'll never look back. (Okay, maybe if you're ditching an ill-conceived tech startup name you might look back and wonder, "What were we smoking?")

“ If you're concerned about the brand equity you have in your current name, gaze into your proverbial crystal ball. How long is your brand's life expectancy? If it's many more years than it has been in existence, that's fantastic.

If Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

If you're stuck with a mediocre name, take heart. You can woo and wow customers by mixing some verbal love potion into other parts of your business. There are plenty of things you can jazz up with names that make people smile.

For inspiration, here's how we've used the food theme to milk our name, Eat My Words:



Tagline: *Fresh names and taglines to go.*

Blog: *The Kitchen Sink*

Email: *hungry@eatmywords.com*

Packages: *Appetizer, Just the Meat, Whole Enchilada*

Wireless network: *Candyland*

Guest password: *(can't say, but it's something yummy)*

Training workshop: *Spilling the Beans*

Parking sign: *"Eat My Words Client Parking Only. Violators Will Be Eaten."*

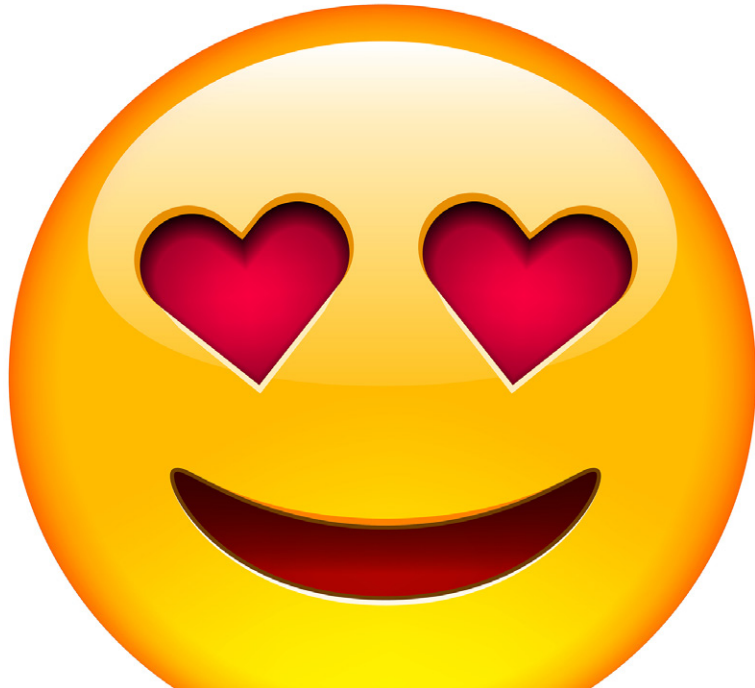
You can inject a smile into everything from job titles to conference room names.

Try it and see what a difference a name makes.

Instant Attraction = Action

Now you know the secret to make anyone love your brand instantly. Love-at-first-sight brand names draw us in, generate buzz, and move us to purchase. Whether you have a product, a company or a service, your brand name makes a valuable first impression. Even more than your shoes. So make it absolutely irresistible.

Who loves you, baby? 🧐



Info



BUY THE BOOK | Get more details or buy a copy of [Hello, My Name is Awesome: How to Create Brand Names That Stick](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Alexandra Watkins is the self-proclaimed goddess of love-at-first-sight brand names. As Founder and Chief Innovation Officer of the San Francisco naming firm Eat My Words, she is a popular guest lecturer at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, Berkeley's Haas School of Business, and the University of San Francisco School of Management. Her clients include Google, Disney, Frito-Lay, TaylorMade Golf and MIT. Brand names she can personally take credit for include Spoon Me, Neato, Gringo Lingo, Church of Cupcakes, Smitten, and a nationally recognized bacon cheeseburger, which ironically must remain nameless.

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