



ONE SYLLABLE. Brevity is the key in naming modern detergents.

If you think naming a baby is difficult, you should try dreaming up . . .

NAMES THAT MAKE MILLIONS\$

EVER wonder *how* manufacturers name their new soaps? Or *why* a cigarette should be called "Camel" or a camera "Kodak"?

These are million-dollar questions. The right name can zoom a product into a commercial success. The wrong one can wreck its sales and waste the advertising dollars spent promoting it.

By last week, as industry's 1952 expenditure for advertising neared a record \$7 billion, the stake had become huge. Less and less is the naming of products the casual sport of company presidents or (as used to happen all too often) the daughters of company presidents. Naming products has become a modern science.

Take a new soap, for example. Before Lever Bros. picked "Swan" it considered 100,000 names. That's precisely 98,912 more alternatives than the "Common English Given Names" section of Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary* gives you as possible baby names.

Lever Bros. took the 100,000 suggestions in batches to thousands of potential customers and asked their opinions. The list narrowed to ten. Further tests on the public showed Swan to be a favorite, but curiously, Lever Bros. executives didn't like it. So they tested it again, this time on more people. When Swan again won out, the brass gave in. Now they're happy about it: Swan became such a good seller that, in naming Breeze and Surf, Lever Bros. used the same mass-sampling approach.

Maybe you've noticed that nearly all soaps and detergents have short, one-syllable names. Some, like "Vel," "Fab" and "All" have only three letters. There's a reason: you.

"The housewife is notorious for her utter lack of loyalty to any one soap or detergent," explains a vice-president of one of New York's biggest advertising agencies. "So manufacturers must battle constantly to *catch her eye* at the store. How? Simply *hit her in the eye*—typographically. The shorter the name, the bigger the type on the box can be, and the more it will stand out over products with longer names."

Names that Make Millions

What Is It?

Your buying habits name other products, too, but in a different way. Take drugs. When you're sick or hurt you don't look for the briefest label but for the one suggesting a cure; hence names in this field (Band-Aid is a good one) suggest what the product is and what it will do. On the other hand, in buying a car, you look for luxuriousness and power: A name like Studebaker *Land Cruiser* suggests both.

Your children helped to name candy bars, cookies, soap, skates, bicycles, waste baskets and knives by their hero-worship of TV and movie star Hopalong Cassidy: What better name than one kids already know and love?

There's no question but what this works: Only last month, in Chattanooga, Tenn., a soft drink bottler reported amazing success since taking on the name "Donald Duck beverages." The sales of his drink have jumped from last to second place in Chattanooga in 90 days, and he's expanding to national and Canadian distribution.

Spoofing Poof

If some day you hear a product called "Heck" or "Gosh," don't be surprised. Slang is more popular than the king's English in product naming. Again, it's because *you* use it more naturally. Newest proof of this came after the phrase "poof—there goes perspiration" (a TV commercial for Stopette spray deodorant) made "poof" a new American slangword.

Delighted Americans parodied it into such irreverencies as "Poof—there goes the boss," but Stopette's maker had a better idea: Name a new product "Poof" and cash in on the publicity. Result: His new spray body powder, Poof, is selling three to four times ahead of expectations, because *you* made it a household word.

If your taste rules the selection of product names, why can't you capitalize on it? Maybe suggest a name which will make a manufacturer a lot of dough, with a tidy slice for yourself? The answer is you sometimes can, but opportunities for this are diminishing. The Henry J. automobile was named through a contest, and so was the defunct Chicago *Sun* (now the *Sun-Times*); but many manufacturers found that contests brought legal complications. This month, not one manufacturer is trying to name his product in this way.

Enter Science

Increasingly popular instead are professional devices as adaptations of the psychologist's word-association test.

Such scientific scrambling for names would have amazed the early pioneers in brand-naming. In the old days, the maker simply put his own name on his product. Thus Wedgewood (1759) and Spode (1770) became symbols of good China, and Baker's Premium No. 1 (1780) came to mean good chocolate. "Valvoline" lubricant (1866) began a trend towards coined names. Finally, in 1887, came the first wholly synthetic name, Kodak, merely a combination of vowels and consonants easy to remember and pronounce. Products also were named for birds, trees, stars, royalty, cities, and animals. Camel cigarettes were named (1913) in an attempt to cash in on the popularity

Names that Make Millions

of a Barnum & Bailey circus camel, Old Joe, now forgotten.

Advertising, product acceptance and constant usage have made many of these oldtime names into bywords. But some might not have passed the test demanded by modern name-makers. One study of 637 brand names by Robert N. McMurry, & Co., of Chicago lists 36% as "more or less detrimental" to the sale of the product; 52% were merely "labels which tagged along." For new products, McMurry insists we must do better.

Among the requirements: The name must be easy to read, pronounce and remember; must compel attention and connote quality or impart status to the user; must be free of undesirable connotations; and must suggest what the product will do. If that sounds easy, try sometime to meet all these requirements in one name. It'll make naming babies seem like a lead-pipe cinch.



Pathfinder

NEWS MAGAZINE

December 3, 1952: p. 54

OldMagazineArticles.com