

Name That Brand

Product managers face unique challenges when choosing a new product's identity.



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Gearing up to launch a new product is a major undertaking. Among the bevy of details that product managers must address is the therapy's name—a decision often given inadequate attention. However, branding's growth, its improved stature among pharma executives, and the mounting challenge of identifying "available" trademarks and maintaining customer loyalty

after patent expiration have contributed to a shift in thinking about therapeutic product names. Pharma professionals now are much more aware of how important it is to formally research and develop brand names that clear legal, regulatory, and marketing hurdles. They understand that a product's name, arguably the brand's most familiar manifestation, may be the most important piece of the brand communication puzzle.

Following are recommendations that product managers (PMs) should consider when beginning the brand name development process.

Allow enough time. The process includes three distinct stages: name creation, validation, and legal evaluation and registration. And the time to complete all three stages always takes longer than expected—anywhere from two months to two years, depending on several factors.

Name creation, which involves the initial brainstorming about desired brand communications, name ideation, and creating a shortlist, can be completed in six to eight weeks. Validation, which involves evaluating the names against a series of regulatory and marketing measurements, can take another one to three months.

The time needed to complete research varies

based on several factors, most notably the nature of the research—qualitative versus quantitative—its geographic scope, and the desired target audience and sample size. The third and final stage—legal evaluation and registration—can take anywhere from two months to more than a year.

The key factor in the length of the process is the scope of the protection sought for the trademark. If a company intends to market its drug globally, it must secure a registration for the brand name in each country. The more comprehensive the coverage, the more time required to complete the process.

Understand the brand. It's important to take the time to determine what's distinctive about the new brand. Fundamental to the development of a therapeutic's name is an understanding of what it should communicate. That communication must be as well defined and targeted as possible. Questions to ask include: Is it important to

- express something about the agent or its delivery method?
- reflect the condition that the brand treats?
- emphasize the benefits derived by patients, physicians, or both?

Regardless of the decision, it's better to communicate one message clearly than deliver three foggy ones. Each communication becomes more diluted with the addition of another messaging intention.

Dare to be different. Once embarked on the search for name candidates, product managers should be open-minded. The easiest way to achieve brand name differentiation is to adopt non-traditional nomenclature. Review the competition and do the opposite of what they do. One of a brand's primary purposes is to help a product stand out from the crowd.

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Given the sheer number of drug names and the difficulty of distinguishing between them, it makes great sense to consider new and unusual naming styles. Furthermore, non-traditional nomenclature is much more likely to circumvent potential legal obstacles and expedite regulatory clearance.

Understand the regulatory hurdles. Apart from creative and linguistic issues—brand names are expected to be effective worldwide—it's important for product managers to appreciate the ever-increasing difficulty of identifying trademarks that pass legal muster. International Trademark Classes 5 and 10, which cover pharmaceuticals and medical products respectively, are particularly crowded, with more than 200,000 trademarks registered in both classes. In addition, therapeutic names must satisfy FDA and European Medicinal Evaluation Agency requirements. Difficulty in pronunciation and writing of a prescription can quickly undermine a name's chances of regulatory survival but so, too, can the suggestion of an unsupported clinical promise, or the implication of an alternative indication. Approximately one-third of the names submitted to FDA's Office for Postmarketing Drug Risk Assessment (OPDRA) are rejected. A good brand-name development company will be familiar with the various regulatory requirements. PMs must learn about those requirements too.

Consider all target audiences. Even if a product will receive substantial direct-to-consumer marketing, the best brand names often speak to more than one target audience. Good examples include Claritin (loratadine), Allegra (fexofenadine), and Zoloft (sertraline). Not only does Claritin imply clarity, perhaps both physically and mentally—and thus the benefits it will have for patients—but it also reminds professionals of what it treats—hay fever and related symptoms. The reference to “clarity” provides a memory hook for doctors as much as it strikes a chord with patients. Similarly, Allegra speaks to the patient community through both its tone—calming and comforting—and the associations it draws with music and harmony. At the same time, the name provides a strong reference to the condition it's used to treat—allergies—and thus succeeds in reaching professionals as well.

Zoloft is another good example of a name that appeals to both doctors and patients. In much the same way that patients are reminded of elevated, uplifted spirits by “loftiness”, doctors are reminded of the disease state—depression. In addition to facilitating the drug-condition association, there are other ways to enhance the appeal of a brand name within the professional community. Consider the following:

Studies suggest that up to 30 percent of medication errors result from confusion about a product's name. An estimated 1.3 million Americans suffer from those errors such as the wrong prescription and improper administration of the therapeutic dose.

Given the high potential for errors, it bodes well for prod-

uct managers to develop product names that not only remind professionals of the condition the drug treats but that people find easy to pronounce and write as well. An acute sensitivity to the name's practical application can go a long way toward making a therapy popular in the professional community.

The Big Picture

Marketers must also be aware of all the brands in the company's portfolio. Answers to the following questions can contribute to naming protocols for current and future brands:

Kinship. How does the new brand relate to products already in the company's portfolio or to drugs in development? Consider Neupogen (filgrastim), an anti-infective, and Epogen (epoetin), an anemia product, both marketed by Amgen. By using a common root, the company builds a product family which, in turn, contributes to the credibility and strength of each individual brand.

Commonalities. Are there ways to simplify, streamline, or leverage certain equities to establish product commonalities or to contribute to corporate brand awareness? In much the same way that Amgen has established brand commonalities, so, too, has Roxane Labs. Its product portfolio includes brands such as Roxilox (acetaminophen and oxycodone), and Roxanol (morphine). By incorporating the “Rox” root so prominently in multiple therapeutic products, it leverages its corporate brand name and further establishes its corporate brand identity.

PMs should consider hiring a brand name developing firm. Below are some ways in which working with a such a company can add value to the process. Look for a consultancy that

- can bring objectivity to the process and help build consensus
- understands branding issues specific to the industry
- has linguistic expertise and creativity
- has created work that goes beyond obvious word roots and uses imagery that is crucial to the development of evocative names
- will meet tight time-lines
- can provide an objective perspective of the brand and desired communications.

Furthermore, sophisticated brand specialists will add a strategic component to the process, taking the time to evaluate products in the context of the competitive market as well as the pharma company's larger brand architecture. Those specialists also have unique exercises to help PMs better understand the brand and to develop strategically appropriate and legally available brand names with impact.

Developing strategic, evocative, and protectable brand names is one of a product manager's greatest challenges. But a brand name that captures patients, physicians, and market share generates its own rewards. ■