

# The Brand Names Report

2026

A collaboration between:

**heirloom**



**ELIOT\***  
V L B L T

# Welcome to the 2026 Brand Names Report

The Brand Names Report is a collaborative research project from Rob Meyerson of Heirloom and John Elliott of Elliott Verbal exploring how brand names are created, perceived, and evaluated in the real world. Drawing on multiple data sources—startup directories, notable brand launches, experimental academic studies—we identify the news, trends, and science shaping brand naming today.

Our goal is to surface directional insights from diverse sources. Some observations about brand naming are more enduring and rooted in the nature of language; others are more ephemeral, shifting decade to decade or in light of major sea changes. We think putting these different kinds of insights together in one place—and updating it regularly—illuminates the lay of the land for naming in a way that maxims and checklists can't.

This report is intended for brand leaders, marketers, founders, and naming practitioners who want a clearer, more grounded view of how names perform in context—and how to think more critically about naming decisions in the year ahead.

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# Brand names in the news in 2025

1. Notable new brand names
2. Notable renames
3. Naming backtracks
4. Names we said goodbye to
5. Other interesting naming news

## Section overview and context

Thousands of brand names change every year.  
Only a handful make headlines.

The stories that typically rise to the surface—from bold new launches to public backtracks—are rarely representative of the quiet, strategic naming work happening inside companies every day. Instead, the news cycle gravitates toward spectacle: high-profile company and product launches, controversial renames (some of which result in subsequent walkbacks), and the occasional name that disappears altogether.

As expected, 2025 brought all of the above. We saw ambitious new brand names enter the lexicon, well-known names trimmed or swapped, and a notable number of reversions (brands backtracking on prior decisions). At the same time, familiar names quietly sunset after decades of use, reminding us that brand portfolios are living systems.

The pages that follow capture a curated snapshot of naming moments from 2025.

## Notable new brand names

Comcast spun off a cable network portfolio under the new name **Versant**.

Apple previewed **Liquid Glass**, their “first major interface overhaul in 10 years”, at WWDC 2025.

Coca-Cola announced **Fizzion**, an “AI-powered design copilot.”

A new automaker will offer a very inexpensive EV that’s highly modular. **Slate** can be a pickup truck or an SUV. It has roll-down windows and no entertainment system or speakers.

Scientists discovered a new color, **olo**, but you won’t be seeing a Pantone chip for it anytime soon. The color can only be seen when lasers are used to stimulate cones in people’s retinas. The word *olo* comes from *zero*, *one*, *zero*—the color’s coordinates on a 3D color map. The scientists also “named their ... retinal stimulation technique ‘**Oz**,’ in homage to the green-tinted glasses that people wear in the Emerald City.”

# VERSANT

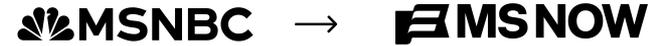
## Liquid Glass

# SLATE

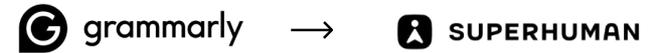


## Notable renames

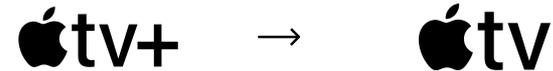
MSNBC rebranded as **MS NOW** as part of a corporate restructuring. The change was not universally loved!



Grammarly became **Superhuman**.



Apple TV Plus became **Apple TV** (a little confusing given they also sell a device called Apple TV).



The Duchess of Sussex, American actress Meghan Markle, renamed her “cooking, entertaining, and hostessing” brand from *American Riviera Orchard* to **As Ever**.

A new logo launched for the 2034 **Utah Winter Olympics**, and reactions were mixed. Some were annoyed that the logo dropped “Salt Lake City.”

John Oliver (comedian and host of “Last Week Tonight”) offered to rebrand a minor league baseball team for free. The Erie, Pennsylvania team Oliver selected will be renamed the **Erie Moon Mammoths**, a name “inspired by the 1991 discovery of woolly mammoth remains by George Moon, a [local] resident.” (The new name is temporary, it seems.)

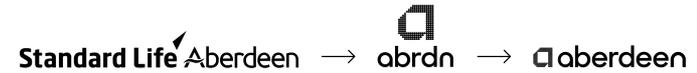
Hewlett Packard Enterprise launched an updated logo to coincide with its 10th anniversary—shifting from the full company name to the abbreviated *HPE*.

## Naming backtracks

Max officially rebranded back to **HBO Max** on July 9, 2025. After operating simply as *Max* for roughly two years following a 2023 merger, Warner Bros. Discovery decided to restore the prestigious *HBO* name to the service to better highlight its premium content.

After infamously “disemvoweling” its name to *Abrdn* about four years ago, Aberdeen is once again **Aberdeen** (or *aberdeen group*, to be precise). Do we call that “re-emvoweling”?

Philadelphia Museum of Art changed its name to **Philadelphia Art Museum** (PhAM for short) and underwent a full visual identity refresh. In early 2026, about 120 days later, the museum reverted to its original name.



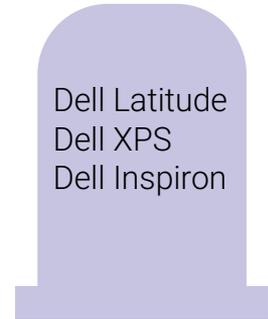
## Names we said goodbye to

**Skype** is dead after 22 years. Microsoft phased it out in favor of Microsoft Teams.

Coca-Cola will “sharply cut distribution” of **Aha** sparkling water (a relatively new name in the space!).

Following its acquisition by Mars, Incorporated, **Kellanova** ceased to exist as an independent, publicly traded company. As a result, the *Kellanova* name has largely disappeared from consumers’ shelves; its individual product brands will continue under Mars ownership.

Dell Technologies will apparently kill off its laptop brands—**Latitude**, **XPS**, and **Inspiron**, each about 20 years old—and replace them with modifiers that sound pretty iPhone-ish: **Dell**, **Dell Pro**, and **Dell Pro Max**.



## Other interesting naming news

In **naming systems** news, Apple is changing how it numbers operating systems. According to *The Verge*, “Right now, the version numbers are all over the place; the current naming schemes include things like iOS 18, watchOS 12, and visionOS 2.” Apparently, Apple will use the release year instead so that all those different operating systems are aligned.

In the U.S., the **Trump administration** has been busy on the naming front. On his first day in office, the president signed an executive order renaming the Gulf of Mexico to the “Gulf of America.” (The change is only effective in the United States.) The U.S. Department of Defense has reverted to a previous name (from the 1940s): “The Department of War.” And military operations with names like *Operation Charlotte’s Web* have “raised eyebrows and drawn criticism” (NPR).

On LinkedIn, naming expert Anthony Shore pointed out a “**cautionary tale for nomenclators**,” detailed in a *New York Times* article. Apparently, U.S. federal regulators have filed a lawsuit against Capital One for (deliberately?) causing confusion with accounts named *360 Savings* and *360 Performance Savings*.

It’s been almost 25 years since Andersen Consulting became **Accenture**, a project that included enlisting the company’s “entire workforce—65,000 professionals—to create and submit names.” Anthony Shore, who led the colossal renaming effort on behalf of Landor, recounted his story of the project in *Fortune*.

# Y Combinator names in 2025

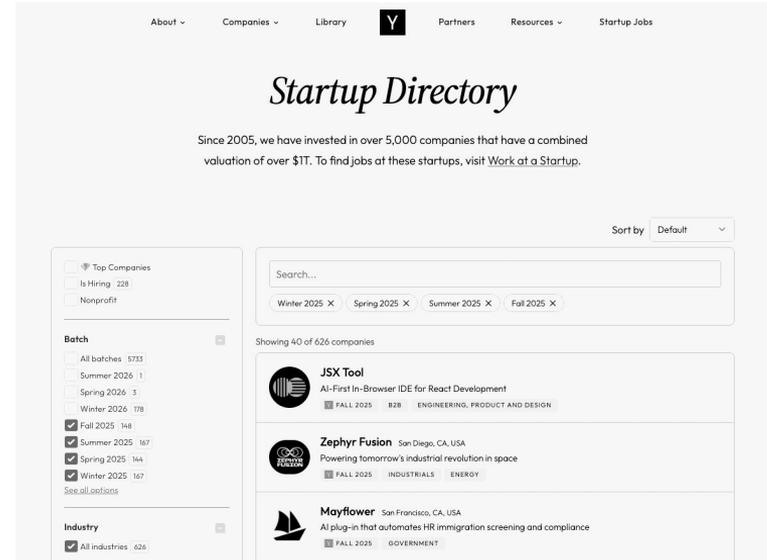
1. Macro trend: the vibe shift
  - a. Bolder totem animals
  - b. More alphanumeric
  - c. Long and descriptive names
  - d. Harder coinages
2. Bonus: "AI" in names

# Section overview and context

Y Combinator (YC) is widely regarded as the world's top startup accelerator. They have funded thousands of companies worth hundreds of billions of dollars, including tech leaders like Airbnb, Stripe, Dropbox, Coinbase, and Reddit.

The startups they fund are therefore a bellwether for where tech is headed, and the broader economy with it. The 500 YC fundees of 2025 give us insight into naming trends—what's sticking around, what's standing out, what's feeling stale or cringe, and what's just a little try-too-hard.

Even established brands can benefit from paying attention to the latest shifts in startup naming. They indicate the state of play in which brand meaning and brand equity operate.



# Macro trend: the vibe shift

Early 2025 was full of talk about the “vibe shift”—brands and the broader culture seemingly moving away from approachable inclusivity and toward machismo and vice signaling.

That change is reflected among the names in 2025’s YC cohort, and it marks the full arrival of a trend that has been gaining momentum for several years: *the death of derp*.

“Derp” refers to the cute, quirky, friendly aesthetic that accompanied Silicon Valley’s “rag-tag insurgent” vibe. It’s a sensibility that no longer fits in an economy where tech runs the show. In fact, cute and friendly can read as outright disingenuous for companies that increasingly control major facets of the economy and daily life.

This shift to serious manifests in several mini-trends, each of which may have its own shelf life and sub-trends:

a. **Bolder totem animals**

More serious, competent, or dangerous animal/plant names

b. **More alphanumerics**

Technical prowess demonstrated through company names that look like product names

c. **Long and descriptive names**

A return to names like *International Business Machines*

d. **Harder coinages**

Made-up words that are less small/cute, more elegant/stark

## a. Bolder totem animals

In 2024, the YC fundee class was still full of cute and derp animal names: *Weevil, Dodo, Corgi, Ducki, Scrapybara, Unsloth.*

The YC 2025 class, by contrast, takes its flora and fauna more seriously: **Bear, Dolphin, Kestrel, Lark, Bluejay, Moss, Beluga Labs, Sunflower, Cactus.**

Even animals and plants that are presented as cuter still have some danger to them: **Pangolin**—those spikes!

In years past, startups might have worried about a name seeming too serious, and names of animals that are explicitly known as slow, dim, or awkward provided some ironic self-deprecation.

While some exceptions remained this year (see the MooDeng-inspired *Chonkie*), startups are choosing to actively lean into expressions of competence, skill, and power, and away from hedging their bets with un-intimidating approachability.



## b. More alphanumerics

A number of (pun-intended) YC '25 startups are using some interesting alphanumeric names: **o11**, **Sixtyfour**, **b12 Labs**.

Alphanumerics are names based on combinations of letters and numbers. This approach to naming is ubiquitous in product and model naming—think the BMW *S Series* or ChatGPT *o4*. This year, however, we saw an uptick in these kinds of labels being used as company names and flagship brands in their own right.

Alphanumerics almost definitionally feel more “technical” and therefore more serious, matching the vibe shift macro trend we saw this year.

Some of these names are the result of startups self-identifying more as products than as companies, wearing acquisition goals on their sleeves. But over time, if more companies take on this kind of name, that strategic rationale may not matter—the naming convention may take on a life of its own.



## c. Long and descriptive

The tech industry's obsession with short, suggestive names—*Yahoo, Tubi, Hulu, Miro, Figma, Bumble, Uber*—has been with us since the dot-com boom of the late 90s. However, judging by the uptick in names from the YC '25 class that are long, literal, and descriptive, a 180-degree turn could be taking shape.

While the trend is not pervasive, we're seeing more of these names than in previous years. Their more serious and direct tone aligns with the larger trend—even if some are carried out with a hint of tongue-in-cheek.

Some are purely descriptive—**The Prompting Company**, **Autonomous Technologies Group**—while others use long descriptors paired with short evocative names—**Axial Composites Industries**, **Axion Orbital Space**. In either case, the length and explicitness of these names assert a subtle but important positioning cue: AI is more like industrial infrastructure than consumer tech.

*the*  
PROMPTING  
COMPANY

**AX**CO  
INDUSTRIES

The  
Robot Learning  
Company

ENHANCED  
RADAR

>>> *The*  
Context  
Company

The LLM  
Data Company

Note: Long names don't always lend themselves to easy wordmarks.

## d. Harder coinages

Coinages (made-up words) are a perennial company name go-to, partly driven by trademark availability constraints; about 15% of the YC '25 class has coined names.

This year, we are seeing relatively fewer names with cute -y or -i endings, although there are still a few: **Pally, Munify, Sonarly, Karumi, Acrely, Mixy.**

Instead, the YC '25 class favors coined names ending in A (5% of all names), which may feel feminine, but not necessarily diminutive or cute: **Panta, Zarna, Amera, Bluma, Sava, Nivara, Veria, Norra, Brickanta, Freya, Convexia, Sira, Autosana, Solva, Omnara, Tesora, Imprezia, Monarcha, Liva, Godela, Lyra, Aravolta, Kanava.**

Similarly, we see more names ending in consonants—**Luel, Haladir, Arcten, Metorial, Tornyol, Selfin, Questom, Pleom, Altur, Lexius, Zlos, Oxus, Lapis, Metis, Humoniq, Hemut, Serafis, Ambral, Atlog**—which feel more assertive and stand out against the historically more common vowel-final names.

Coined names  
ending in -a

Brickanta 

Monarcha

 **Kanava AI**  
AI powered Customer Engagement

Aravolta

 Convexia

Coined names  
ending in a consonant

 Lemut

atlog

 SERAFIS

 TORNOL

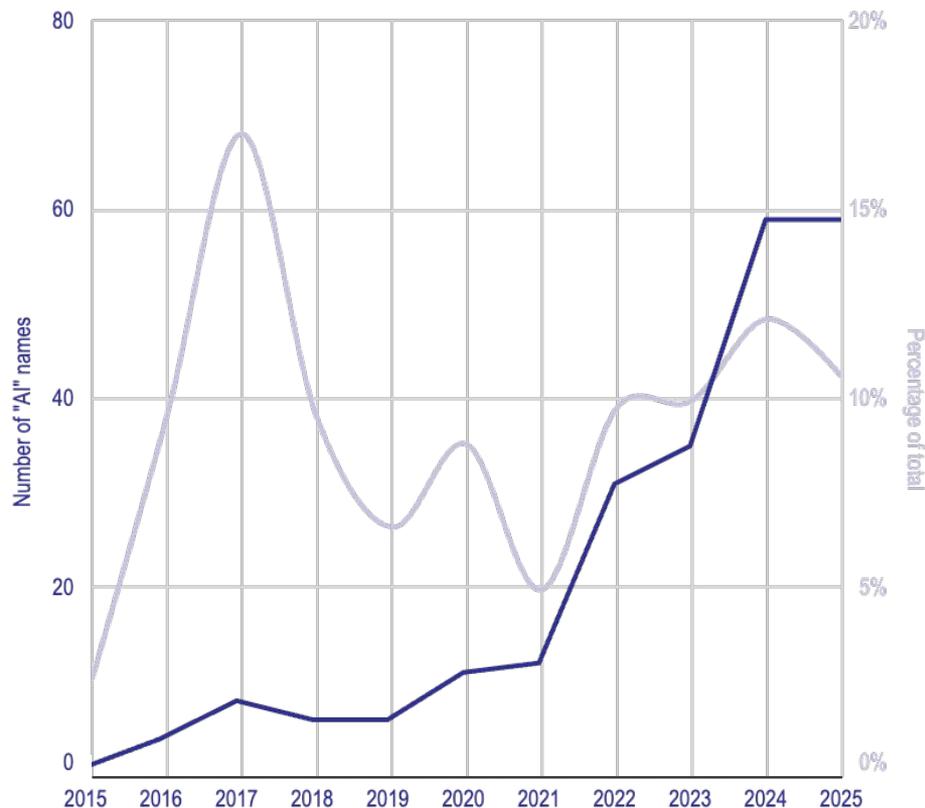
**OXUS** 

## Bonus: “AI” in names

While we expect adding “AI” to company names will eventually feel trite or dated, the trend is still very much alive with YC ‘25 names like **OnDeck AI**, **dScribe AI**, and **Certus AI**. Both 2025 and 2024 included 59 “AI” names—the most since we started tracking—and “AI” names have comprised 10% or more of the total names for the last four years running.

A related trend that has apparently started to wane, however, is using human given names to explicitly anthropomorphize AI products. The YC ‘24 class had tons of company names like *David*, *Henry*, *Andy AI*, and *Clara*. There were still some names like this in 2025—**Sarah AI**, **Scott AI**, **Janet AI**—but only about one fifth as many as the previous year.

Any slowdown in first-name company names could have multiple explanations—a limited number of common first names, the potential ickiness of treating a tool like a person—but we think this might just be part of the larger vibe shift away from overt approachable friendliness in tech.



# Names on Brand New in 2025

1. Most-preferred names
2. Scores (vote performance)
3. Frequency of naming constructs
4. Scores by naming constructs

## Section overview and context

Leading brand identity blog Brand New often publishes polls alongside its reviews. Occasionally, these polls ask respondents to react to not only visual aspects of a brand, but names, too. With over 30,000 subscribers eligible to vote, the site offers one of the few publicly accessible data sets capturing structured reactions to new names and renames.

In 2025, site visitors cast more than 3,000 votes across 32 names. The year produced a host of very short, real-word names. Notably, the two top-performing names of the past six years (2019–2025) both emerged in 2025.

In this section, we analyze 2025 poll results, focusing on names with meaningful vote volume. Overall performance is reported using a score calculated as percent of “Great” votes minus percent of “Bad” votes. We also examine differences by naming construct—real-word, coined, compound, abbreviated, and foreign-language.

It’s important to note that respondents are not a representative sample of consumers. They’re likely designers, professionally invested in branding and bringing their own biases. Nor do these polls measure long-term marketplace effectiveness.

Still, patterns emerge—directional signals about how names land at first glance.

2025

**12** months

**32** names

**3,123** votes

2019–2025

**72** months

**260** names

**49,077** votes

# Most-preferred names (with 50+ votes)

It's worth noting that the top four names have clear negative connotations—perhaps these “red flags” make them more memorable or appealing to this audience.

Rank	Name/logo	Score Great/Bad votes Total votes	Additional notes
1.	<b>bugg</b> <sup>®</sup>	<b>89%</b> 224 Great, 1 Bad 252 votes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entirely new name (not a rebrand)</li> <li>Premium gardening products brand (New Zealand)</li> <li>Coined (one extra letter!), suggestive, very short</li> <li>Most-preferred name of 2019–2025</li> </ul>
2.	<b>mud</b> <sup>™</sup>	<b>87%</b> 325 Great, 7 Bad 366 votes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entirely new name (not a rebrand)</li> <li>Dog-care brand (UK)</li> <li>Real-word, suggestive, very short</li> <li>Second-most-preferred name of 2019–2025</li> </ul>
3.	<b>Tilt</b>	<b>76%</b> 320 Great, 8 Bad 411 votes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New name for Empower</li> <li>Financial technology company (USA)</li> <li>Real-word, abstract, shorter than prior name</li> <li>Created by Ragged Edge</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Blood Cancer United</b>	<b>61%</b> 146 Great, 5 Bad 233 votes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New name for Leukemia &amp; Lymphoma Society</li> <li>Real-word, descriptive, shorter than prior name</li> </ul>
5.	<b>percent</b> <sup>®</sup>	<b>56%</b> 121 Great, 9 Bad 200 votes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entirely new name (not a rebrand)</li> <li>Nut spread brand (Peru)</li> <li>Real-word, abstract</li> <li>Created by MINO and Ángela Alberca</li> </ul>

# Scores (vote performance) of names with 50+ total votes

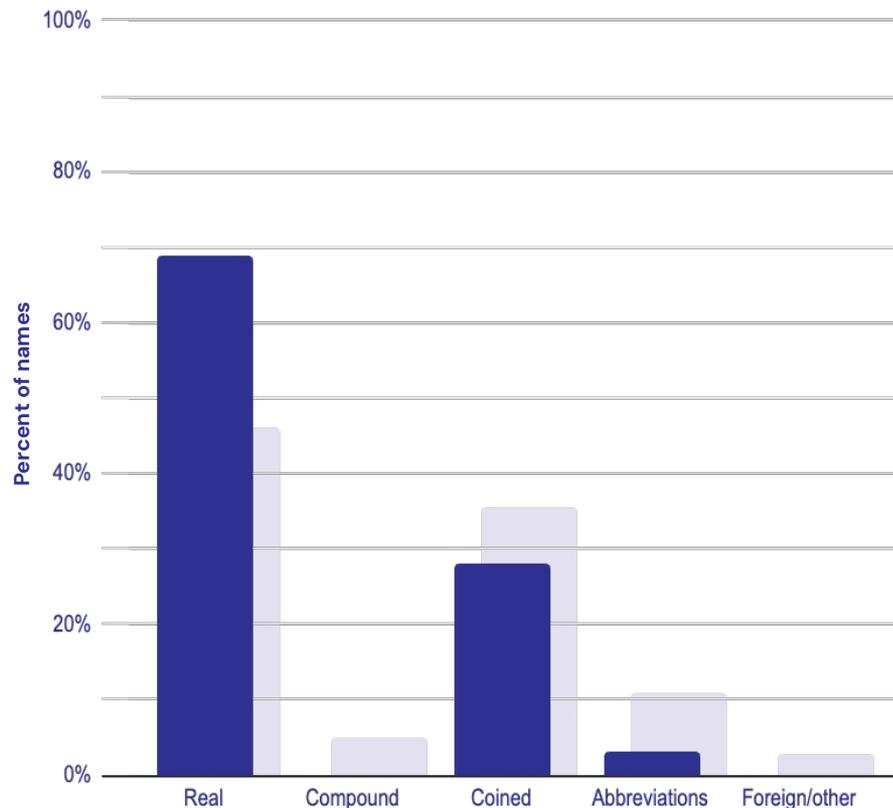
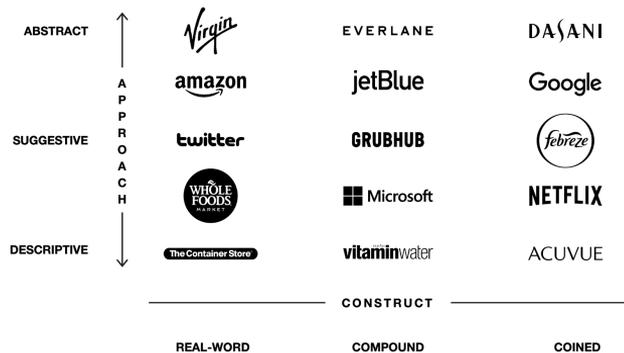


# Almost all reviewed names are real-word or coined

All but one of the reviewed names in 2025 were either real-word (22) or coined (9). This pattern tracks loosely with all names reviewed on Brand New from 2019–2025 (in lavender), over 81% of which were either real-word or coined. No compound or foreign-language names were reviewed in 2025.

## Refresher: what is a naming construct?

The construct describes how a name is structured. For example, “Virgin” and “Whole Foods” are real English words, while “Dasani” and “Febreze” are coined (made-up) words.



# On average, real-word names outperformed other constructs

In 2025, real-word names not only outnumbered but also outperformed coined names, in keeping with average scores from past years.

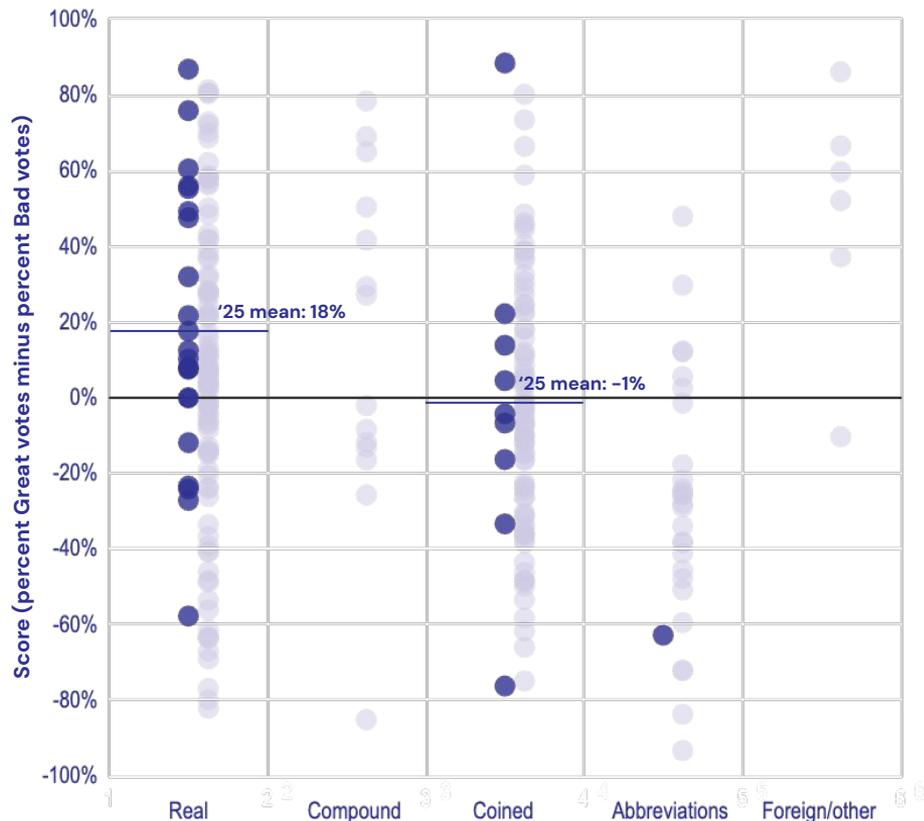
## Mean scores by name construct

	Real	Compound*	Coined	Abbreviation	Foreign*
2025	18%	n/a	-1%	-63%**	n/a
2019–2025	3%	12%	-5%	-30%	47%

From 2019–2025, real-word names had an average score of 3%, with coined names at -5%. In 2025 alone, those means were 18% and -1%, respectively. While not definitive evidence of one construct's efficacy over another, these results suggest that poll respondents prefer real-word names. Abbreviations, on the other hand, consistently underperform other name constructs, with a 2019–2025 average score of -30%.

\* In six years' worth of data, we have very few compound and foreign-language names.

\*\* Only one abbreviated name, *Liga AUF Uruguay*, appeared in the 2025 data.



# The year in naming research

1. Possessive brand names
2. Misspell, if it fits
3. Reduplication is cute
4. Authentically local names
5. Cross-cultural sound symbolism
6. Phonetics in Chinese naming
7. Consumers dislike some nicknames

## Section overview and context

High-quality research on brand naming is hard to come by. Companies performing testing on their own brand names don't generally publish that research, and there's limited funding for academic research on brand names. Naming research, as we can professionally attest, is also just tough to get right.

Nonetheless, research on naming has become *slightly* more common over the last few years. The recent findings summarized in this section may prove valuable to both namers and naming decision makers.

These studies from 2024 and 2025 generally meet two criteria for good naming research:

1. They investigate valid name *categories* (or *types* or *patterns*), not individual names.
2. They investigate the relationships of those categories to specific, brand-relevant meanings (e.g., ownership, cuteness, authenticity, etc.)—not just “do you like this.”

# Possessive brand names can signal competence and accountability

**The influence of possessive brand names on consumer decisions and preferences: an exploration of the role of perceived control**

*Journal of Economics, Accounting, Business, Management, Engineering and Society*

Aripin, Z., Supriatna, U., & Mahaputra, M. S. (2024)

Aripin et al.'s 2024 study asked a question that sits right at the sweet spot for naming research: how do repeatable naming patterns map onto specific, meaningful consumer perceptions? Rather than treating names as purely creative artifacts, the authors examined possessive brand names—those ending in an apostrophe followed by s ('s)—as a structured linguistic signal.

Across their analyses, possessive names (e.g., Wendy's, Trader Joe's, Michael's) were found to increase perceptions that the brand exercises control and authority over its products or services. This sense of ownership and stewardship, in turn, positively influenced consumer preference and decision making, suggesting that the possessive form cues competence and accountability rather than mere personalization.

**Takeaway:** The *apostrophe s* can buy you some trust.

This is a clean example of how a small grammatical choice can carry a reliable semantic payload. It's important to remember that names are not interpreted literally, but instead through implicit associations like “grammatical possession = competence.”



# Non-standard spelling is fine, but only if it helps build brand associations

## The Art of Misspelling: Unraveling the Diverging Effects of Misspelled Brand Names on Consumer Responses

*Journal of Consumer Research*

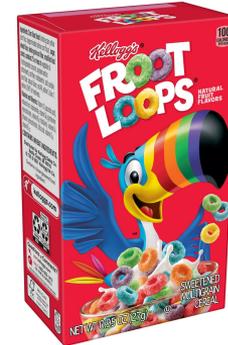
Smith, L. W., & Abell, A. (2025)

Smith and Abell's 2025 study tackled a long-running assumption among namers: that misspelled brand names are inherently bad. Across multiple experiments, the authors show that this advice, when applied indiscriminately, is wrong. In contexts of high brand-product fit, misspelled brand names can perform just as well as—and sometimes slightly better than—standard spellings.

A key mechanism is fluency (how easy a name is to read, recognize, and mentally process). The authors distinguish among different types of misspellings and show that not all deviations are created equal. Purposeful, interpretable alterations (e.g., *Bloo Fog* for oolong tea, leveraging the “oo”) maintain fluency and perform well, while arbitrary or visually awkward spellings (e.g., *Blewe Fog*) perform poorly. Logo design and visual branding can also support fluency.

**Takeaway:** If you have an alternate spelling for a name that aligns with important brand characteristics, don't be too afraid to use it—it could help with distinctiveness and availability.

This study gives empirical backing to what experienced namers already suspected: a lot of “rules” about naming have exceptions, and they all come down to brand fit.



# Reduplication in names is beneficial when cuteness is relevant

## Sounds cute: Exploring the role of sound reduplication in brand names

*International Journal of Research in Marketing*

Motoki, K., Iseki, S., & Pathak, A. (2025)

Motoki et al.'s 2025 study examined reduplication in brand names—that is, the repetition of sounds or syllables (e.g., “mimi,” “gugu,” “mishmash”)—and how this linguistic pattern shapes consumer perceptions. Across multiple experiments, the authors found that reduplicated names reliably signal cuteness, a perception with clear downstream implications for branding.

However, these effects were not universal. When testing non-sense brand names with both Japanese and English speakers, the study showed that reduplication (especially with bilabial sounds like “m”, “p”, and “b”) only improves brand evaluations when there is strong brand-product fit, such as in baby- or pet-related categories. Outside of those contexts, reduplication produced no meaningful positive or negative effects.

**Takeaway:** The name *Mimi* for your fintech app might not read how you want it to.

This is one of those “obvious in hindsight” findings, but it’s valuable because it provides rigorous, cross-linguistic experimental evidence that repetition is not just a meaning-neutral mnemonic device. Reduplication has a “meaning” on its own.



# More locally specific geographic names read as more authentic

**Small = authentic: the effect of geographic brand name size on perceived product authenticity**

*Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*

Chen, J., Wang, L., Pang, S., Zhang, Y., & Jiang, Y. (2024)

Chen et al.'s study focused on the use of geographic names in brand names (e.g., *Boston Pizza*, *Dubai Chocolates*, etc.), finding that geographic names that were "smaller" (i.e., more local, like a city or neighborhood instead of a country or continent) were generally perceived as more authentic.

Perceptions of authenticity predicted purchase intentions, though all of these relationships were modulated by product type—low-tech, craft-based, or tradition-coded categories showed a stronger benefit from using names for little places than did high-tech products.

**Takeaway:** Millbrook Vineyards & Winery is a good idea. Millbrook Microchips not so much.

This finding is remarkably intuitive from a brand-product fit perspective, but it's nice to have some high-quality experimental data to back it up when a client is hesitant.



# The value of sound symbolism depends on name type and cultural context

## Beyond Words: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study on Brand Naming Strategies and Sound Symbolism

*Journal of International Consumer Marketing*

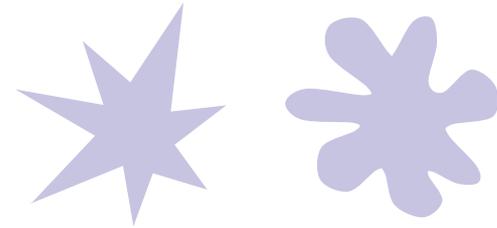
Zulfugarova, N., Yüksel, C. A., Kurtuluş, S., & Akturan, U. (2025)

This cross-cultural study examined how name type (descriptive vs. suggestive) and sound symbolism (inherent associations carried by sounds, such as the “roundness” of “b” or the softness of “f” and “s”) shape consumer perceptions across two culturally related but distinct markets: Türkiye and Azerbaijan.

The results showed that suggestive brand names performed better for low-involvement convenience products (e.g., snacks, OTC medications) while descriptive names were more effective for higher-consideration shopping products (e.g., apparel, furniture). Sound symbolism effects—such as voiceless sounds conveying softness more readily than voiced sounds—were strongest in suggestive names, where meaning is less explicit and more open to interpretation. Notably, Turkish participants were significantly more sensitive to sound-symbolic cues than Azerbaijani participants, regardless of name or product type.

**Takeaway:** Sound symbolism is a real thing, but it’s not magic. You can’t brute-force it to give a name subliminal vibes.

This is a reminder that sound symbolism can reinforce brand-product meaning, but it is neither universal nor automatic—its effectiveness depends on naming strategy, product category, and cultural context, making expert guidance essential.



Kiki and bouba—you know which is which because of sound symbolism



# Consumers dislike brands using externally-generated nicknames

## BMW Is Powerful, Beemer Is Not: Nickname Branding Impairs Brand Performance

*Journal of Marketing*

Zhang, Z., Ye, N., & Thomson, M. (2024)

Zhang et al.'s study examined a growing practice in branding that they call "nickname branding"—companies officially adopting consumer-generated nicknames (e.g., *Bloomie's* for Bloomingdale's or *Nordy* for Nordstrom). While marketers often assume this signals warmth or closeness, the authors argue—using speech act theory, which theorizes that language is used not only to present information but also to carry out actions—that adopting a nickname is a symbolic act of power redistribution, signaling deference to consumers rather than authority.

Across secondary data, field studies, and multiple experiments, the results were consistent: brands that used their nicknames experienced lower engagement, reduced purchase intention, and diminished willingness to pay. The mechanism was clear—nickname branding reduced perceived brand power, which in turn hurt performance.

**Takeaway:** A consumer-created nickname is an indication of brand equity, but brands shouldn't use them.

This paper is a sharp reminder of the interplay between consumer affection and managerial authority: when brands speak in the consumer's voice, they may sound friendlier, but they risk losing the symbolic power that underwrites price premiums and category leadership.



Some Australian McDonald's locations adopted the local nickname, Macca's, in honor of Australia Day in 2013.

# Final notes

# A few parting thoughts

## Considerations for future editions of this report

Tracking only the naming stories that break through to mainstream coverage risks missing quieter patterns. Future editions will aim to cast a wider net. We'd also like to expand our analysis of new names beyond YC and Brand New, which are useful lenses but hardly the whole picture. And as always: what would *you* like to see more of? Contact us (see next page) any time with questions or suggestions.

## A case for naming out loud

Naming is one of the last areas of brand work that happens almost entirely behind closed doors. Agency partnerships, processes, outcomes—none of it gets talked about the way, say, advertising AOR relationships do. Keeping naming in a black box is bad for namers and forces clients to fly blind. If you're a namer: ask for the rights to promote your work, and ask early. If you're a client: talking about your naming work publicly isn't a liability—it proves you're taking your brand assets seriously.

## Naming situations we're watching

Is the rename-and-walkback pattern becoming a trend in its own right—along with the executive fallout that follows?

M&A activity is up—which names survive consolidation, and which get quietly buried?

How will AI and LLM chat apps change consumer behavior, and how will naming strategy be reshaped as a result?

The current U.S. administration's Trumpwashing and trolling-by-renaming habit: how far does it go?

The upcoming Sam Altman/Jony Ive mystery device: what will they call it? (We just hope the name doesn't suck.)

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## Heirloom

Heirloom is a brand strategy, identity, and naming agency. We help clients create intangible value by building and strengthening their brands—brands that are more likely to be noticed, remembered, understood, selected, and shared.

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## Elliott Verbal

Elliott Verbal is a naming, nomenclature, and description studio. We work with cutting-edge, category-defining clients to craft linguistic landscapes and conceptual ecosystems that make innovation intelligible to the marketplace.

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