

Brand Matters: The lingua franca of pharmaceutical brand names

By Rebecca Robins

Introduction

Words have the power to inspire, to motivate and trigger a call to action. Ever-evolving and ever-expanding, language enables new and different ways of articulating and expressing what we want to say and how we want to say it. As such, the role and importance of a name and of language supporting a brand should not be underestimated.

Brands have come to be recognized, slowly but surely, as powerful wealth creators and vehicles of value by the pharmaceutical industry. Concomitantly, the development of all aspects of the brand has come to be regarded with greater strategic intent. As pipelines produce more diminished returns and as generics prove an ever greater force to be reckoned with, one of the fundamental challenges for the pharma industry is making that all important transition from the current model of profit maximization before product obsolescence, to one of brand maximization to prevent obsolescence. This calls for a radical reassessment of the value of brands within the industry and a rethink of how brands are developed, managed and maximized.

As the first public act of branding, the brand name is afforded a unique role. Ultimately, it is the one element of the brand that will endure throughout its lifecycle. Whilst the variables of packaging, promotions and positioning are all subject to change, the brand name will remain constant and therefore frequently acts as the focus for the brand.

Today, prescription (Rx) brand names are exchanged almost as common currency—debated by the media, commented on by patients and caregivers over Internet chat rooms and message boards and even requested by name in general practitioners' (GPs) surgeries. However, this has been far from the historical case. Over the past 10 to 15 years, we have seen a paradigm shift in the extent to which the medical lexicon has become part of a public vocabulary. Botox, Prozac and Viagra are now listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. "Health" and "health-related issues" are two of the most widely searched subjects on the Internet.

In the context of the industry's changing dynamics, this article will set out the role and importance of a name in brand communications, establishing the value of a name across the lifecycle of a brand, from pre-launch to post-patent. Recounting a brief history of pharma naming—it will examine how the role of the name has evolved in the context of the changing dynamics of the industry and how the development of a name has come to be regarded as a strategic component of a brand's identity and value.

Fundamental to the forging of any piece of intellectual property, is the requisite legal—and in the case of pharmaceuticals—regulatory due diligence needed to secure the rights to a brand's moniker. Amidst the overwhelming competition of today's crowded and

cluttered therapy areas, we will examine the rigors and risks of achieving both legal clearance in one of the most crowded trademark classes and the most exacting of approvals from the requisite regulatory authorities.

Words are the cornerstone of how we communicate. So, in seeking to maximize the opportunity for a brand, why not develop names and language around the brand more creatively, precisely and effectively?

“Every time you communicate with your audiences you either build equity in your brand, or you destroy it.” Martin Homlish, Chief Marketing Officer, SAP¹

The value of a good name

In an article whose subject is the making and meaning of names, and the value of words and language, it seems only logical to begin by looking to the semantics of the word brand. “Brand” originates from the Old Norse *brandr*, meaning “to burn,” from the “branding” of livestock—a mark of distinction and differentiation, a sign of quality and trust. Over time, that trustmark has been established as a relationship, one which by securing preference and loyalty sustains future earnings.

The battle for brand-stand out is hard won and defining that crucial “white space,” around which to develop the beginnings of that relationship is key. The strongest brands are built on foundations which are **credible**, **differentiated** and **sustainable**, for the lifetime of the brand. Let’s examine those criteria in more detail:

Credibility – Laying the foundations of a brand needs to start with a clarity of values—of what a brand stands for, a clarity of vision—of where a brand is going, and a clarity of mission—of how it is going to get there. In determining that crucial window of brand opportunity, it is vital to ensure, from the outset, a brand proposition that will be relevant and credible across all target audiences.

Differentiation – Therapy areas are more crowded, the pharma brandscape is more cluttered than ever before, and with degrees of differentiation between products diminished, a brand needs to work harder and to shout louder in order to be noticed. Differentiation is the name of the game and a distinctive name will play its part in enabling stand-out from the competition.

Sustainability – Where might a brand ultimately be going? The foundations that we establish for a brand from the outset should be sufficiently flexible, both to accommodate changes in the market and for the post-patent life of the brand. The criterion of sustainability extends to “future-proofing” a name for the long-term brand opportunity. From Amazon to Virgin, the “stretchability” of brand names has long been attested to in other industries. Whilst pharmaceutical brands are under somewhat different constraints, the issue of stretch is not to be underestimated. Consider, for example, the number of biologics which have the potential to target more than one condition. Consider, as companies are looking to build longer-lasting brands, the need for the equity of an

established Rx brand name to be leveraged within the over-the counter (OTC) environment.

In the context of the current dynamics of the market, what we say about our brands and how we say it have taken on more significance than ever. In the “blockbuster boom,” best-seller drugs were milked as cash-cows until the patent ran out and the focus of efforts turned to the next in the pipeline. However, times have changed—and radically so—as competition is greater than ever, the blockbuster golden bullets are far more elusive and each and every mature drug faces the all too present reality of the rise of generics.

The challenge for companies is to build value across every asset within their portfolio and the foundations of that value start long before launch, as companies are recognizing the value of establishing early-stage equity in the lead-up to launch.

At the same time, that equity needs to be applicable to the long-term value of a brand. A name that may be developed three years ahead of launch needs to be applicable for the lifetime potential of that brand, as companies are looking to leverage equity established in a brand beyond its patent-protected life.

In an industry faced with the harsh realities of a limited patent life, we should not forget that a brand name *can* last forever. Providing a trademark is used, it can be renewed *ad infinitum* – a name is therefore a vital and valuable intellectual property asset.

An art and a science

For many decades, naming a drug was considerably less complex than today. With fewer drugs on the market, trademark classes were less crowded and there was greater opportunity for “newness” in a name. However, to a great extent, what arose was a proliferation of names of a certain “type”. As the GP and prescribing audience were the core focus of pharma companies’ naming efforts, brand monikers became predictable, with many brands in a given category sounding like everyone else. Names spoke largely to the science—referencing the generic and/or to the specificity of a drug’s indication.

A copy of MIMs (Monthly Index of Medical Specialties) or the MPR (Monthly Prescribing Reference) will bear witness to certain “trends” that can be charted in pharma naming. For example, what also transpired for some time was a predilection for names beginning with “A”—the premise being that drug listings were in alphabetical order and that being listed at the beginning of the alphabet put a brand in a more prominent position. As competition grew, however, companies looked to new ways to signal something new and different in their brand name. The “shock of the new” came in the form of brand names beginning at the other end of the alphabet and, from Zofran to Zeneca, from product brands to corporate brands, came the rise of under-utilized letter-prefixes of “Z” and “X”. Visually distinctive and phonetically dynamic, Z and X had the double-edged benefit of sounding “new”, “different” and cutting-edge, as well as being, at the time, two of the most under-exploited letters of the alphabet.

Table 2.1 shows a list of pharmaceutical brand names beginning with Z found in MIMS as at October 2005.

Table 2.1: Pharmaceutical brand names beginning with Z, October 2005				
Zacin	Zaditen	Zamadol	Zanaflex	Zanidip
Zantac	Zapain	Zarontin	Zavedos	Zeasorb
Zeffix	Zelapar	Zemplar	Zemtard XL	Zenapax
Zerit	Zerobase	Zestoretic	Zestril	Ziagen
Zibor	Zidoval	Zimbacol XL	Zimovane	Zimovane
Zinacef	Zindacin	Zineryt	Zinnat	Zirtek
Zispin	Zithromax	Zloric	Zocor	Zofran
Zoladex	Zoleptil	Zolvera	Zomacton	Zometa
Zomig	Zomorph	Zonegran	Zorac	Zoton
Zovirax	Zumenon	Zyban	Zydol	Zyomet
Zyprexa				

Source: MIMS

Business Insights

Branding is ultimately about creating a relationship with the customer. In terms of the pharmaceutical industry, the “customer” had been defined predominantly in terms of the prescriber. However, today’s patients/end-users are more enfranchised and empowered than ever before, which has created a paradigm shift in how healthcare companies approach the concept of brand development. The need to engage with the end-user has caused companies to rise to the challenge of speaking the patient’s language as much as the prescriber’s language. As a society, we have become more interested in our health and are keen to take more of a role in the management of our health, all of which continues to be fuelled by the immediate access to open sources of information, as afforded by the Internet and, in the US at least, by direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising.

With the advent of DTC, has emerged a more consumer-oriented *lingua franca*. Brands need to have wider appeal and to speak to both prescriber and patient. The patient/end-user is less concerned with how a drug works and more concerned with what that drug can do for them—surely, therefore, it would follow that a drug’s name should function more than as a mere mnemonic for the patient’s disease or condition. “Benefit-led” names are more directly communicative across and relevant to a wider set of target audiences. Within high-exposure, DTC environments, names which speak less to functionality and more to end-benefits can help to cut through the clutter of a crowded therapy area.

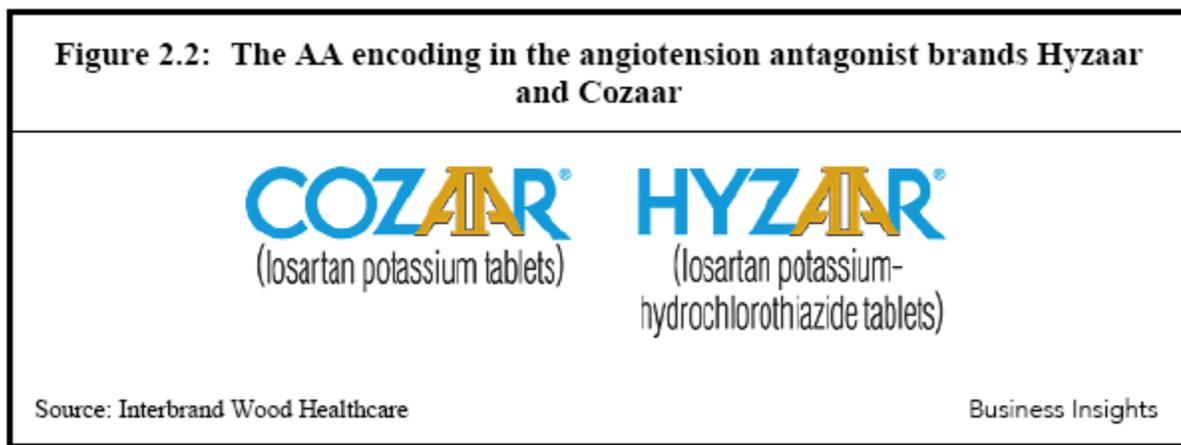
Classic examples of benefit-driven names abound, some of the most notable including Celebrex, Viagra, Allegra, Claritin, Enbrel and Zestril, all of which suggest the ability to move forward and get on with one’s life. Celebrex speaks to a quality of life message,

evoking the end benefits for the end-user, whilst at the same time, celebrating the science of *celecoxib*. The name thus balances sufficient gravitas for the prescribing audience, whilst communicating more emotive benefits to the end-user.

Enbrel exemplifies the future-proof value of a name established on a broad-based quality of life concept of “enabling relief.” *Etanercept* was indicated for the treatment of RA (Rheumatoid Arthritis) but had the potential to be indicated for various treatments beyond RA. Critically, therefore, the name needed to be relevant at the point of initial approval in RA, as well as for its approval for a subsequent indication in psoriasis.

The emergence of a more enfranchised end-user, however, does not equate to a single new approach to naming pharmaceuticals. The fact remains that the role and opportunity for a brand will vary according to the prescribing context—for example, a hospital-prescribed drug, as required in an emergency setting, will have no end-user interface. Ultimately, a name should help to signal and strengthen a brand’s point of difference in the marketplace. In today’s heavily branded environment, prescribers and consumers alike are bombarded with a barrage of brand messages and more creative approaches are called for. Let’s take a look at some strategies that can be employed to achieve that crucial determinant of differentiation:

Speaking to the science in the name can be a strong strategic move, provided that it results in a unique, distinctive and ownable proposition for the brand. The antihypertensive brands Hyzaar and Cozaar both encode AA—angiotension antagonist—within the brand name. This approach afforded a linking strategy/franchise approach for Merck’s anti-hypertensive portfolio and, in the follow-through of the “AA” in the graphics of the wordmark, cemented it as a meaningful mnemonic for the prescribing audience.



Another example of this approach is Namenda, an Alzheimer’s treatment. Leveraging terminology specific to a new class can play a key part in taking ownership of “white space”—in the case of Namenda, an NMDA receptor agonist, encoding NMDA (N-methyl-D-aspartate) within the name. Fuzeon, as a leading fusion inhibition therapy in

HIV, also adopts a classic blocking strategy, by cornering the concept of Fusion inhibition in the prefix.

The position of being first in a new class is a privileged one, and thus one to be signaled in clear and distinctive terms. This extends beyond the development of a brand name, to leveraging supportive language, such as class nomenclature.

A new class will serve as a positioning tool to separate out the compound from other treatments in the same therapeutic category. In so doing, a company gives itself the opportunity of fighting the marketing battle on new terms, which affords the advantage of a platform for differentiation and a means by which to take ownership of “newness” and of the story behind the science. Pharmaceutical companies that are proactively creating this nomenclature give themselves this edge, instead of having a classification handed to them.

With the advent of more targeted therapies, have emerged a number of names which speak to the specificity of those therapies. Targeted therapeutics is the watchword of the oncology market and we have seen that translated in brand names such as: Erbitux, referencing ERB; Herceptin, encoding HER 2 and, in more general terms, with the “tar”geted approach of Tarceva.

Companies have also looked to their corporate heritage. Epogen and Neupogen, two of the biggest brand names in biotech were built off the corporate brand name.

In examining these different approaches to pharma naming, we have touched on a broad spectrum of names—names which are indicative of the generic, names which are associative of the drug’s indication, or unique mode of action, names which suggest certain benefits. In charting these so-called “categories” of name, perhaps the most prevalent in the current pharmaceutical arena is the “abstract” name.

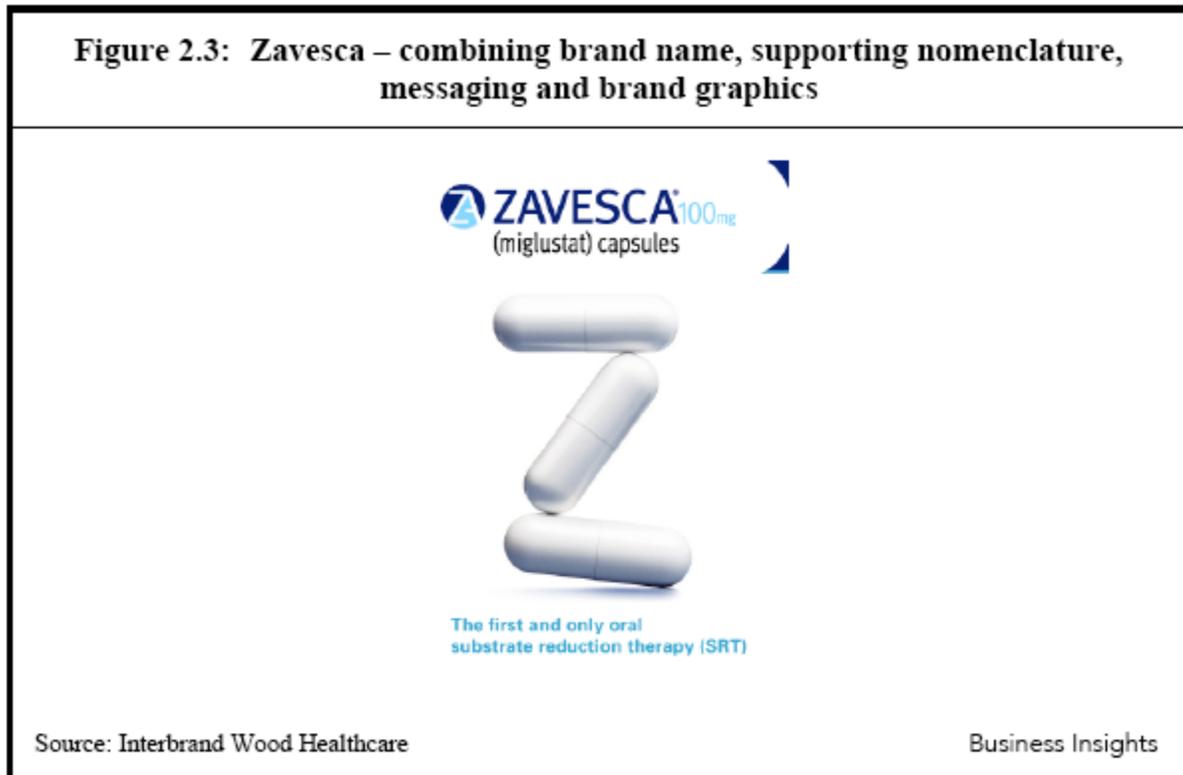
The term “abstract” harks to names which do not encode any overt, inherent meaning. For example, within the anti-emetics category, classic articulations of an “abstract name” include Zofran and Kytril. Neither is linked to the generic, speaks to the category, or references a specific benefit. These six-letter success stories are built on the simple dynamics of sound and tonality. They exemplify the fact that names communicate as much via construct as content.

Other tactical applications of the “abstract approach” include palindromic constructs, as exemplified in such brands as XANAX, LOZOL, MERREM, KETEK, LEXXEL.

Buy-in to more abstract names can be a more difficult process. However, consider the plethora of names outside the industry, which, in some cases, have clear derivations and stories behind them, yet which are unknown by the majority of their target audience. Does the majority of Nike’s core target audience know that the name is derived from the Greek goddess of victory? Probably not. Does it matter? No! Simple, concise and

distinctive, the name has come to be synonymous with and evocative of the concept of victory, of playing the game.

Again, let's not lose sight of the fact that a name is not an island. The brand name is the public face of the brand, but it is one element of an integrated proposition. Therefore, it should always be considered within the context of the overall strategy for the brand and should be leveraged as part of a cohesive whole, comprising name, supporting nomenclature, messaging and brand graphics.



Zavesca illustrates this very well both through the wordmark and the supporting graphic comprised of the product itself, which speaks to the unique proposition of the first and only oral therapy, indicated for Gaucher and Fabry disease.

With the “ascent of the brand,” the way in which healthcare companies approach the development of a brand name has become more strategic and, indeed, open to the possibilities of language. “Classic” vowel/consonant constructions have ceded to more innovative approaches, such as the conjunction of consonants, as exemplified in brands such as Vfend, an antifungal and Qvar, an asthma treatment.

As clutter increases across therapy areas, brand stand-out will need to be defined, incessantly, in new and different ways.

A global currency: namer beware!

In a market which is increasingly global and where companies are seeking to concentrate investment toward a single brand across all markets, a concomitant requirement for a single global trademark is called for. However, the legal, cultural and regulatory challenges that are to be overcome to achieve that single trademark are not to be underestimated.

Cultural

The linguistic and cultural acceptability of a name is paramount. Checks need to be carried out in all territories in which a new drug will be marketed to ensure that the name(s) under consideration are free from negative connotations and cultural associations.

www.

As desirable as a global brand name may be, the reality is that the web knows no borders. Aside from the rigors of legal and regulatory clearance, domain name availability is a law unto itself. The basic tenets are to register all permutations of a name—.com, .net, .biz, .info—along with as many local country variants as available, and to protect your name with a vengeance.

Legal

A name for a new drug is subject to a level of scrutiny unknown in any other industry. Any brand name for a pharmaceutical or healthcare product has to be cleared and registered in Class 5, notoriously one of the most crowded trademark classes:

- Every month an average of 1,000 names are filed in Class 5 at the USPTO;
- No fewer than 663,000 registered trademarks exist in Class 5 in the EU alone.²

Once a shortlist of names has navigated successfully the legal labyrinth, applications to file should be made to afford the requisite protection of those marks.

Regulatory

If the legal statistics are not sufficiently daunting, the realities of the regulatory approval process are such that approximately 35 percent of names submitted for approval are met with rejection by the FDA and EMEA.

Why is the rate of rejection so high and what can be done? The simple reason is that a name can be a matter of life and death. Seemingly innocuous interchanges of names have resulted in temporary harm; permanent harm; patient hospitalization and, in some cases, ultimately, in death.

Rejection is largely down to the potential of confusion with other brand names and thus, the resulting risk of dispensing errors and misprescription. Examples of misprescriptions

are not as few and far between as one might imagine, but some of the most frequently cited by the USP (United States Pharmacopoeia) include:

- Primaxin IV (antibiotic injection) and Primacor (hypertension injection);
- Cartia XT (hypertension) and Procardia XL (hypertension);
- Lamictal (epilepsy) and Lamisil (fungal infection).³

As a result, pharmaceutical companies are increasingly looking to more rigorous approaches to testing and validating brand names with prescribing and dispensing target audiences prior to submitting a name for regulatory approval.

The EMEA (European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products) sets out a degree of guidance as to the development of pharmaceutical trademarks. These state that a name should:

- Not look or sound like any other proprietary drug name or non-proprietary drug name relating to a different active ingredient;
- Have a minimum of three distinguishing letters;
- Not convey misleading therapeutic or pharmaceutical connotations or suggest a misleading composition;
- Avoid qualification by letters or a single detached letter and numbers;
- Not incorporate a WHO or USAN adopted and published generic stem.

Having surmounted a legal labyrinth, more tortuous than any other, and a regulatory process fraught with difficulties, a name faces one last hurdle. It is often the case that a name which fits the brand strategy, survives the rigors of legal searching and rates highly on regulatory risk assessment, may not be the brand team's number one "personal" favorite.

The basic tenets for decision-making on a name are to set clear and consistent objectives and criteria for the selection and to be unwavering in benchmarking potential names by those criteria. Names will not live in the environs in which they were created and in which they will be managed—the criteria for final selection should never be one of "like/dislike," but of a name that fulfils the following objective, market-driven criteria:

- Fit with the brand proposition;
- Relevant for all target audiences;
- Distinctive, unique and memorable;
- Future-proofed for the life of the brand;
- Linguistically acceptable and appropriate;
- Registrable and protectable as a trademark and URL;
- Approvable by the requisite regulatory authorities.

Let's remember what a brand name is here to do. Ultimately, a brand is about adding value. The development—and selection—of a name should be considered in the same terms.

Summary

In the words of William Hazlitt: “Words are the only things that last forever.” In an industry where patent life is limited and the domain of market exclusivity is being toppled harder and faster by the onslaught of generics, a brand name needs to work that much harder throughout its on-patent life, while having the potential to live long beyond it. As companies are increasingly looking to lengthen the productive and profitable life of their brands, established equity in a brand name can provide a powerful platform for future wealth creation. It’s about a name that will resonate with prescribers and consumers alike, and, ultimately, that will be relevant for the lifetime earnings potential of a brand.

The reality is that healthcare companies and the industry as a whole are going to need to engage in a more direct and open means of communicating with their respective audiences. We have seen moves toward this already, for example, with the publication of clinical trial data. There is a pull-push dynamic toward a greater transparency in the industry and the use of language, in how we speak to, and of, our brands, will have a key role to play.

So, having taken a 360 degree view of the pharma namescape, what can we extrapolate as the recipe for success? With only 26 letters in the alphabet, 1000+ names registered at the USPTO each month and 35 percent of names submitted to the FDA and EMEA for approval being rejected, the creative challenge is sharp-edged, but one to be approached as a vital, valuable and long-term opportunity.

As stated at the outset, a brand needs to be built on foundations which are credible, distinctive and sustainable, from pre-launch communications to post-patent platform for brand extensions. Those foundations start with a name that looks to optimize the opportunity for the brand.

Ultimately, there are no “right” or “wrong” approaches. A name which looks and sounds like other brands in a category may feel “comfortable” because it appears to “fit” the current market context. Brand distinction, however, is built on recognition, not repetition. The simple reality is that if you look and sound like everyone else, you risk getting lost in the crowd.

It comes down to the question of what business the healthcare industry considers itself to be in. As famously stated, the railroad industry is not in the business of trains, but of transportation. Similarly, is the healthcare industry in the business of illness or wellness? If we look at the vision and mission statements of the top 20 pharma companies, they all speak to “improving the quality of human life.” Ultimately, if healthcare companies are in the business of life, surely they should be looking to reflect that in the way in which they communicate, not least, in the one enduring element of a brand—its name.

Determine the white space, define your point of difference and speak to it!

¹Wall Street Journal, September 2000

²As at January 2005

³Source: U.S. Pharmacopeia. A full list can be found at the website of the USP