

What's in a name?

Anyone who has ever had a baby in Japan will probably be aware of the myriad of books and rules about choosing the right name for your child: from the number of strokes in each *kanji* character to outright pronunciation no-nos, it seems that you just can never be too careful.

Unfortunately, there is very little to go by when it comes to naming your own company, even though it is a decision which many of us will have agonised over for many months. At best, most business books brush over it by including it in their chapters on product/brand names, though most skip the subject altogether.

There are some specialist naming agencies which advise clients on product brand names. Igor is one of these and on their web-site (www.igorinternational.com) they give the following general tips on choosing an effective name:

How to Name a Company or Product

Before you begin, it is essential to decide what you want your new name to do for you. To make that decision, you need to understand the possibilities. A name can:

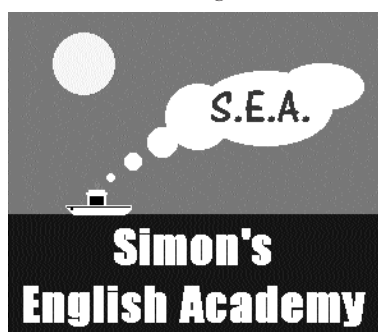
- achieve separation from your competitors
- demonstrate to the world that you are different
- reinforce a unique positioning platform
- create positive and lasting engagement with your audience
- be unforgettable
- propel itself through the world on its own, becoming a no-cost, self-sustaining PR vehicle
- provide a deep well of marketing and advertising images
- be the genesis of a brand that rises above the goods and services you provide
- completely dominate a category

I doubt if many English schools could afford the fees that such an agency charges. So how did ETJ school owners go about choosing

their names? Are there any important considerations or specific things to avoid? This question was put on the forum a few months ago and produced a variety of responses.

Perhaps the easiest and most common option in the naming of any school is to simply take the actual name of the owner and add on something like 'English School' to the end:

The names we considered included 'British Academy' - rejected in case we actually grow and hire teachers who don't happen to be British...In the end, we settled on 'Simon's English Academy', not to try to sate my ego but just because I am fairly well known here as Simon and I like the acronym of SEA. We came up with a nice logo of a boat on the sea to go with it.



Simon's English Academy
Established April 2004
Nishiwaki City, Hyogo
Owner: Simon Beashel (from UK)

Some surnames allow for clever playing around on different meanings, as one owner explained:

My last name is "Block" We started using all block letters. Our logo is three blocks. These days, most new students do NOT know that the owner's family name is "BLOCK". It's so easy to remember.

However, many English names incur pronunciation problems on the Japanese tongue and need to be adapted slightly, as in these two examples:

What with all the other stuff involved in starting out we had to make a fairly rapid decision. ... I had to abandon the idea of using Will's English etc.... since in katakana in sounded uncomfortably like virus. In the end we chose William's English Conversation Class. Granted, it's a mouthful in English but has a marginally better ring in Japanese and is straight to the point.



William's English Conversation Class
Mito, Ibaraki ken.
established 1998
William Percy

I started my school a little over a year and a half ago and I remember the time when my wife and I sat down to talk about what to name our school. I then thought that it would be cool to use my name in my school's name. After all, I'm the school's lone teacher and the foreign face that has become the identity and people around here know me as Makudonaridosan.... we eventually settled on e-mac. All lower case letters. The e stands for English and mac is me. My wife designed the logo which is e-mac with the e looking like a happy face profile talking. I think its cool. It's simple, short and sweet, easy for the Japanese tongue, easy to remember and all my students like it.

e-Mac English School
Higashi-ku, Fukuoka
Established 2002

Craig and Kazue Macdonald

A much more complex approach in the naming process is to try to combine the name with a matching logo, one which Adam Duran seems to have achieved remarkably well:

I actually went about naming our school (Apple English Network) a little differently. I thought of the logo first, an apple with a child's arms, legs, and head inside instead of seeds. I thought

an apple would be catchy, and so from there started thinking about names. My nickname was Adam Apple when I was a kid, so the name of the business fit me! Apple English sounded a little too plain, and since I was planning on teaching toddlers, kids, teens and adults, network came along easily.



Apple English School
Fukui City, Fukui Prefecture
Established 2002
Adam Duran

The use of acronyms also figured prominently in the names of schools:

As dictated by three of my most precious held tenets regarding English training, 'English is the result of Motivation, Confidence, and Fun. To get EMC2, only "Fun" didn't fit, so we changed it to "Cheer" which seemed to fit just as well in any case. Once we had achieved the acronym EMC2, and all its weight and power in the academic world... (though most Japanese don't seem to have a clue)...., it only made sense to attach a catchy name to the letters themselves, so we invented: English Masters - Communication Center, which represents to a "T" who we are.



English Masters
Communication Center

English Masters - Communication Center (EMC2)

Nara City, Nara
Founded 2003
Steven Nishida

I teach in our house. I have one room converted into a classroom which can occupy 5-7 students per class.... I came up with "Our Little English School" for obvious reason, my school is just small. I got a logo in which the school name is written circular (colored green), at the center is a drawing of a house with a clock, at the bottom is the acronym "OLES" (black). My signboard says "eikaiwa" (kanji), "Easy English at OLES" plus the katakana "Oresu" & telephone number.



OLES (Our Little English School)
Yamashina, Kyoto City
established in 2003
Judith Laurel-Nishikawa
(teacher/owner)

Another common consideration in many members' school names was the first letter, with Peter Warner offering this advice:

The first syllable, written in Katakana, should be at the beginning of the kana alphabet. In this way, your school will be listed in the Yellow Pages at the top of the list.

If prospective students use the phone book, they often start calling from the name listing. If your school is listed far from the first dozen names, they may never reach your listing.

At Home English
Tempaku-ku, Nagoya
established 1993
Peter Warner

The names of 2 other schools seemed to reflect this

We are Idea English ... actually, I do other things in addition to teaching, and did not want to use the school / academy title, and idea starts with the "a" sound in the kana alphabet.



Idea English
69-43-107 Hamano-Cho
Fuji Co-op Building
Takamatsu, Kagawa
760-0011 Japan
<http://ideaenglish.com>
Tel:090-6289-8639
established 1999
Peter Lutes

I finally decided on ABCDEnglish, no separation between ABCD and English. I thought this would be catchy, plus as Peter Warner and others pointed out, being at the top of syllabary would help get you noticed in the phone book (we don't have any ads, though). I wanted the name to mean something, so I took another 2 weeks to come up with: Actively Building Children's Doors to English. I am very satisfied with that name, as it explains exactly what I am about--building doors that the students can open by themselves through learning English. There are many doors out there in the world, and English will help open many of them.

ABCDEnglish

ABCDEnglish
Actively Building Children's Doors to English
Yokkaichi, Mie
established 1989
Sharon Abe

Cultural identity and icons can give the school a firm sense of identity, with national symbols featuring strongly in some names:

My school's name is Maple Eikaiwa. You can all probably guess why...yes, I am from Canada!!!! My logo is a....yes, Maple leaf in a diamond with the

name at the bottom. Most people just call the school Maple now....I had t-shirts and tot bags made (from Land's End) with the logo and I gave them out as a promotional gimmick at the beginning of last year's school year. They could choose free t-shirt or tot bag when they signed up. I figured it would be good promotion for the school and it is kinda nice to see our kids with their Maple T-shirts on.



Maple Eikaiwa
Matsudo City, Chiba

Established 2002
Owner Nanette Park

Returning to the earlier advice given by Igor, one ETJ member offered this anecdote on how she managed to incorporate the image and vision of the school into the name:

After a long hard debate I am "Action English Eniwa". How did we arrive at that?... I want kids (I am going to specialise in kids and women, not only eikaiwa but also a craft class for kids and a cooking class for women.) to be active, to be doing, experiencing, moving, speaking, touching, feeling and expressing themselves. That leads to the obvious "Active English" but on googling it, loads of hits came up and it is also the name of a Japanese English study magazine. So that went out the window. I still liked the verb though, so I changed it to

Action English.
Action English Eniwa
Eniwa, Hokkaido
Founded 2004
Vicky Kobayashi

Perhaps herein lies the secret to choosing a good name for your school. The name you choose is probably NOT going to have much bearing on your initial success. However, over time the name is the one thing which is going to remain constant and which will come to embrace public perceptions of the school. If you can ensure that the name encapsulates the image that you wish to convey then maybe you will have a big say in your school's long-term fate... but then again the largest school in Japan has managed to grow on the back of a name whose first syllable says a big 'no' to everybody!!