
your bottom line

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What's in a name?

Names are very important to people. They are the tag we use to identify people or things; to differentiate one from another. When we meet a person, the first thing we want to do is learn their name. When we see something new, we immediately want to know what it is called.

Psychologists have discovered that a name can considerably influence your feelings toward a person. For example, what are your first thoughts when you hear the names Gertrude, Elmer, or Timmy; as opposed to Kimberly, David or Jonathan? Some names seem to automatically conjure images of strength and attractiveness when compared with other names. The same effect occurs with business names.

Are you pleased with your studio name? Does it compliment your business and project a positive image, or is it a hindrance?

Unfortunately, many photographers don't realize that their company name can help determine their business' success. Too often, little thought is given to the development of an appropriate business name when, in fact, it should receive top priority. Many large companies hire top level advertising agencies to develop names for their new divisions or products. If development of a product name is so important to the "big guys," then it should be equally as important to you.

Consider for example, the words: picture, photo, portrait, and photography. "Picture" and "photo" tend to immediately bring forth thoughts of cheap amateur snapshots. "Portrait" sounds more professional but also implies a high-priced product. "Photography" not only implies quality, but also signifies more versatility than portrait. Thus, before you name your business, determine the market in which you plan to specialize. If you plan to emphasize work in the lower price range, then Photo Service or Picture Place may be quite appropriate. On the other hand, if you intend to specialize in upper end work, then you should use words such as "photography" or "portraiture". Would you expect to find high-quality work and

high prices from George's Photo Shop?

Your studio name affects the image your studio portrays, and the kind of clientele you wish to lure. A studio that specializes in children's photography should have an appropriate name, such as Pixy Photo. However, would you go to Pixy Photo for your wedding photography? Probably not! A studio associated with a major department store should carry the store's name as part of the studio name, such as the Sears Portrait Studio. Although the Sears studios are not owned by Sears, the name associates the studio concession with the large customer draw and respected name of Sears, Roebuck and Company. Generally speaking, unless you operate a "gimmick studio," you should avoid gimmick names. Let your name reflect your work.

Too often, photographers believe they solved the problem of name selection by simply inserting their own name followed by the word "studio". There are many good reasons NOT to use your family name as part of the business name. First, Smith Studio is not very original. It does nothing for the business, unless the Smith name is already well-known and respected in the area. Other names simply do not look well on a sign, for example, Maguillicutti Studio or Oles Studio. In some respects, it is even worse to use your full name. John E. Smith Studio or John E. Smith Photography is an acceptable name as long as John E. Smith intends to do ALL the work himself, now and forever. When the owner's name is too prominently associated with the business, customers logically expect the owner to do all the work and are satisfied with nothing less.

Another factor few photographers consider is the effect the name may have on the salability of the business. My first business name was Henry J. Oles and Associates, Professional Photography. The "Associates," which implied that others were also involved in actually doing photography, was necessary because we frequently did as many as ten weddings on one Saturday. The problem developed

when it was time for me to leave the area. Although my studio operation was the largest and probably the most profitable wedding business in the area, it had virtually zero resale value. Henry J. Oles had to operate Henry J. Oles and Associates! We learned our lesson. In Texas, our studios have been named Cameo Studios, Studio II, and Hunter's Run Photography. My wife, Marian, is the primary photographer. Depending on the emphasis we want to give to her personal involvement in the day-to-day routine operation of the business, her name becomes a large or small part of the by-line in all ads, including telephone directory yellow pages.

If you find that you are already saddled with an inappropriate name, change it!—slowly. During a transition period of a year or more, John E. Smith Studio can gradually become John E. Smith's Cameo Studios.

Once you have selected a name, you should hire a professional designer to help you create your logo and letter head. You should also be willing to hire a well-respected sign company to design a professional-looking sign that will catch the attention of the customers you wish to serve.

You should continually promote your studio name in your community so that when a photographic-related event occurs, the public thinks of your studio. Other promotional techniques include: respectfully displaying the studio name on your vehicles, equipment cases, and at other locations. Another idea is to have your studio name discreetly placed on your portrait prints. But here again, beware of the name. Most clients resent something like "Sam's Photos" being prominently stamped on the front surface of their prints.

In summary, your studio name can help form your studio's image in your community. As a result, it can directly influence the financial success and marketability of your business. Select your studio name wisely. If need be, incorporate a gradual name change. Your bottom line, both today and tomorrow, will reflect your efforts. ■