



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

WOULD AN AGENCY BY ANY OTHER NAME PRODUCE THE SAME LEVEL OF WORK? IT'S ALL ABOUT NAMES, DARLING, NAMES

WORDS: BROOKE HEMPHILL

Naming offspring seems like a fraught exercise until you speak to the agency founders responsible for branding their own businesses. “It was harder than naming a kid,” Brett Dawson, founder of Bohemia Group, confirms.

There are many factors that don’t come into play when a new human being enters the world. Like being able to secure a domain name, or fearing you’ll instantly label it as a product from a soon-to-be outdated era. Maybe the second still applies.

Brenton Gowland, managing director of agency Nucleus which has offices in Melbourne and Adelaide, says an agency’s web presence is an enormous contributor in the naming process.

He says: “Most agencies have to throw in the word ‘advertising’ or something. While that helps with search engine ranking, realistically, they often have to make a hybrid of the name to get the URL.

“There’s a funny story around how we got the URL nucleus.com.au. We initially went through iterations of the name because we couldn’t get it. Nucleus Media was available and was reasonably short. Then one of our guys found out who owned nucleus.com.au and he approached them saying, ‘I’ve got a client...’ We ended up buying the URL for about \$2,000.”

Unfortunately Dawson at Bohemia Group wasn’t so lucky. As it turned out, a moderately sized crystal company called Bohemia had dibs on bohemia.com.au. And while Dawson made the approach, it didn’t matter how deep his pockets were. They weren’t looking to negotiate.

Dawson says: “The reason why we’re Bohemia Group is, one, because I want to have a group of companies. It’s a bit of a nod to another company I may launch in another market, perhaps. But the other reason is I couldn’t get Bohemia.com.au because it’s owned by a crystal company. I offered them a large sum of money to buy the domain name and they wouldn’t give it up. So we are called the Bohemia Group.”

Ongoing feuds with crystal companies aside, Dawson is happy with the media agency’s name, although his investor wasn’t initially a fan.

“I pitched it to our shareholder and they hated it,” says Dawson. “We had about 40 names on a list. We were nearly called Rhapsody, but that’s a US streaming service and I couldn’t get the domain.

We were thinking Obi-Wan at one point because it’s a nod to owned, bought and earned media, as well as the science of what we do. I’m glad we didn’t because it was geeky.”

The name Bohemia comes from a piece of art Dawson saw out the window of a Brisbane pub shortly after he resigned from his former cushy agency gig.

He says: “The artwork had the name ‘Bohemia’ and it had a definition I can remember word for word. As soon as I saw it I was like, ‘Oh my God, that is it.’”

The definition of Bohemia Dawson read was: “A community of people who adopt manners and mores conspicuously different from those expected by the majority of society.”

Dawson, who wanted to do something very different with his company, says: “The majority of society, for me, is the old school, traditional media agencies.”

This was a sector of society he was keen to rally against, so much so he didn’t even want to call Bohemia a media agency. And his distaste for the old guard extends to legacy agency names.

“The funny thing is, just say you wanted to call OMD or UM or PHD and ask, ‘Where did the name come from?’ Who the fuck would you call? Some guy who’s retired in the UK? Sir Martin Sorrell?” says Dawson.

Well, you probably wouldn’t want to disturb Sir Martin with such trivial matters.

In the case of UM, the name comes from Universal McCann, and it was established in 1999 as part of McCann Worldgroup, an agency that has roots going back to 1912 and owes its namesake to Harrison King McCann.

PHD comes from three chaps, David Pattinson, Nick Horswell and Jonathan Durden, who formed the agency in 1990.

Of course if you want to know the history of any name under the GroupM umbrella, there’s only one man to call, head of business development and marketing, Greg Graham.

“I’ve lived through most of them,” he says of the various name changes at the agency. MEC, he

explains, was once The Media Edge. It joined forces with agency CIA so the C was added and the name abbreviated. Mindshare was named because the business is all about the ‘share of minds versus the share of voice’.

As a general rule, though, for companies within GroupM, it helps to start with M.

While once upon a time agency names stemmed from the company’s owners or their initials, today, Graham says, it’s all about being trendy and clever. “You know, names like One Green Bean or Spiderleg or whatever.”

Names like, say, BLOKE? While it is believed the Sydney agency took on the name because it was only looking to deal with blokey, male brands, managing partner Matt Daunt says that’s not the case.

“Ours is actually quite straight forward. It was Tim Bloore and Mike O’Rourke that started the agency. You put their two last names together and you get BLOKE,” says Daunt.

So while it seems like a funky, modern title, it borrows much from the agency naming conventions of yore when the principals of the business slapped their name on the front door.

Still, other agencies have thrown out the playbook when choosing their names.

The Monkeys started out as Three Drunk Monkeys after the agency was formed in 2006 by three spritely young chaps. A slight rebrand then followed some years later when the ‘Drunk’ got dropped.

Droga5 famously got its name from founder David Droga’s mother who labelled her six kids clothes by birth order. David was the fifth child of the six. While it’s still someone’s name, the number is a fresh approach.

It could all be about the illusive zeitgeist.

BLOKE’s Daunt says: “A zeitgeist is a trend you’re tapping into. Are people going to look back and go ‘ha ha, yeah, you’re an agency of the late 2000s’. The zeitgeist was then and you seem to have made it through. We think our name has complete longevity.”

Let’s check back in 2030.