

# Give your name a voice

Why brand voice should shape  
your name

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## Why brand voice should shape your name

By Fell Gray and Caitlin Barrett

When your brand communicates, what does it sound like? This tone of voice question isn't just critical for collateral, ads, and other touch points; it is, in fact, an often-overlooked key to naming.

A name can only say a few things well, so most naming work rightly focuses on identifying your primary message—after all, a sharp summary of what makes your offer stand out is a must. But just checking the box on what you want to say isn't enough—you have to figure out how you want to say it. Making sure your names sound like your brand is where attention to brand voice makes all the difference.

To understand the importance brand voice plays in naming, let's consider two names: Zipity and Accelaran. Both are coined. Both are suggestive of the same message: speed. And if your creative brief stopped at those criteria, both names should be a great fit for the same company.

Yet the first suggests the spirit of a start-up, while the other tonally evokes world domination. The difference in tone isn't just a matter of style, however. These names capture very different brand personalities.

And that's what brand voice is for: to express your organization's culture and personality, setting audience expectations for the way your brand behaves. It's the basis for the type of relationship you create: Is it formal and instructive, or helpful and encouraging? This is why voice must be a part of your approach to naming. You need to align the way your brand communicates and the way it names its offerings. Ask yourself if your naming delivers on the promise established by the voice (and vice versa).

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**Your voice sets audience expectations for the way your brand behaves.**

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### Go beyond your gut

Bringing brand voice into the creative development phase can help you steer name generation in the right direction. Namers will tell you that having a clear sense of a brand's voice can be a real source of inspiration. If you're a fresh startup, your brand voice might be built around a spirit of optimism—so your creative direction might include sounds and symbols with upbeat associations and a rhythmic tonality. If you're an established global company, your brand's voice might be used to signal that you're a grounded leader. This might open up your brief to the use of linguistic cues of scale, stability, and legacy in how you name.

Or you can flip the script. Using your voice doesn't mean sticking to one note. With a structured voice in place, you can more easily break the rules and create tension. Brands that operate on a global scale could consider names with a highly optimistic tonality that suggests they're agile enough for the modern world—and avoid associations that imply a hulking organization.

Brand voice also helps with name evaluation: those names that feel “not right” or “not like us” aren't usually wrong because they're off—message—more likely it's because they are off-voice. You can use brand voice to help articulate what doesn't feel right and provide actionable direction to get names that capture the personality of a company.

### Stand out and fit in

Aligning the way you speak with the way you name differentiates your brand, and gives your business a competitive advantage. Evaluating names against your voice helps ensure that the way you name

is an expression of your unique brand, not merely an expression of your category. A technology name that starts or ends in “i” or a beauty name that uses a word that might describe a beautiful woman—these types of names won't stand out in market. (You'll also have a harder time clearing them for trademark registration.) Voice helps you name in a way no one else can; a way that can create a distinctive naming system and style that complements the entirety of your verbal identity.

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**Aligning the way you speak with the way you name differentiates your brand, and gives your business a competitive advantage.**

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So, what does it look like when it's a fit? Consider the following copy examples:

1. *Your super-smart technology solutions. We'll help you get from A to epic.*
2. *Around the country and around the world, set your sights on advancing your business with unmatched agility.*

Now let's go back to Zipity and Accelaran. Which name would be a natural fit alongside or within each piece of copy? And which feels disruptive? The expectations for what type of experience each brand might offer is likely a combination of the name itself, and how it interacts with the tone established by the language supporting it.

The bottom line? Always keep the promise of your brand in mind. And the next time you're naming, whether it's a company, product, or service, make your brand's voice as much a part of your brief as your brand's message.



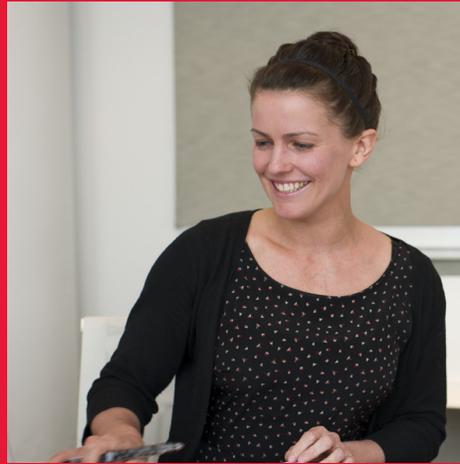
### Fell Gray

Senior Director,  
Verbal Identity

As a Senior Director, Fell is the practice champion for brand voice and ideation. She leads the Verbal Identity work for Qualcomm, John Deere, MWV, and Avis Budget Group, among others. Fell believes that astute, insightful strategy is the springboard for brilliant creative. She is driven to find the language and behaviors that are fundamental to compelling brand experiences.

Prior to joining Interbrand, Fell worked at MKTG/US Concepts developing the strategy and creative concepts for integrated marketing platforms for consumer brands, including those within the Diageo, Nintendo, and Coty portfolios. Her experience includes brand communication, experiential marketing, social media, and shopper marketing.

She fell in love with writers and writing during her former professional life producing theater off-Broadway. At Playwrights Horizons, Fell developed and produced award-winning productions with playwrights such as Doug Wright, Craig Lucas, James Lapine, and Lynn Nottage. She graduated with distinction from Yale University with a bachelor's degree in Psychology.



### Caitlin Barrett

Director,  
Verbal Identity

Caitlin is a director for Interbrand's New York Verbal Identity department. She develops smart, insightful creative work that marries clients' brand strategies with their needs and goals.

Every brand has an authentic—and compelling—story to tell. By helping clients understand the power of language, Caitlin connects brands to consumers who truly align with their values. She has worked with brands such as 3M, GE, Microsoft, SAP, John Deere, Kellogg's, Wrigley, Nielsen, and Louisville Slugger.

Before joining Interbrand, Caitlin worked as a senior writer at Ologie, where her efforts were focused on education and healthcare clients, including Univita Health, Communicare, CCAD, and Kent State University. Prior to Ologie, she spent two years at Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia. There, she served as a writer for the retail division, writing brand communications. Caitlin received her bachelor's degree from Baruch College in New York City.