



## Choose the right name for your business

Choosing a name for your business is a creative and enjoyable process. It is also one that you need to get right. Customers will deduce a lot from your business name and first impressions count.

While it may be tempting to try to stamp your individual personality on your business name, there are many other issues to consider. Being objective and choosing a name which reflects your business strategy can be more valuable, especially as your business develops.

This guide shows you how to create the right impression, how to display your business name, consider whether your business name will be your brand and get your name on the web. It also outlines the specific rules that you must follow when choosing a company name for a limited company, sole trader or partnership.

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### Creating the right impression

When you are generating ideas about a business name, you initially may want to focus on personal preference. However, an objective approach will enable you to consider the customer first.

Remember that your business name will be the cornerstone of your brand. It should work well wherever you use it - on the phone, in your logo, signage, stationery, advertisements, website, uniforms and any other media you plan to use to reach the market. See our guide on branding: the basics.

### Points to help you decide on a name for your business

- Do you want the name to reflect what your business does - framing, moving, cleaning, building? Or would something more abstract be suitable?
- Would it be a good idea to include your own name?
- Do you want a traditional-sounding name, conveying durability and old-fashioned values, or a modern name, suggesting a fresh, innovative approach?
- Think about the future - avoid words or phrases that are likely to date quickly.
- If you're likely to be trading overseas, check that the name doesn't mean anything inappropriate in the relevant languages, and that it can be easily read and pronounced.
- Think about callers and customers - avoid very long names, strange wordings and unusual spelling.

There are also regulations that could affect your choice. Read information on company and business names at the Companies House website.

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## Limited company names

If you've decided to form a limited company, you'll need to register your name and other details with Companies House

Before you fill in the forms it's essential to check that your proposed name doesn't break the rules.

### Company names - the rules

To make sure your company name is acceptable, work through this list before you send your application to Companies House. Ensure that:

- your company name ends with limited, plc, Ltd or Welsh equivalents - this must not be used anywhere other than at the end of the name
- the name isn't offensive
- the name isn't the same as - or very similar to - one already in the register
- the name doesn't include any sensitive words or expressions - unless you have obtained permission to use them

The full version of these rules is given in the Companies House guidance booklet *Company Names*. Call Companies House for a copy on Tel 0870 333 3636 - alternatively, you can access the booklet on company names at the Companies House website.

For an explanation of how to register your company name with Companies House and a list of forms you need to complete, see our guide on how to set up and register a limited company (private or public).

Businesses in Northern Ireland can find company advice on the Companies Registry website.

## Trade marks

It's a good idea to check that your proposed name isn't too similar to a word or expression that someone else has registered as a trade mark. This isn't compulsory, but it could save time and trouble later on.

Find out whether your chosen name has already been registered as a trade mark on the UK-Intellectual Property Office (UK-IPO) website.

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## Sole trader and partnership names

People operating as sole traders or in partnerships can trade under their own

names, or choose a different business name.

### **Sole trader and partnership names - the rules**

If you decide to use a business name, there are a few rules to bear in mind. The name must **not**:

- be offensive
- include the words limited, plc or equivalent
- contain sensitive words and expressions, unless you've obtained permission to use them - see the page in this guide on sensitive words and expressions

For the full version of these rules, read a guidance booklet on business names at the Companies House website, or you can call the Companies House Contact Centre on Tel 0870 33 33 636 for a copy.

Businesses in Northern Ireland can find company advice on the Companies Registry website.

### **Is anyone else using your proposed business name?**

Before you decide to use your chosen name, it makes sense to check whether it's already being used. If a sole trader at the other end of the country is using it, there may not be a problem. However, if another local business or a national firm is using it, you should definitely choose a different name.

- Check local phone books, business directories and the Internet.
- Make sure that your proposed name - or something similar - hasn't been registered by a company. Check registered company names on the Companies House website.
- Make sure that the name isn't too similar to a word or expression that has been registered as a trade mark. Find out whether your chosen name has already been registered as a trade mark on the UK Intellectual Property Office (UK-IPO) website.

If you're in any doubt about your business name, get expert advice from your local Business Link. You can find your local Business Link through our Contacts Directory.

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### **Sensitive words and expressions**

There are some words and expressions that you can't use in a business name unless you have official permission. These are words that might give a false impression about your business. They are known as **sensitive** words.

The rules about sensitive words apply to all types of businesses and fall into five main groups:

## Sensitive words

Type of expression	Examples
Words that suggest your business is of national importance	British, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, English, National, International, European
Words that suggest a special status	Association, Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Chartered, Council, Institute, Society
Words that suggest a particular function	Charity, Insurance, Register, Trust
Words that suggest a specialised activity	Architect, Chemist, Health Centre
Words that suggest connections with government or royalty	Parliament, Government, Royal, Queen, Prince

## Getting further help

These guidelines provide a basic summary of sensitive words. You can find details of sensitive words and expressions on the Companies House website, or call the Companies House Contact Centre on Tel 0870 33 33 636 for a copy. As well as listing sensitive words, this booklet tells you who to contact for permission if you intend to use a sensitive word or expression in your business name.

Businesses in Northern Ireland can find company advice on the Companies Registry website.

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## Displaying your business name

There are a few requirements about displaying your business name - and other details - so that your customers and suppliers know who they're dealing with. You should not have any stationery printed until you're certain your proposed name is acceptable.

For a limited company, this means waiting until registration is complete. At this point you'll receive a Certificate of Incorporation, showing the company's registered name and number - see the page in this guide on limited company names.

A sole trader or partnership must go through the checks required for sole trader and partnership names and take expert advice if necessary. See the page in this guide on sole trader and partnership names.

## Displaying a limited company or limited liability partnership (LLP) name

- Your company or LLP name must be clearly shown **outside every place of business** - even a director's or partner's home if that's where the business operates from.

- Your company or LLP name must be included on all **business letters**, electronic business communications, orders, payments, invoices, receipts and other business documents.
- Business letters, external emails and order forms must also show the company's or LLP's registered **address, number** and **place of registration**.

The 2006 Companies Act introduced particular rules for displaying the company's or LLP's details on its website, which must now show:

- the full name of the company or LLP
- the registered office address of the company or LLP
- the registered number of the company or LLP
- the place of registration of the company or LLP
- if the company or LLP is being wound up, that fact

For a full version of the rules on displaying your company details, see the guidance notes on company formation on the Companies House website, or call the Companies House Contact Centre on Tel 0870 33 33 636.

### **Displaying a sole trader or partnership business name**

Your business name, your own name, or the partners' names and business address must be clearly displayed:

- wherever you run your business and deal with customers or suppliers
- on all business letters, orders, payments, invoices, receipts and other business documents

For a full version of the rules on displaying your business details, see the guidance notes on business names on the Companies House website, or call the Companies House Contact Centre on Tel 0870 33 33 636.

You can find information for companies in Northern Ireland on the Companies Registry website.

### **Displaying a name online**

If you are an online business, you must display:

- general information about your business - including business name, address, email address, VAT registration number (if applicable)
  - details of any relevant professional body that you belong to or any authorisation scheme to which your service is subject
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### **Getting your name on the web**

Even if you are not intending to create a website for your business immediately, you'll probably be using email and want to have a presence on the web at some point in the future. This could be a single screen advertising your company and giving contact details, or it could be a site that allows customers to browse

through products, place orders and make payments online.

### **Domain names**

The website address, for example my-new-business.co.uk, is known as a **domain name**. For most businesses based in the UK, a name ending with .co.uk is suitable. Your **email address** will normally include this name, for example enquiries@my-new-business.co.uk.

Businesses and individuals that meet certain European Community (EC) criteria can apply for the new .eu domain extension - for example www.my-new-business.eu.

If your business is active in EC countries, the .eu domain name can help you market your company as a pan-European business. There is a phased registration process. Find out how to register a .eu domain name at the European Registry of Internet Domain Names (EURid) website.

To reserve a domain name for your business, you need to register it through an agent, who will charge a small annual fee. You should do this as soon as possible - even if you're not going to use your domain name straight away.

### **Registering your .uk or .com domain name**

- **Decide on a suitable domain name for your website** - if you are unable to use one that exactly matches your business name. You can use numbers as well as letters. Hyphens can be used to separate words - but you can't include spaces, full stops or other punctuation. It's a good idea to have a few alternative names in case your first choice has already been taken.
- **Check whether the name is available** - the official registry for UK domain names is Nominet. Check whether your chosen domain name is available on the Nominet website.
- **Register the name** - this is a simple process which you can carry out online with any registration agent. There are hundreds of registration agents to choose from - a good starting point is Nominet. Find out about choosing a registration agent at the Nominet website.

Businesses in Northern Ireland can find company advice on the Companies Registry website.

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### **Here's how I chose the name for my business**

**Nick Jenkins**  
Moonpig Cards

### **Nick's top tips:**

- "Keep your name short and simple if you're a consumer-facing company."
  - "Don't box yourself in. The real thought should go into your trading name. Your corporate name should be bland and give you room for manoeuvre into other activities."
  - "Make sure you secure the domain name for your trading name. Even if you're not selling over the Internet, people will be reassured to see a professional-looking website if they are checking out the solidity of the business."
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Managing director Nick Jenkins founded Moonpig, a London-based company selling personalised greeting cards over the Internet.

### **What I did**

#### **Consider how a name could work as a memorable brand**

"I wanted business to spread by word-of-mouth so it was important my company's name was both catchy and memorable. I decided it had to be only two syllables so that people wouldn't forget it, and phonetic so that they wouldn't misspell it. Moonpig is fun and cheeky. Most of our cards are humour based and Moonpig encapsulates that.

"The name also had to be easily represented in graphical format. Once you've seen our logo you never forget it. I commissioned a cartoonist to design the moonpig. The whole branding exercise cost £200 and three days' work, but it has been far more effective than we could ever have expected."

#### **Ensure the name is available on the Internet**

"Control of a domain name was very important for us. To check what was available, I sat on Nominet for four days plugging in variations of names. I originally came up with lots of different names - red-dog, green-carrot, that sort of thing - but they were all already taken.

"Moonpig was actually my nickname at school. It was available as both a ".com" and a ".co.uk" which was also an important consideration.

"Moonpig is a completely unique word. The only references to it on Google are links to our website."

#### **Trademark the name**

"Having the ".com" and ".co.uk" gave the name Moonpig some protection against copiers but we thought people might also try other permutations of Moonpig to capitalise on our success. It wasn't that expensive to go for trademarking and it gave the name an extra layer of protection.

"I employed a trademark attorney and Moonpig is now a trade mark in the UK and the US.

"It's such a small insurance premium. In a customer-facing brand I think it's

critical as the brand name is the thing that customers really recognise."

### **What I'd do differently**

#### **Start out with a general, bland registered-company name**

"Although we continue to trade under the name Moonpig, we changed our name at Companies House to Altergraphics Limited in 2001, when we received venture-capital investment. The new investors seemed reluctant to write out a cheque with the word Moonpig in it.

"It might have been easier if we'd started out with Altergraphics as our company name anyway. Moonpig pigeonholes us as funky and humorous which is great as a trading name for our current website, but having Altergraphics as a corporate name gives us the flexibility to develop other brands under different trading names in the future."

Download this case study and 20 like it in our free book, "Here's how I started up my business" (PDF).

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### **Companies House Contact Centre**

0870 33 33 636

### **Business Link Helpline**

0845 600 9 006

### **Nominet Enquiry Line**

01865 33 22 11

### **Related guides on [businesslink.gov.uk](http://businesslink.gov.uk)**

Manage your personal list of starting-up tasks with our Business start-up organiser

Download our No-Nonsense Guide to starting a business (PDF)

Legal structures: the basics

Set up and register a limited company (private or public)

Set up and register as self-employed

Set up and register a partnership

Set up and register a limited liability partnership (LLP)

Use our interactive tool to investigate what kind of website is best for your business

Planning for e-commerce

Website hosting options

Read and download our free best practice case study books

Here's how having an up-to-date business plan helped my business

Here's how I control my stock

## **Related web sites you might find useful**

### **Check registered company names at the Companies House website**

<http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/info>

### **Find out about choosing your domain name on the Nominet website**

<http://www.nic.uk/registrants/register/choose>

### **Check registered trade marks at the UK Intellectual Property Office website**

<http://www.ipo.gov.uk/tm/t-find/t-find-text.htm>

### **Find out about choosing a name for your business on the National Business Register website**

[http://www.start.biz/business\\_names/](http://www.start.biz/business_names/)

### **Find out about choosing your domain name on the Nominet website**

<http://www.nic.uk/registrants/register/choose/>

### **Access the booklet on company names at the Companies House website**

<http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/about/gbhtml/gbf2.shtml#three>

### **Find out about choosing a name for your business on the National Business Register website**

<http://www.anewbusiness.co.uk>

### **Read a guidance booklet on business names on the Companies House website**

<http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/about/gbhtml/gbf3.shtml>

### **Check whether your chosen domain name is available on the Nominet website**

<http://www.nominet.org.uk/>

### **Find out about eligibility and the registration process for .eu domain names at the .eu registrar website**

[http://www.gtld.com/doteu\\_FAQ\\_updated.html](http://www.gtld.com/doteu_FAQ_updated.html)

### **Find an approved agent for .eu domain names on the EURid website**

<http://list.eurid.eu/registrars/ListRegistrars.htm?lang=en>

You can find this guide on <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk> by navigating to:  
Home > Starting up > Business names & structures > Choose the right name for  
your business

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