What are descriptive brand names? The pros and cons of descriptive naming

Category: Naming
written by Steve Harvey | 22 September 2022

Descriptive brand names are some of the most common and easy to understand monikers available. As you might have guessed, these are titles designed to immediately describe what your company is, what it sells, or what it does.

With a descriptive brand name, you focus on directly positioning your company as the solution your customer is looking for, by telling them what you offer. There's no need for a consumer to puzzle over your brand mission when you have a name like "Kentucky Fried Chicken".

Of all the various types of brand names business leaders can choose from; descriptive titles are the most basic. When you're struggling to come up with an emotional and evocative moniker for your business, it's often much easier to simply describe what you do.

Descriptive names can also be fantastic from a search engine perspective, as they often contain some of the keywords your customers will be looking for.

However, there are limitations to descriptive names. They lack the creativity and depth you can achieve with more suggestive, or invented titles.

Today, we're going to explore the pros and cons of descriptive naming and offer some tips on how you can choose the right title for your business.

What is descriptive naming? An introduction

There are countless ways to define and identify a company. You can come up with an entirely new word as your business name, like “Google” or “Kodak”. Alternatively, you might choose something evocative or suggestive, like “Puma” or “Apple”.

Descriptive names are one of the most simplistic solutions. Rather than trying to convey the emotion or values in your brand, descriptive titles simply tell customers exactly what you do.

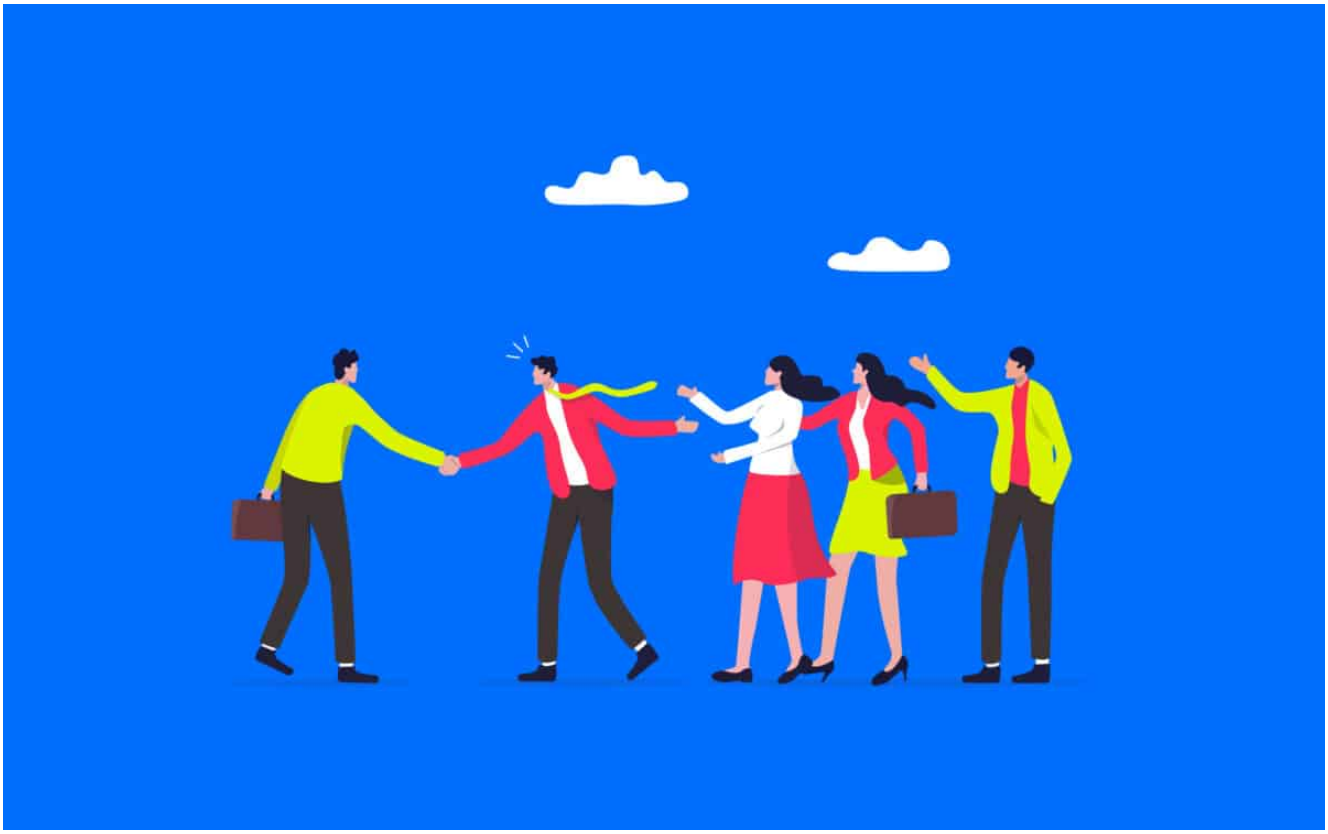
One of the oldest forms of naming, descriptive titles are logical, functional, and utilitarian. They get straight to the point, without relying on consumers to unravel the mysteries of your name.

A name like “The Weather Channel” is easy to understand and leaves no room for misunderstandings. This can be a good thing for a brand, as it ensures your customers can understand your business immediately, without any potential mistakes.

Of course, there are some significant issues with descriptive brand names too. Perhaps most significantly, these names are extremely basic. They can often be deemed boring and unremarkable and say nothing about your brand personality.

In a world where customers are searching for meaningful human connections with businesses, descriptive names do nothing to make an impact.

This often means you need to work harder to connect with your audience on a deeper level elsewhere, perhaps through your marketing strategies, or your visual identity.



What is a descriptive brand name?

A descriptive brand name is essentially the opposite to an abstract, invented, or suggestive name. The majority of naming projects focus on sharing valuable information about your business in just a couple of words.

A great name should be able to differentiate your brand, engage your audience, and deliver information fast.

Descriptive names do achieve this goal to a certain extent. They tell your customers what you do, though they don't necessarily convey who you are.

In contract, an abstract or suggestive name attempts to convey more information about your identity and brand promise. They highlight what makes your company unique and interesting, rather than focusing specifically on what you sell or do.

Descriptive names used to be a lot more common than they are today. In the past, companies were less concerned about

resonating with their target audience and creating affinity through a name.

Consumers chose companies based on their location and convenience, rather than searching for a specific experience or a set of shared values.

As consumers have changed, the popularity of descriptive names has diminished. Businesses are beginning to see the value in highlighting emotion in their names. They know they need to share more than just what their company sells in their title to grab attention.

What are the pros of a descriptive company name?

Companies often choose descriptive brand names when they want to attract new customers quickly and make their title as visible as possible. In a world of search engines and online browsing, customers are more likely to search for descriptive terms than specific brand names.

This makes it easier for you to capture the attention of your audience if your name is descriptive.

Descriptive naming can also be more convenient and straightforward for your customers. With countless companies to choose from in a cluttered landscape, consumers don't always want to spend time figuring out what a business does, by trying to understand its name.

The biggest benefits of descriptive brand names include:

Simplicity

Choosing a great name is hard work. It's difficult to mine to the core of your brand's identity and determine what kind of words and sounds you can use to convey meaning.

Simply describing what your business does is often a lot simpler. It requires a lot less effort and may even be less expensive if you can come up with a name without help.

Convenient

For customers in search of a quick solution to a problem or a specific service, a descriptive name is convenient. It immediately tells your target audience what to expect from your business and lets them know they're in the right place.

There's no confusion around what a company like "Burger King" might sell or offer.

Visibility

As mentioned above, descriptive names are excellent for visibility and searchability. They include the words your customers will already be looking for online when they're searching for a specific product or service.

This means you can more easily attract a huge number of clients with relative ease.

Spelling and pronunciation

Because descriptive names already include existing words and terms, they're much less likely to be misspelled or mispronounced. Your audience should be able to share information about your company relatively easily, which can improve your chances of attracting more prospects.

What are the cons of a descriptive business name?

The biggest challenge for most companies choosing a descriptive name is figuring out how they're going to leave a lasting emotional impression on their audience, with more than just a title.

Descriptive names are extremely basic at their core. They don’t make an emotional connection with an audience or convey information about your brand’s values.

Ultimately, a descriptive name only tells your audience what your business does. It doesn’t cover the other information your customers are looking for, like what you have to offer in terms of customer experience.

These names are also very generic, so it’s easy to find a lot of other companies with similar names in the same industry.

The biggest disadvantages of descriptive brand names include:

Ownership

Because a descriptive name is so generic, it isn’t easy to trademark and own your name. It’s even more complicated to find a name which hasn’t already been claimed by another business.

The chances are there will be countless other brands using similar words and phrases to you. This makes it hard to differentiate your business.

Lack of emotion

There’s nothing to emotionally connect with your target audience in a descriptive name. A title like “Smoothie Co” doesn’t have the same influence as “Innocence” when it comes to reaching your customers.

As more customers continue to search for businesses with the same values as them, descriptive names don’t make the right impression.

Memorability

Descriptive business names are relatively boring. There’s nothing about them to stick in the mind of your target audience, which means they’ll often be easily forgotten.

You'll need to work a lot harder to make other parts of your brand identity more engaging, just so you can capture the attention of your audience.

Restrictive

If you choose your descriptive name with a specific focus on one of your products or services, there's a good chance you'll outgrow it over time.

As your business evolves, a descriptive name may begin to only highlight a small portion of what you do, or what you can offer.

Global limitations

There's no guarantee the words and phrases used to identify your business in one part of the world will have the same meaning in another.

You'll need to do your due diligence to ensure your title still translates well into other environments, particularly if you're planning on growing a global brand.

Examples of descriptive brand names

Like most naming strategies, descriptive brand names have both positives and negatives to consider. While these titles won't work in all scenarios, they've had a positive influence on the growth of some major companies.

To help you get a feel for how descriptive company names can work, here's an insight into some of the best examples throughout the years.



1. Sports Illustrated

First published in 1954, Sports Illustrated was an American Sports Magazine committed to sharing pictures of important sporting events, alongside engaging stories.

The name of this publication is obviously very straightforward and descriptive, which may have helped it to achieve such a massive readership.

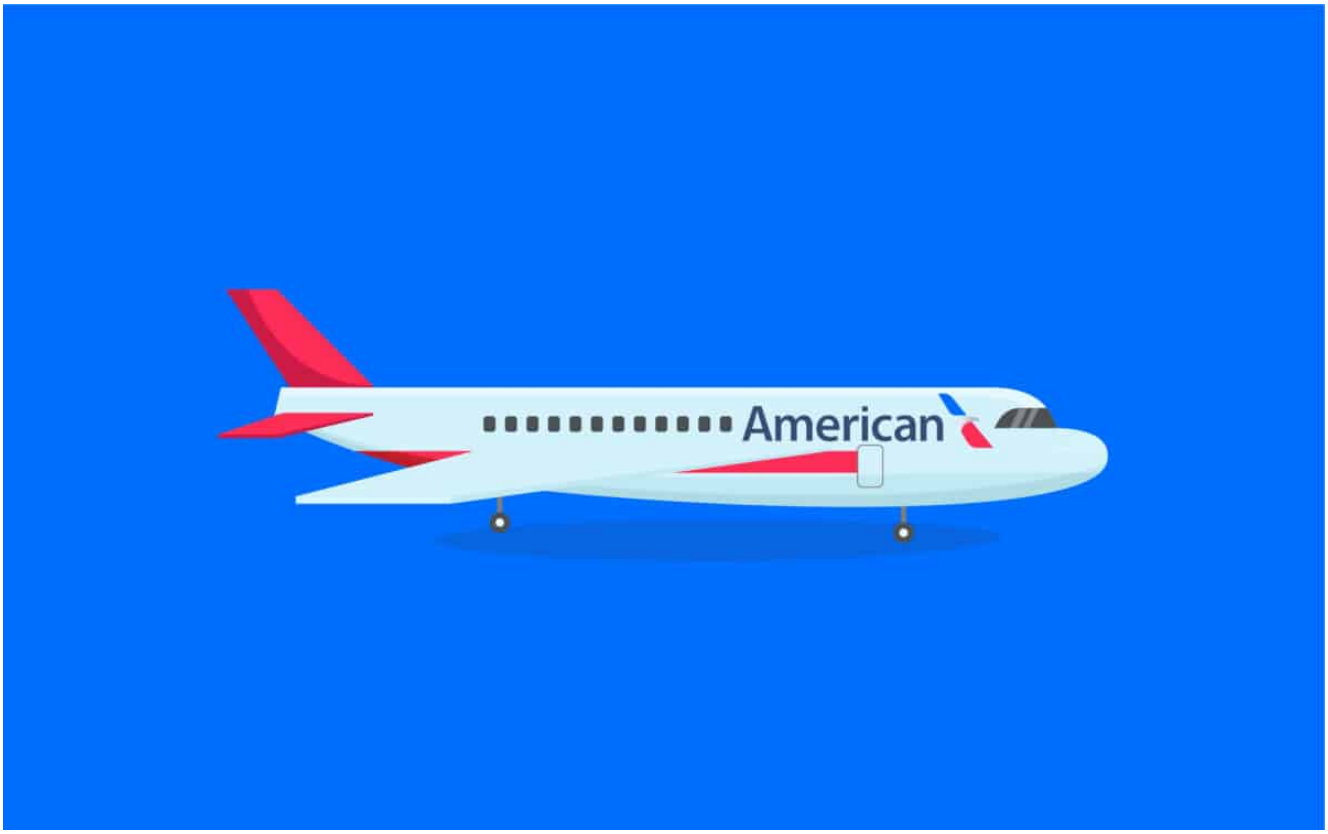
Sports Illustrated was the first magazine in publication with a circulation of over 1 million to win the General Excellence National Magazine award twice. It also continues to be a well-known and relatively popular publication to this day.



2. Cartoon Network

Another excellent example of a descriptive brand name, Cartoon Network is a television channel specifically designed to broadcast cartoons and children's shows. The American television channel was first launched in 1992 and continues to be a popular choice for kids today.

A descriptive name might have been the best possible choice for this business, as it was attempting to attract the attention of younger viewers. Children don't always have the best capacity for understanding metaphors and evocative names.



3. American Airlines

First introduced in 1936, American Airlines has grown to become the biggest airline in the world, measured by scheduled passengers carried, fleet size, and revenue. The simple name aims to portray exactly what you’d expect from an American travel company.

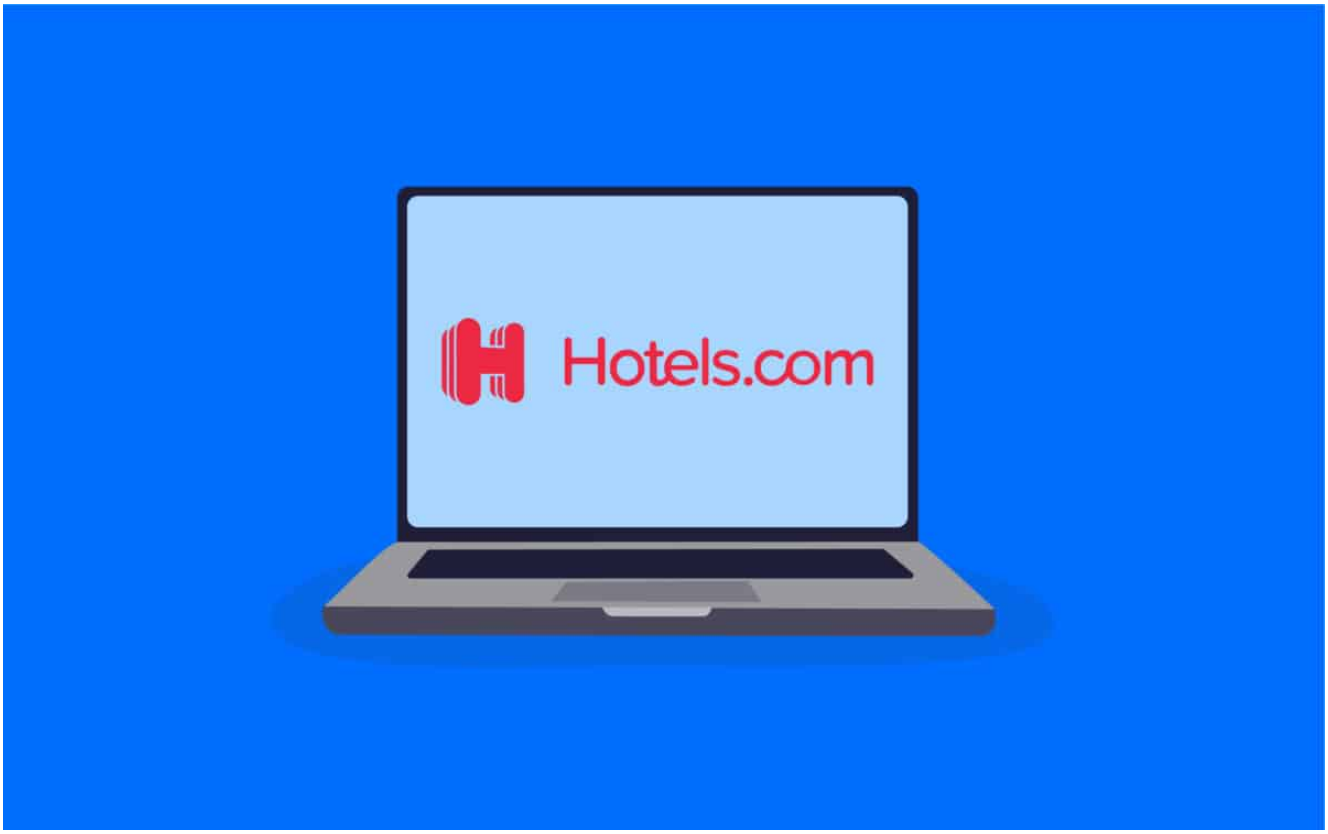
American Airlines was launched at a time when simplicity was still key in defining a brand. Today, the company continues to have a massive presence across the globe, and it’s certainly not hampered by its use of a simple name.



4. Pizza Hut

Descriptive company names are relatively common in the fast food landscape. When you're driving down a motorway at high speed, you want to be able to see a clear indication of what you're going to get by pulling over to a restaurant.

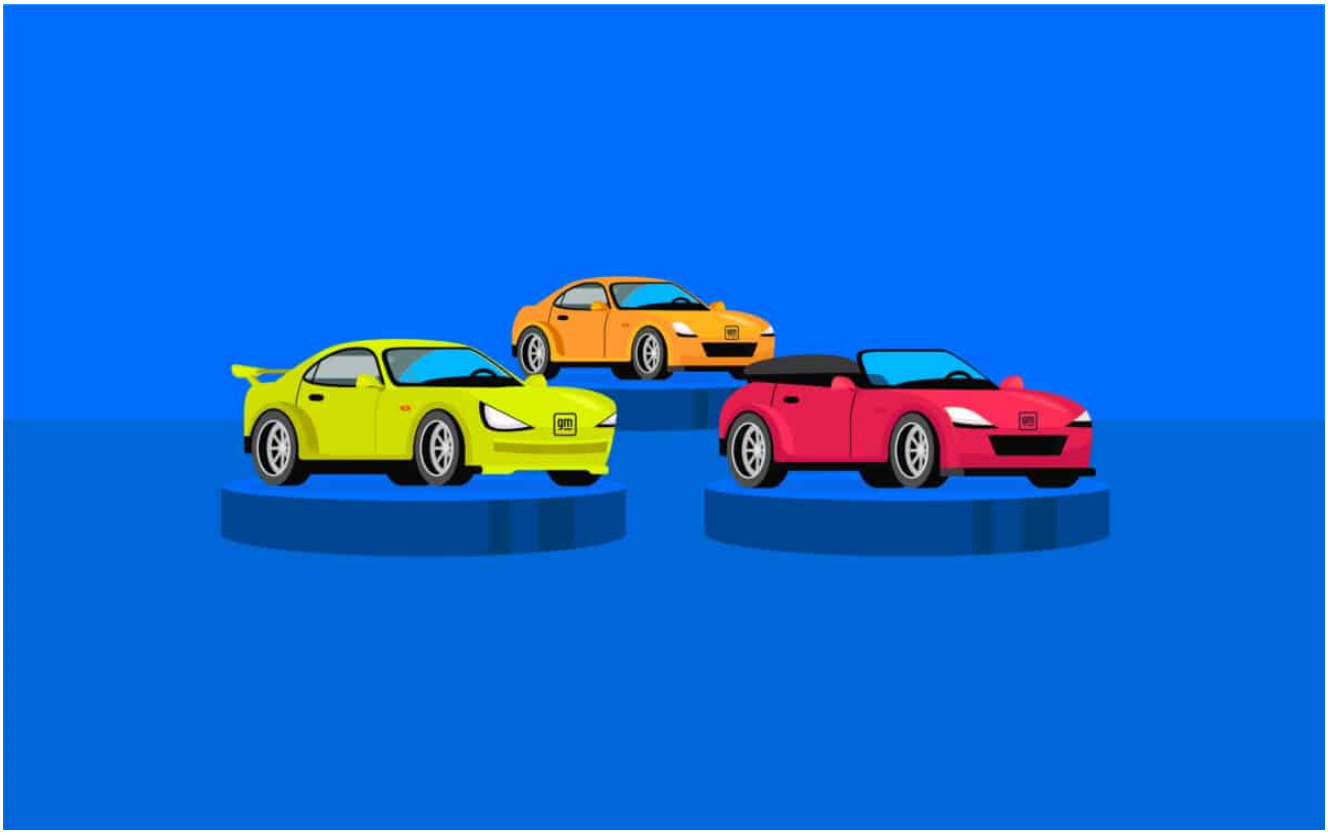
Launched in 1958, Pizza Hut chose its name to immediately convey its USP – the focus on selling a wide selection of pizzas in a fast-service environment. Today, the company is one of the largest in the world, with franchises found all over the globe.



5. Hotels.com

Designed for the digital age of travel, Hotels.com takes advantage of the power of descriptive names to attract a wide audience. When looking for a place to stay online, “Hotels” is one of the primary words most consumers will automatically search for.

Hotels.com gets straight to the point with its name, allowing customers to immediately define what the company does, and what it can offer. Notably, the company also had an equally descriptive name before Hotels.com: the Hotel Reservations Network.



6. General Motors

Sometimes simply referred to as “GM”, General Motors was first launched in 1908, and is now the largest automaker in the United States. It was also the biggest automaker in the world for nearly 80 years, before it eventually lost this title to Toyota.

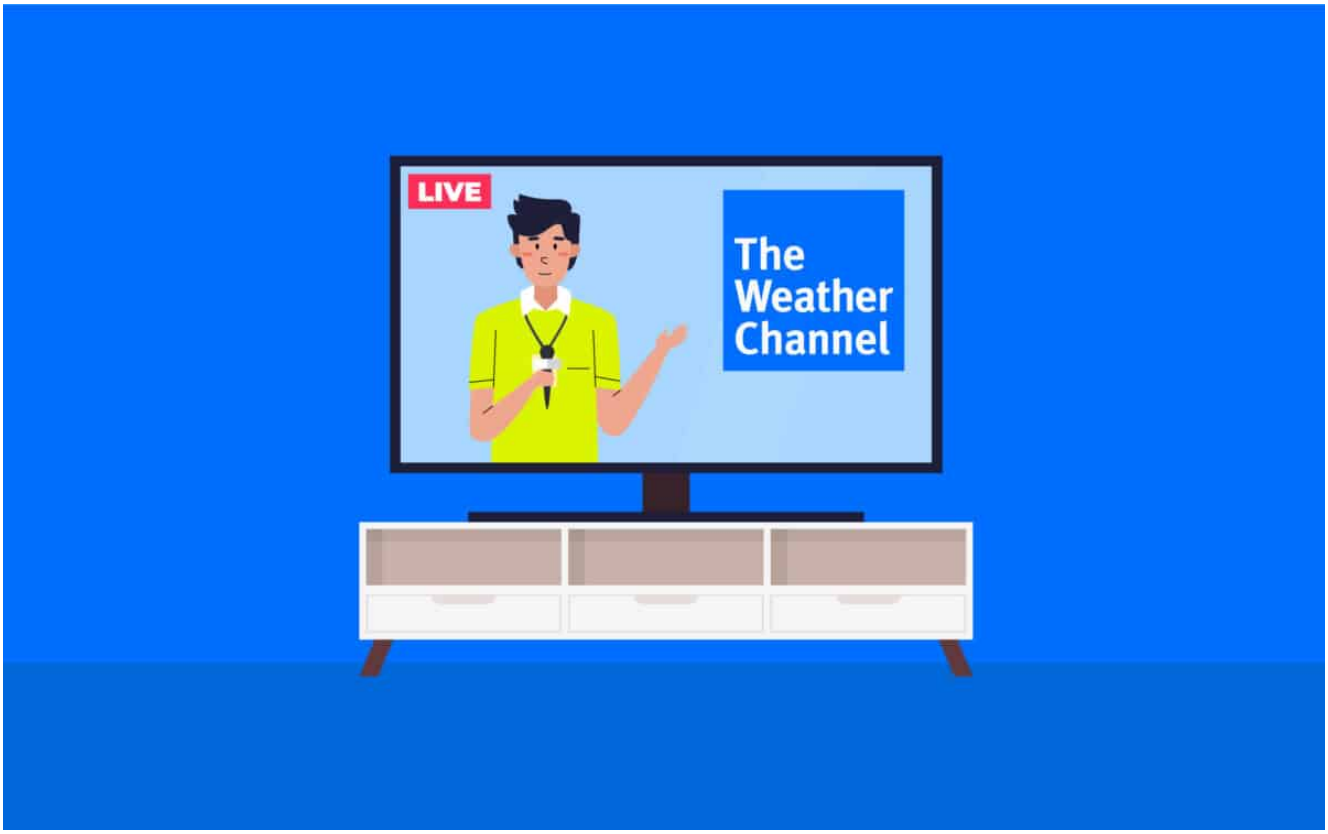
General Motors uses its name to highlight the wide selection of vehicles quickly and conveniently it has to offer. The use of the word “General” tells customers they can purchase affordable, utilitarian cars, rather than focusing on sports or commercial vehicles.



7. Bank of America

Some industries are better suited to descriptive brand names than others. For instance, when you're choosing a company to help you manage your money, you may find yourself looking for transparency and simplicity over emotion.

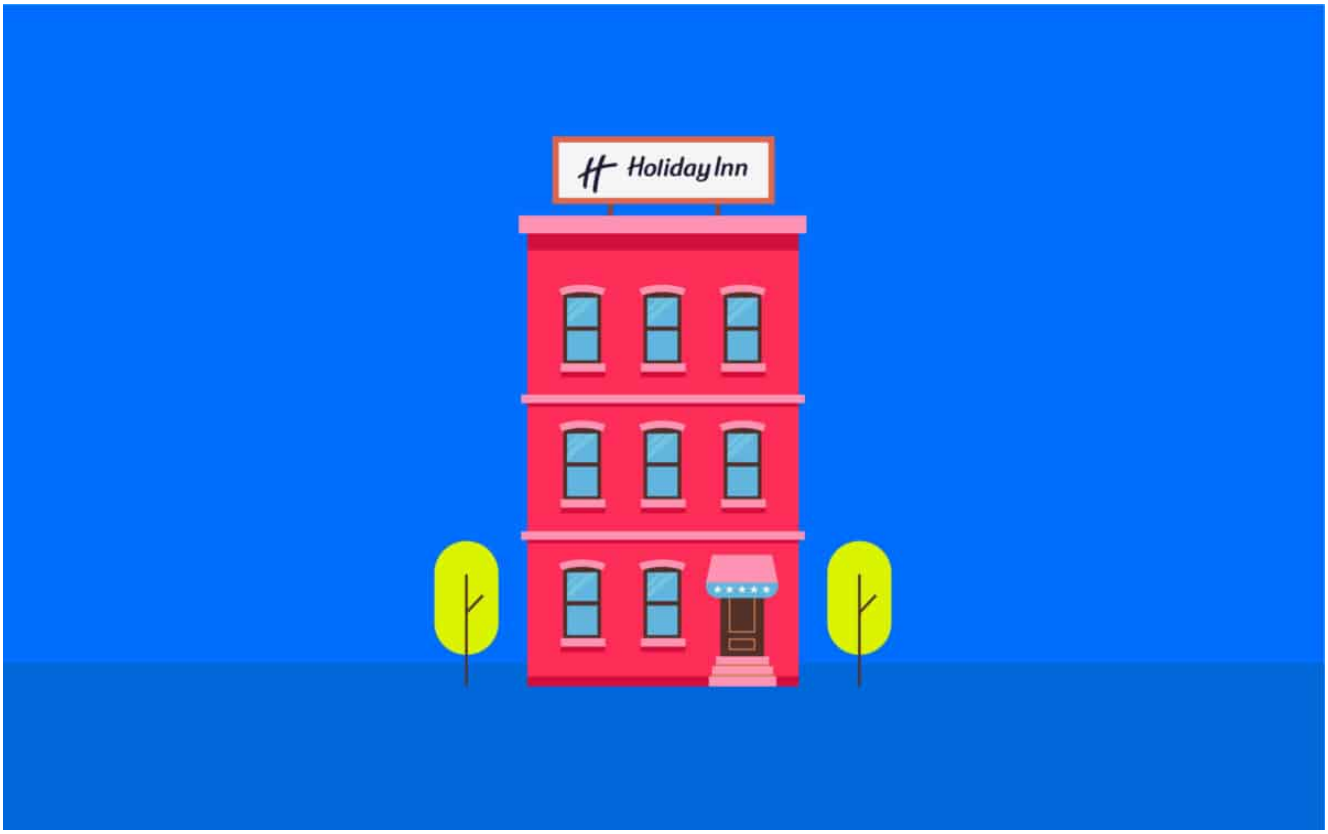
The Bank of America, launched in 1784 as the "Massachusetts Bank", has retained a focus on simplicity in its name throughout the centuries. The straightforward name hasn't prevented the bank from gaining fame and fortune over the years.



8. The Weather Channel

Owned by the “The Weather Group”, the Weather Channel was launched in 1982, with a mission to bring weather reports to people around America. The channel broadcasts only weather forecasts and weather-related news, alongside documentaries related to weather.

For customers in search of weather related information, the Weather Channel’s name provides a quick insight into what to expect from its programming. It’s simple and straightforward name has helped it to become a popular choice for weather broadcasting over time.

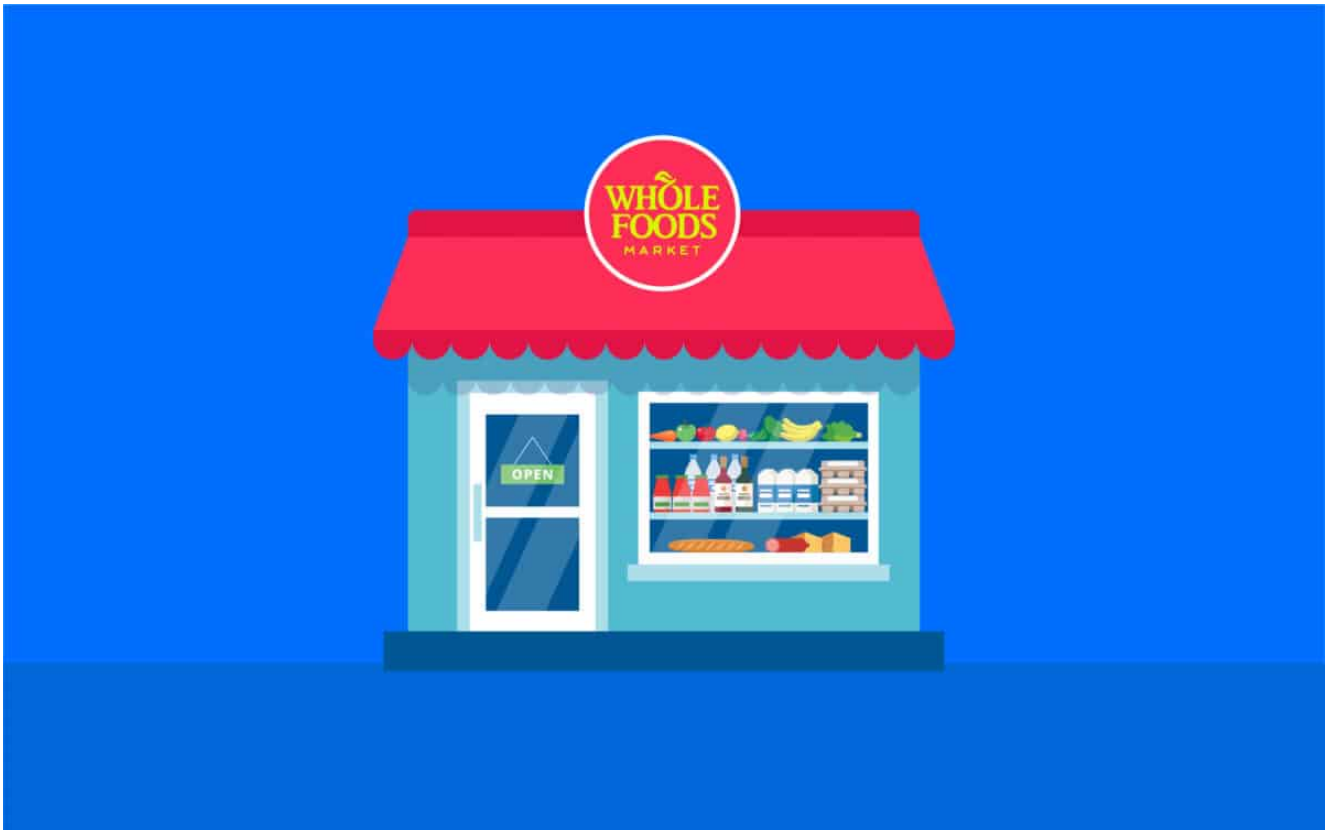


9. Holiday Inn

The Holiday Inn brand is an American chain of hotels based in Atlanta. The company first launched in 1952, and has grown consistently ever since, thanks to its fantastic marketing and branding.

Although the company has a very straightforward name, it has focused on strengthening emotional relationships with customers through its ad campaigns.

The name of Holiday Inn is wonderfully searchable, easy to remember, and easy to say. This makes it a popular choice for customers searching for a convenient and affordable room.



10. Whole Foods

Whole Foods is an interesting example of a descriptive name. Though it focuses specifically on telling customers what the company sells, the name also has an emotional impact because it focuses on the USP of the company: selling all-natural produce.

Whole Foods is a name commonly associated with excellent quality products and organic items today. The company has had no trouble capturing the attention of its target audience with its simple but compelling name.

Tips for descriptive naming: Where to begin

As mentioned above, descriptive brand names won’t be right for everyone. They have some significant limitations which can make it difficult to connect with your audience on an emotional level.

At the same time, descriptive names make it difficult to own your company's moniker.

However, there are circumstances where a descriptive name could make a lot of sense. If you want to make your business more searchable, and convey information quickly, this could be the right choice for you.

Like with any naming campaign, of course, it's important to have the right strategy in place.

Here are some quick tips for descriptive business names:

Look at your USP

When choosing a descriptive business name, it's important to start with a strong focus on what makes your company unique. Rather than focusing on a specific product or service directly, you might want to look a little broader.

For instance, "The Weather Channel" gives the broadcaster a little more freedom than a name like "Weather Forecasts".

Keep it simple

Descriptive names are usually relatively simple by nature. However, it's important not to get too descriptive. Avoid adding too many words to your title when you're trying to convey information.

You'll need to keep your name as short and simple as possible so it's easy to share and spell.

Do your research

Because descriptive names are so generic, it's common to find other companies have already started using the words and phrases you're drawn to. Even if the exact name you want to trademark isn't already taken, it's crucial to avoid a name which sounds too much like anything else.

The more common your name is, the harder it’s going to be for customers to find you.

Check for global issues

Remember certain words and phrases can have different meanings in certain countries. If you’re planning on building a global brand, it’s a good idea to check the meaning of your words all over the world.

Ensure your title still translates correctly regardless of which language you’ll need to use.

Add something extra

If you want to combine the simplicity of a descriptive name with something more emotionally compelling, it might be worth adding something extra.

For example, “Burger King” tells customers what the company sells, but it also highlights the value of the brand with the use of the word “King”.

If you’re struggling to find descriptive brand names with the right impact on your audience, the best thing you can do is seek out additional support. Working with a brand naming company can be an excellent way to avoid common mistakes and get more creative ideas.

Your naming agency will have years of experience determining which titles make the best impression.

Should you use a descriptive name?

Descriptive brand names can have a lot of value in the right circumstances. With a descriptive name, you can immediately connect with your target audience, and let them know exactly what to expect from your business.

However, you may find you don’t have the same impact on your

customers as you would with a more creative title.

Descriptive brand names can be difficult to maintain full ownership over, and they don't always stand out from the crowd. You might also find they limit your growth as your business begins to evolve.

If you're struggling to choose the right name, the best thing you can do is seek out assistance from an expert in naming.

Fabrik: A naming agency for our times.

Now read these:
–Types of brand names, the ultimate guide
–The pros and cons of abstract brand names
–When to use an evocative brand name
–Your guide to invented company names
–Is a lexical brand name right for your business?
–An insight into acronymic business names
–Putting geographic brand names on the map
–Should you name a business after yourself?
–Definitive guide to compound brand names
–Exploring the trend for modern brands names
–Is a playful business name right for you?
–Adding up alphanumeric company names
–Why are metaphorical brand names popular?
–Weighing up technical company names
–Getting to grips with historical brand names