The complete guide to product naming architecture

Category: Naming
written by Steve Harvey | 16 August 2024

Choosing the right product naming architecture can be complex. Identifying how to align the different items in your portfolio, link them to your master brand, and create a sense of cohesion takes both creativity, and strategy. But the process is worthwhile.

Product names are powerful. Just like brand names, they differentiate your company from the competition, connect with your target audience on an emotional level, and drive brand awareness.

Choosing the right naming architecture can also help guide customers towards the right products, increasing conversions and revenue.

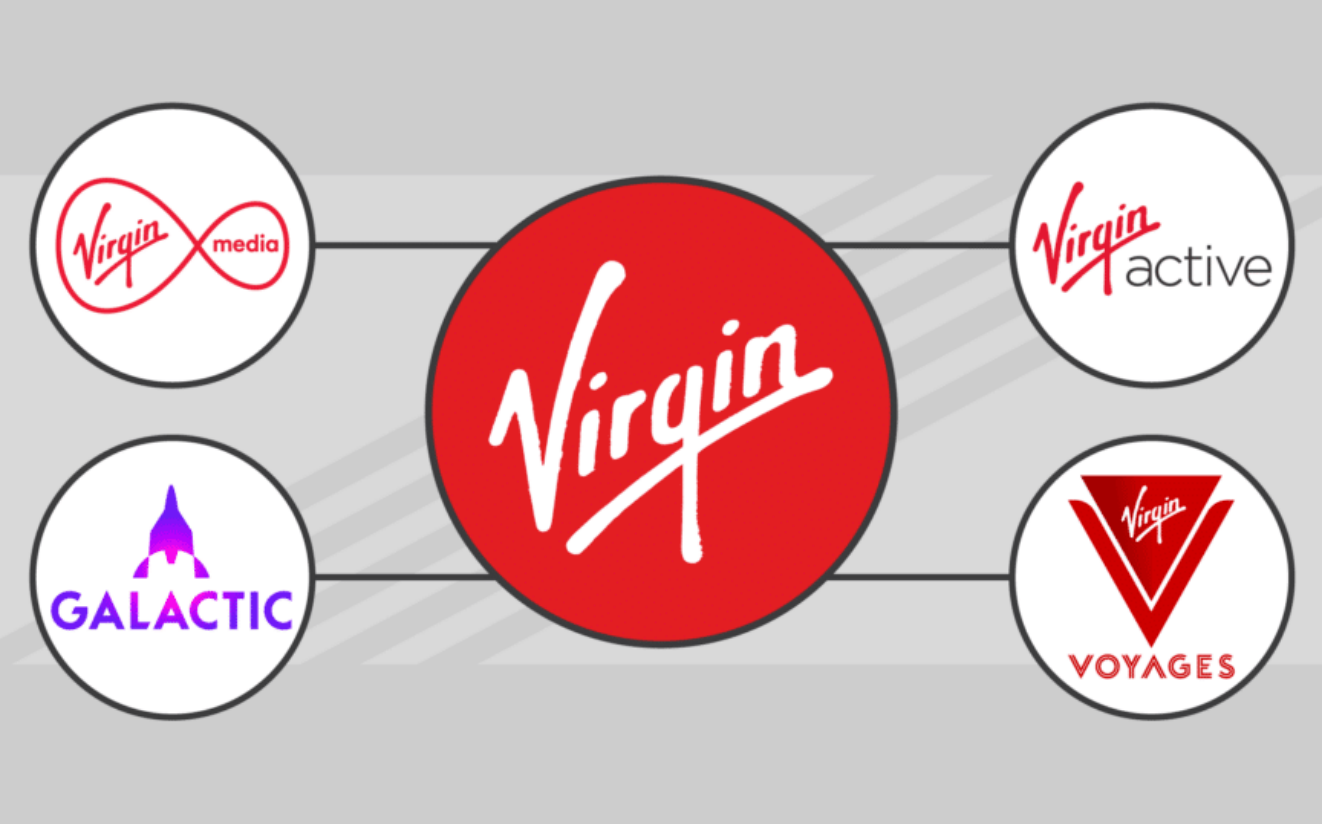
At Fabrik, we frequently work with companies on naming strategies to unify their brand portfolio, draw attention to the value propositions of each product, and boost profits. Today, I'm going to share the insights you need, to pick the perfect naming architecture for your products.

What is product naming architecture?

Product naming architecture is the structure and rules companies use when defining the ideal names for items in a company's portfolio. It's the method you use to create alignment between connected products, enhance brand awareness, and inform potential customers.

There are multiple ways to approach naming architecture. Some

companies, like Virgin, include the master brand name in each product title, using additional words to give clarity, such as “Virgin Media”, for the media-focused arm of the business.



Other organisations create unique names for each solution in their product portfolio. General Mills, for instance, has “Cheerios”, Nature Value bars, and Trix cereal.

The nature of your product naming architecture often depends on your intended target audience, and your chosen brand architecture. Creating a clear naming framework helps to create consistency in your branding, and guide your business, as you develop new products.

Why is product naming architecture important?

The right product names have a significant impact on your ability to connect with customers, and drive sales. That’s why we often discuss product naming architecture with clients, when we’re working on a brand strategy to boost equity and growth.

Just like your company name, effective product names can highlight your brand personality, strengthen connections with existing and new customers, and boost brand recognition.

They also play an important role in your customer's experience with your company. Descriptive and evocative names help customers to instantly identify the best product or service for their needs.

Creative names inspire customers, enhance brand equity, and carve a space for your company in the minds of your intended audience.

Your product naming architecture identifies exactly which method you're going to take to connect with customers, distinguish your portfolio of products from the competition, and drive growth. It gives you a clear map for introducing each new offering to your brand portfolio.

The elements of product naming architecture

Excellent naming frameworks don't happen by chance. Product naming is an art and a science, that involves research, strategy, and plenty of creativity.

Professional naming consultants, like Fabrik, consider several factors when suggesting a specific framework to each client.

Here are the elements we infuse into the naming process.

Brand guidelines: From personality to vision

Brand identity guidelines are crucial to building an effective naming architecture. The name of every product in an organisation's portfolio should have a clear connection to the parent company, its values, personality, mission, and vision.

As an example, Apple is a company associated with innovation, and exceptional customer service. Its product names use the prefix “i” regularly, to create cohesion, give customers a sense of ownership over each product, and demonstrate creativity.

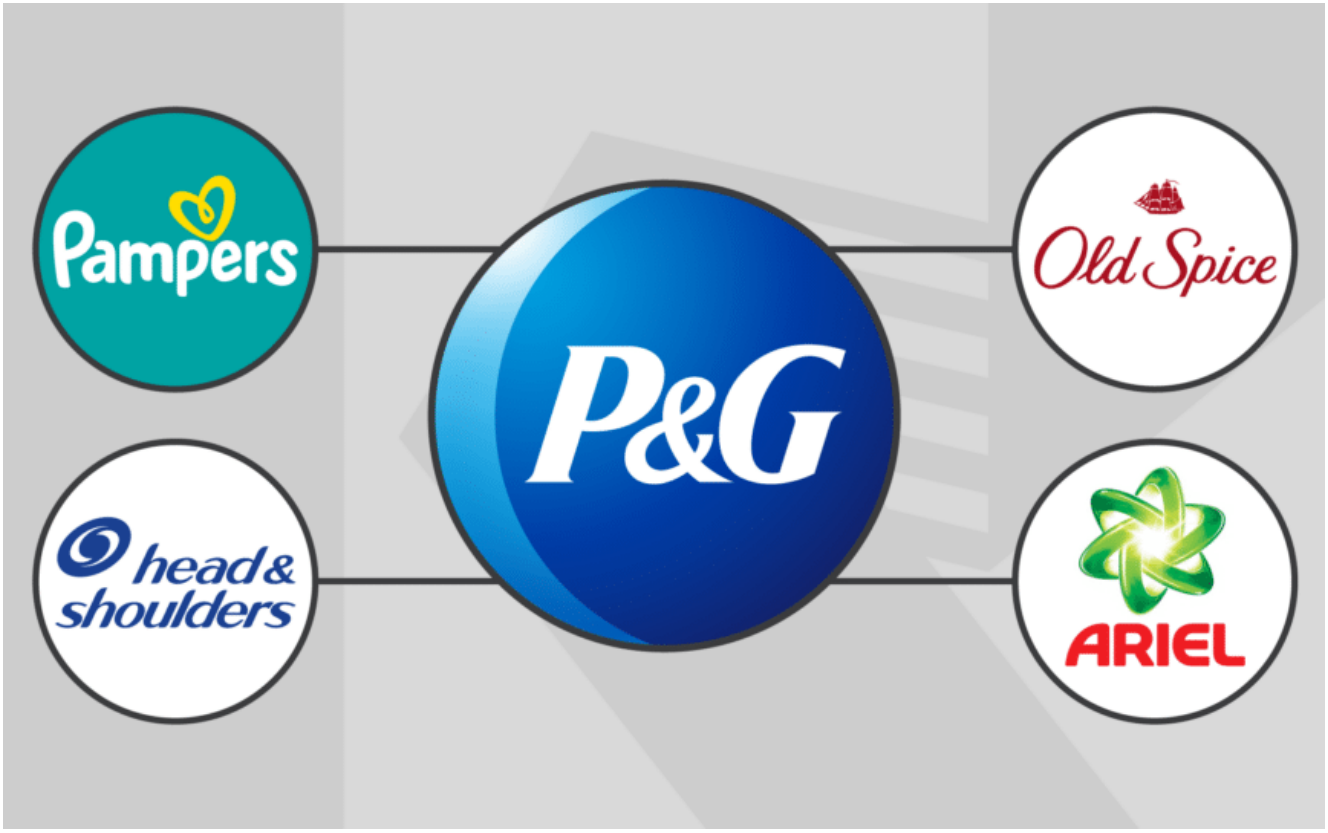
Guidelines provide an insight into the tone and voice that should appear in your product naming architecture. They also boost consistency, which as a study by Marq shows, can increase revenue by up to 23%.

Brand architecture and naming hierarchy

Brand architecture is another critical component of a strong naming strategy, as it identifies how you should build your “naming hierarchy”. A company with a “branded house” architecture, will include its parent brand name in all its products and services.

This creates a strong connection between the master brand and its offerings. As an example, our client Causeway uses the branded house strategy for its naming architecture, combining its title with recognisable words to boost brand awareness, and direct customers towards the correct product.

A company with a “house of brands” architecture, on the other hand, will choose individual names for each product, often to appeal to different audiences.



P&G takes this approach, selecting specific names for each product (Tide, Fairy, Bold, etc), to give each offering a unique identity, carefully chosen for a specific audience.

Notably, though the names in this strategy are all unique, they share common threads. Most P&G products feature single word names, and they're all evocative, well-known words.

Market research: Competitors and customers

Extensive research is crucial to creating great names. Whenever Fabrik engages in a brand naming project, we first host discovery sessions to learn more about the corporate entity, its internal and external audiences, and the competitors in its industry.

We look at how different brands in the same niche select names, examining whether customers are more likely to respond to descriptive terms, invented terms, or suggestive names. We also search for opportunities to differentiate a brand from its competitors.

Sometimes, if most competitors use descriptive terms, selecting more evocative names can give a company a crucial edge. As an example, Epson uses names like “EcoTank” and “Workforce” for printers, HP differentiates itself with more suggestive names, like “Envy”.

We also identify the specific type of audience the company wants to reach. Each niche audience resonates with a specific type of language. This research helps us create guidelines for the length, spelling, and style of product names.

The common types of naming architecture

Naming strategies

One reason finding the perfect product naming architecture is so complex, is there are so many ways to approach naming, based on your market and brand strategy.

On a fundamental level, the right naming architecture should give your business clarity and direction, identifying how you’ll connect each product you offer to the main brand. However, it’s up to you to define how strong the link should be.

Here are some of the most common types of naming convention used in product naming:

Umbrella brand naming

Otherwise known as branded house naming, umbrella brand naming includes a company’s name in each product. Think Google Docs, Microsoft Teams, or Amazon Prime. This naming architecture links the brand identity to the products.

Endorsed naming

With endorsed naming, each product or sub-brand name is unique, but the corporate entity often includes its title in marketing materials. Marriott Hotels has a range of offerings, like the Ritz-Carlton hotel, and signs often include the Marriot branding.

Hybrid naming

With hybrid names, companies choose different architecture strategies for various products. Some names are entirely unique, to appeal to a specific audience, while others include the parent brand name.

Theme naming

In a theme naming system, different product collections have their own underlying theme. A company selling cereal for adults and children may use different naming conventions for each audience, as an example.

Alphanumeric architecture

Otherwise known as tiered naming, this strategy classifies products into tiers of connected items. Apple has the iPhone 14, iPhone 14+, iPhone 14 Pro, and so on.

Function based naming

With function-based naming, companies choose titles based on what the product or service offers. Value Labs, one of our clients, chose the name “DocSpot” for a product that helps identify crucial information in unstructured documents.

How to identify the right naming structure

Once you’ve identified a brand architecture strategy, and your target audience, there are a few additional steps involved in

selecting the right naming structure.

Here's how you can navigate the complexities of creating a product architecture.

Step 1: Portfolio modelling

Before you can establish your product naming strategy, you need a clear understanding of your product portfolio, and how various items are connected. You may offer a range of products specifically designed for different customers.

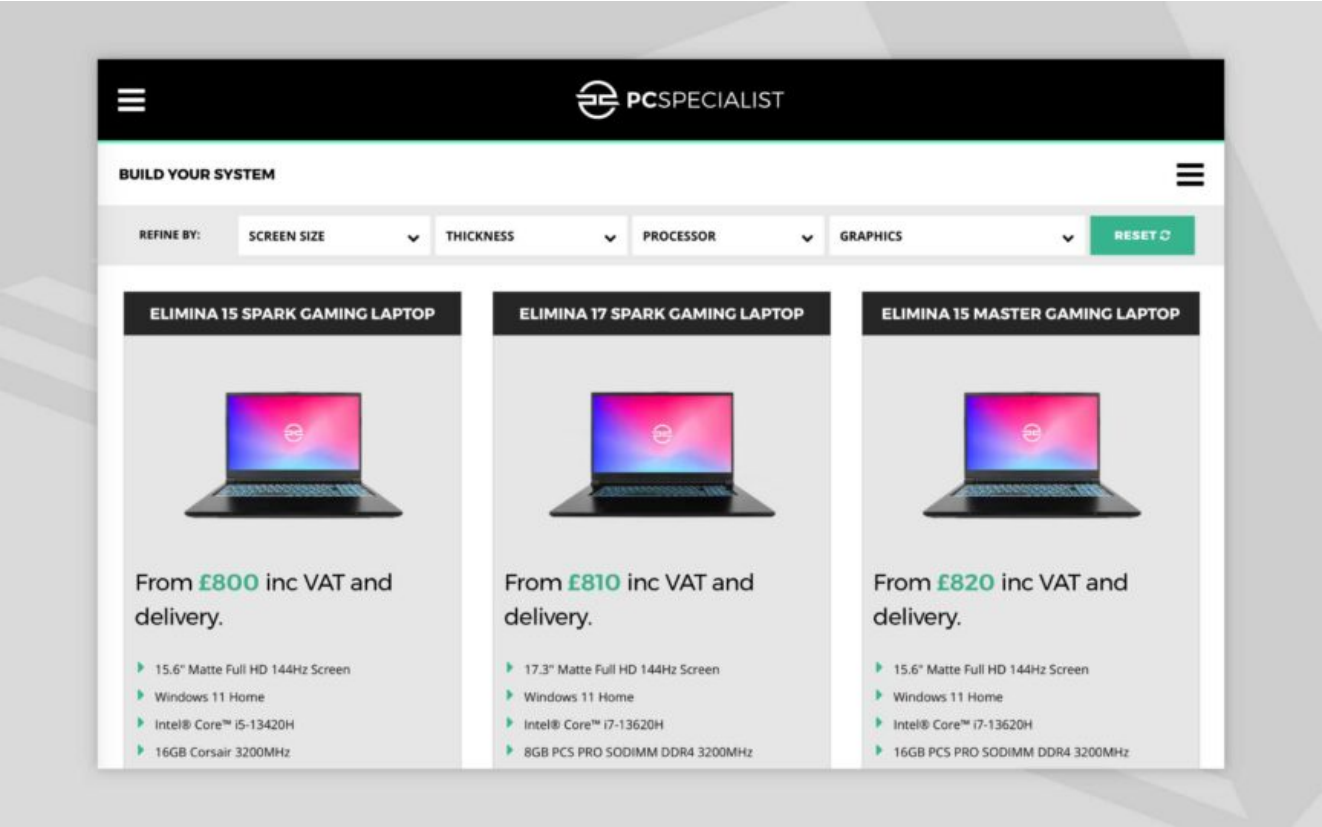
In each "product category" there could be various options available. This means identifying how you're going to connect those options, to create a cohesive identity for your collection.

When we worked with PC Specialist on their product naming architecture for a series of gaming laptops, we first identified the unique value proposition and target audience for each new laptop collection, choosing evocative "primary" names for each solution.

Initia was inspired by the word "Initiate" to symbolize the lightweight, and user-friendly laptop offered by the company. Elimina, inspired by "Eliminate" conveys the power and domination of the brand's high-end gaming laptops.

Building on those initial titles, PC Specialist created a series of names for product variations, which retain the central name, and implement evocative and alphanumeric naming conventions.

The number included in the name references the laptop's screen size, whereas the additional term highlights a unique component, such as excellent graphics, or additional storage.



Step 2: Name selection criteria

After you've mapped your product portfolio, and the links between the items you offer, the next step is determining the criteria for selecting powerful names going forward.

This is when we encourage companies to examine their brand guidelines, the personality they want to convey, and the target audience they want to reach. It's also when you'll determine whether you'll use different naming strategies for each product collection or retain a specific style.

When working with FN Herstal on their product naming strategy, we determined that the naming strategy needed to highlight the cutting edge technology used by the company, as well as a focus on innovation and sustainability.

The team also identified that the "FN" prefix would help to show alignment and cohesion with the company's existing naming conventions. Our naming approach helped the company to create a clear framework for "branded house" naming, which also

leveraged evocative, creative terms.



The name “Aria” for the “FN Aria” product, represents an intelligent twist on the word “Area”. It’s unique, but instantly recognizable at the same time.

This strategy gave the company a clear set of naming guidelines it can now use to identify fitting names for each new product added to its portfolio.

Step 3: Product name testing and due diligence

Testing and due diligence are crucial parts of any naming strategy. These processes are how we ensure the different names we suggest to a client are unique, and impactful.

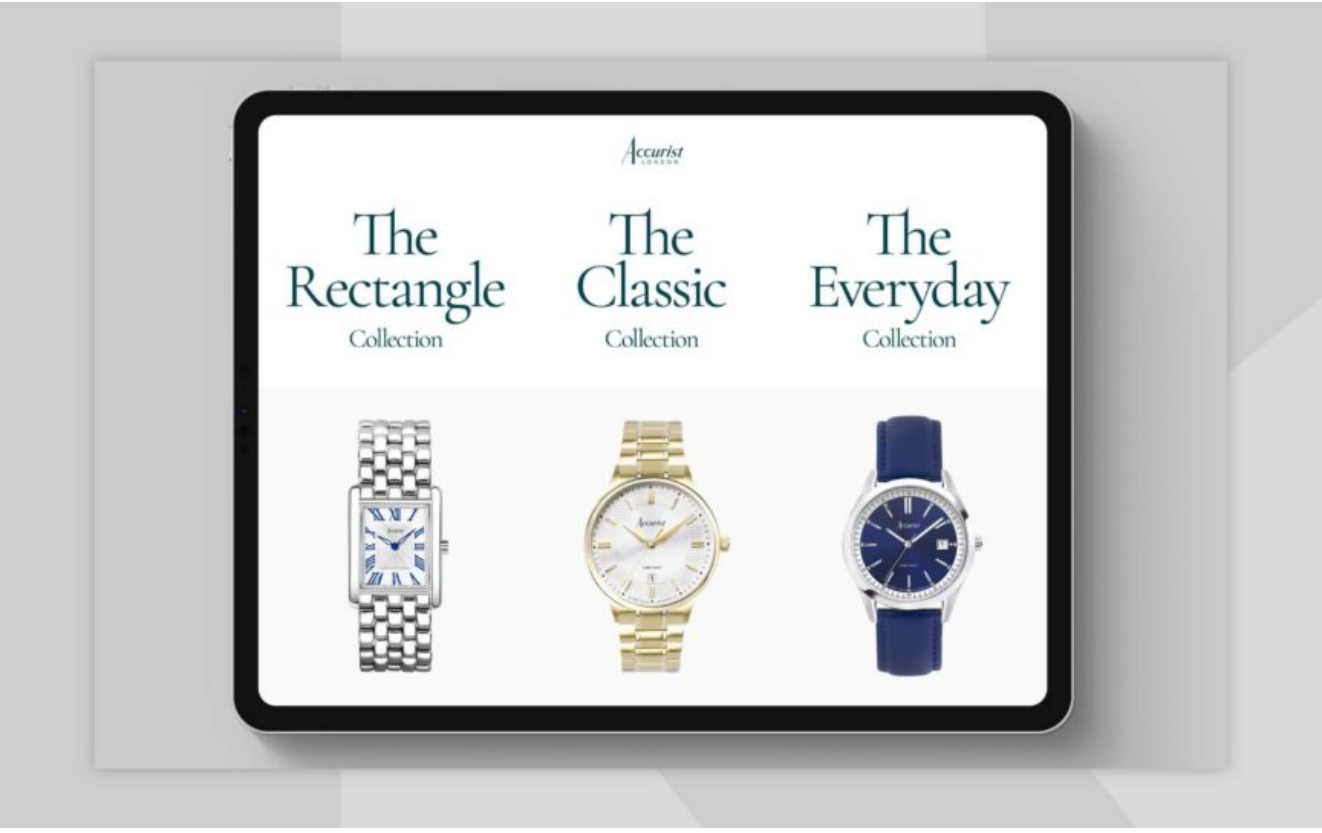
When we’re creating a new product architecture or naming strategy, we conduct various tests, starting with ensuring there are no trademarks connected to the name. We check to ensure names translate into different languages, and consistently convey the right brand promise.

We also run internal tests with stakeholders, asking them how they feel the brand name aligns with the brand vision, and the values of the product. In some cases, we can even conduct focus groups and speak to customers, to gain a fresh perspective on naming potential.

When working with the Accurist brand, we identified their product names needed to be:

- Distinctive, and tuned to the interests and goals of each customer.
- Connected to the company's value of luxury and heritage.
- Descriptive, and evocative, to convey information about the product.
- Easy to remember and search for (which meant using existing words).

We connected with the British public, stakeholders in the Accurist team, and conducted due diligence checks to ensure the naming framework was effective.



The result was a naming strategy that clearly identifies the characteristics of each product collection, engages audiences, and connects with the master brand’s personality.

Building the ideal naming architecture

Choosing the ideal product naming architecture can be complicated. Names are more impactful than most companies realise. The titles you give to your products can affect everything from your brand’s reputation to your potential revenue.

A well-crafted naming architecture helps to ensure you can create a cohesive, powerful brand identity, with products that resonate with the right target audience. To achieve the right results, you need to consistently consider your brand identity, strategy, and architecture.

At the same time, you need to be aware of your target audience, the connections between product categories, and how you can differentiate yourself from the competition.

If you’re struggling with the complexities of naming architecture, the best way to boost your chances of success is with the help of a naming expert.

At Fabrik, we help companies discover powerful branding options, with a strategic approach to selecting the perfect name for each product.

Contact us today to discover how we can help you design the ideal system of names.

Fabrik: A branding agency for our times.