

Choosing and registering a business name

Choosing a business name is not just about picking something that sounds catchy or memorable. It's a strategic decision that can shape the identity of your business and influence how customers perceive your brand.

A well-thought-out name can communicate the essence of your business, establish trust, and set the tone for all your marketing efforts. On the other hand, a poor choice can hinder growth and make it harder to connect with your target audience. Your business name will be on everything from your website and social media profiles to your products and advertising materials, so it's important to get it right from the start.

Business name basics

If you haven't thought of any names yet or feel the names you've come up with aren't suitable, the first step is to relax as few people come up with the perfect name straight away. Take time to play with concepts, ideas and words to find a name that suits the business and your intended market. It's not something you should rush.

Draw up a list of words and names that appeal to you, as well as a list of words applicable to your business. Try different words and combinations and ask friends and family for input and feedback, then draw up a short list of potential names.

It's also useful to spend time online and look for similar businesses, even in other countries, for inspiration. AI tools like ChatGPT can also help.

Other factors to consider

Think about how your name sounds when spoken and whether it is easy to spell when people search online. Short, simple names are easier to remember for word-of-mouth referrals.

You should:

- › Avoid SMS-style abbreviations or slang.
- › Think of a name that invokes a positive image or feeling.
- › References what you offer.
- › Include a byline for search engine optimization (SEO) and online advertising.

Remember, if your name is easily misspelled or difficult to remember, you may miss a potential customer who is searching.

Before you start using your name

Make sure your business name hasn't been officially registered by another company. Check the official companies and [US trademark register](#). You won't be able to register your company or trademark if your name is too similar to an existing business or is deemed inappropriate. If it exists, someone else has it.

Also check registered Internet domain names. There are numerous domain providers that allow you to check this for free, or Google it.

Search the Internet to make sure that there aren't close variations in the words or meaning of the name that could be like an existing business. Finally, find out if your name has a different meaning in other cultures and languages.

Using your personal name for your business

Often in trades, a business will use the name of the owner, such as G.S. McDonalds Plumbers. This is usually fine if there is no confusion over a business in the same industry. G.S. McDonald Burgers, even if your name is G.S. McDonald, is unlikely to be approved due to the obvious confusion with McDonalds.

Pros and cons of using your own name:

- › Your personal reputation is dependent on how you conduct yourself within your business.
- › The business may be harder to sell as it is aligned to you.
- › You're accountable for the product you sell or the services you provide.

Using your personal name for your business can work well in certain industries, but it's important to consider the potential limitations, especially when it comes to brand growth and marketability.

Choosing and registering a business name

Registering

Once you've decided on a name, you'll need to register it. Requirements vary from state to state. The [US Chamber of Commerce website](#) has all the information you need to register your business name.

If you're a sole proprietor or starting a partnership under a name that isn't your real name, you'll need to register for a 'doing business as' (DBA) trade name. It's also sometimes referred to as an assumed or fictitious name.

Your DBA name will let the government know that you're doing business under a name different to your personal name or the legal name of your business.

Protecting your business name

Once you've thought of a name, you need to find out if someone else has beaten you to it on a nationwide level. Use the [United States Patent and Trademark Office \(USPTO\) trademark search tool](#) to find out if your proposed name (or something similar) already exists.

Once you've done that, you could protect your business name with a trademark. This will protect your logo, and the brand name used on your products or services.

To give your business name legal protection, apply for a federally registered trademark by visiting the [USPTO website](#).

Protecting your online business name

If you're intending to make use of a website for your business, and you should, it's important to register for a domain name to make sure your business name is available as an Internet address.

Try to choose a name that:

- › Describes what your business does.
- › Contains good key words for search engine purposes.
- › Is unique.

Like your business name, you need to make sure that no one else is already using your preferred address. Test your proposed domain name in the [WHOIS database](#) to see if it's available.

Next steps

- › If you have a name in mind but aren't sure if it will be suitable, testing the market is a good way to gauge response before taking the plunge.
- › Ask family and friends to comment on the name as they might point out potential issues you may have overlooked. Also consult with existing or potential customers or a marketing professional for advice before you make a final decision.
- › Seek help and advice from professional advisers, your chambre of commerce or industry association.

Getting your business name right from the start is essential for building a strong brand identity, protecting your business legally, and setting the foundation for future growth.

Note

This is a guide only and should neither replace competent advice, nor be taken or relied upon as financial or professional advice. Seek professional advice before making any decision that could affect your business.