



What do J.R.R. Tolkien, the Boston Red Sox, hamburgers and the Revolutionary War have in common? Not a punchline, believe it or not. In fact, they've all served to inspire the names painted onto the doors of some of the industry's top consulting firms.

The stories behind how new firms hit on their branding are usually traded with friends and colleagues over drinks or dinner after the shaky first months are a distant memory. These tales can be funny and inspiring. Some involve the first fight between earnest partners. Others are dry as hell. From what we've heard, the more unusual the firm name, the better the story behind how it was discovered.

To wit, consider the case of Joe DiSabato, whose firm name is based on a fictional realm inhabited by elves. In the 1970s, he launched Rivendell Music Marketing, whose name is inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien's city of elves that's featured in "The Hobbit" and the Lord of the Rings trilogy. At first, DiSabato's firm focused on promoting the music industry in the gay market, but it has since evolved into a full-service media firm that serves the entire LGBT market.

Rivendell Media's mythical origins might seem kitschy, but some of the stories behind other firms are just as out there. Take the production company 2 Ticks & the Dog. "I wrote a script called '2 Ticks in the Dog' in college," recalls Jim Fogarty, the company's president. "When I was working on a different film, we needed a company to support it. The name of the company didn't really matter, so I gave [it] my script's name."

They ordered some business cards for the new company, but when they came back there was a misprint. "It read 2 Ticks & the Dog instead," says Fogarty. "We ended up just keeping it that way."

Other consultants liken a good firm name to a statement piece of furniture or living room art. It's a conversation starter, an ice breaker, the start of a company narrative. "You want something that makes people ask 'Where did you get your name from?'" says Katie Packer Gage, who co-founded Burning Glass Consulting.

Gage, who created the firm with Ashley O'Connor and Christine Matthews, says they took the term burning glass, which is an old-fashioned magnifying glass used to focus the sun's rays to ignite a flame, and turned it political. "We're trying to focus in on women with the hope of igniting a flame for the Republican message," says Gage.

Beyond the creative, inspired names, are the self-named firms or those that feature partners' initials. While these names are quite basic, their simplicity is often intentional.

Liz Chadderdon originally planned on naming her direct mail firm True Blue Strategies, but that was before people advised her that True Blue would end up being known as "Chadderdon, with direct mail."

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“The reason I didn’t call it True Blue Strategies is because people in the business told me that people are going to refer to it by my last name,” says Chadderdon. “It’s how people in the business talk.”

Chadderdon recommends that firms ask themselves who they’re selling themselves to, which are most often consultants and campaign staff. “The consulting group is a small world, so people will recognize the name,” says Chadderdon.

Still, a self-name firm can be limiting if the founder brings in other top consultants to join the operation. Anne Lewis’ self-named firm—Anne Lewis Strategies—began with just her, but the firm has now grown to some 25 people. “It’s not an accurate reflection of who we are at this point,” Lewis, who plans to change it, recently told C&E. “I can’t stand it.”

Name recognition can be a problem if you’re trying to step away from a folded operation. After the closing of MSHC Partners, Stephen Solomon and his partners decided to go in a different direction for their new firm—The Pivot Group. Pivot founding partner Trish Hoppey was the “H” in MSHC. “We made a conscious choice not to use a self-name approach because it gets complicated when partners come and go,” says Solomon.

After some deliberation, Solomon and his colleagues settled on the name The Pivot Group for their new firm in order to showcase the quick pace and nimble nature of their operation. “We wanted something that gets to the core of what we do without pigeon-holing us,” he says.

A sans-surname firm name allows for flexibility, Solomon adds. “I like not working for an agency with a person’s last name. We can be whatever our focus is.”

A firm name that allows for growth in the industry is ideal for an operation just opening its doors. “You want to create something that other people can invest in and something that can transcend you,” says Gage. “It’s important to find something timeless.”

If a name sticks, though, consultants have to learn to live with it. “Your name should be something that you’re comfortable growing into,” says Fogarty. “I started my production company when I was 24, when I thought the name was hip and trendy. People tell me to never change the name, but sometimes I think I should’ve gone with something more professional.”

The Stories Behind the Names

Ken McKay, co-founder of McKay-Gitcho Strategies

“We started talking about it and you come up with all these corny names—Eight Ball Strategies or something—so you should just put your name on the company. I said it should be Gitcho-McKay, because people know Gail, but no one knows me. She said it should be the other way around. That was our first company fight and our first company meeting.”

Tommy Vietor, co-founder of Fenway Strategies

“We picked the name for a couple of reasons. First, we’re from Boston and love the Red Sox. Second, we thought it was a little more fun and lighthearted, and signaled that we didn’t take ourselves too seriously.”

Ann Liston, partner at Adelstein | Liston

“When I signed on, [Eric Adelstein] said, “The deal is there aren’t a lot of women who are partners in media firms. I think it’s really important that your name be on the door.” Unfortunately, I remain the only woman on the door. In general, I think this is an ego, male-driven industry for the most part and I think that’s what has kept a lot of short-sighted names on the door. I don’t make one ad or one thing out of this office that’s all me. It’s a lot more than Adelstein and Liston.”

Scott Goodstein, CEO of Revolution Messaging

“Initially, I established a firm called Catalyst Campaigns to do music, politics and activism. I put CC on hold for a few years to do the Obama campaign in 2007 and 2008. When I went to re-open the doors there was another firm called Catalyst that was doing data management. (Laura Quinn owes me a beer for acquiescing to her the Catalyst brand—good thing I hadn’t gotten the tattoo.) Nonetheless, our team has always been on the cutting edge of progressive technology, culture and activism. We are known for having a little bit of a punk rock edge and for being passionate about the causes we believe in, thus Revolution Messaging was born. Six years later, the name still fits. We’re proud to be known for revolutionary technology (like the first self-serve ad platform for voter targeting), revolutionary creativity (like our award-winning Drunk Dial Congress campaign, and building the Lady Parts Justice movement), as well as our commitment to the cause.”

Jason Cabel Roe, partner at Revolvís

“We were kicking around some names that appeal to our demographic, which is Latino voters. One of them was *revolución*. But the more we investigated it, the more we realized that it’s typically associated with communists. So we abandoned that, and one of our designers came up with *revolvís*, which is a

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