



Trademark Brainstorm Cheat Sheet

Quick-reference guide for creating strong, protectable brand names



Distinctiveness Scale

Trademarks are stronger when they're more unique. From strongest to weakest:

- **Fanciful:** Made-up words (e.g., *Exxon*, *Kodak*)
 - **Arbitrary:** Real words unrelated to the product (e.g., *Apple for computers*)
 - **Suggestive:** Hints at features (e.g., *Netflix*)
 - **Descriptive:** Describes the product (e.g., *Quick Print*) — often not protectable
 - **Generic:** Common name for the product (e.g., "*Computer*") — not protectable
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Brainstorm Prompts

Use these angles to spark creative, protectable names:

- **Mash-up:** Combine parts of words (*Groupon* = *group* + *coupon*)
 - **Invented words:** Make something new (*Zynga*, *Hulu*)
 - **Symbolic language:** Use metaphors, animals, nature, or mythology
 - **Misspellings:** Twist spelling of common words (*Lyft*, *Tumblr*)
 - **Foreign language:** Translate a word into another language
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Avoid These

Common traps that weaken trademark strength or create legal risk:

- Names that describe the product/service too literally
- Common phrases or idioms in wide use
- Names too close to competitors or famous brands
- Geographic names (e.g., '*Texas BBQ*') — hard to protect
- Using someone else's personal name without permission



Preliminary Clearance Tips

Before committing to a name, check for basic conflicts:

- Google it in quotes
 - Search the **USPTO.gov** trademark database
 - Look up matching domains and social handles
 - Say it out loud — is it memorable and easy to pronounce?
 - Ask: could this name work globally, or will it confuse/offend?
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Next Steps

Once you have a shortlist of possible names:

- Narrow to **2–3 favorites**
 - Conduct a **professional trademark search**
 - Consider **registering** the name as a federal trademark
 - Secure matching **domain names and social handles**
 - Use the **TM symbol (™)** until registration is approved
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