



Names Matter Redux: 2B Or Not 2B *By Alicita Rodriguez*

How did a chair come to be called Coy? It's brief, it's cute, it's meaningful—but it's no happy accident. Companies like Keilhauer have to think deeply about product names. Trademarks, searchability, memorability, millennials—they all minimize the possibilities. The list of discarded product names must be long enough to pave the way to Mars. Let's not be coy then. Let's delve into the complex world of naming strategy.

Recently, researchers have been confirming what millennials already know—that writing in text messages does indeed have rules. A 2018 article in *Computers in Human Behavior* finds that textisms (emojicons, emojis, letter repetition, nonstandard capitalization, and missing punctuation) replace the **"extra-linguistic and non-verbal cues available in a spoken conversation."** Experiments found that adding a period at the end of a text made messages **"significantly less sincere."** Other research finds that capital letters imply formality or authoritarianism.

This could explain why turnstone, a Steelcase company, rejects the initial capital T. But what about the unusual combination of lower-case letters followed by a period in the vitra. name? This mix at once demonstrates that Vitra is egalitarian (no caps) and iconic (hence the powerful end stop). As seen in the following chart, Designer Pages' data confirms the movement toward non-standard capitalization. In the past two years, names with one capital letter per word (Ordinary Capitalization) are trending down, whereas names with either no caps or multiple caps (branding capitalization) are trending upward, a grouping we are referring to as Unordinary Capitalization.

Thanks to the new grammatical codes of texting and the ongoing necessity of considering Search Engine Optimization (SEO), naming a product is becoming a herculean task. Last year we wrote about the importance of names and how sounds matter, especially initial letters and vowel sounds. This year we're looking at naming trends. Designer Pages' data suggests that 2017's biggest naming trends extend to the contract market. Having said that, product names for workplace furniture also diverge in interesting ways.

"Startups are (still) making weird name choices," an aptly titled article from Tech Crunch, lists the top naming trends of 2017, which include colors, animals, first names, and food. Although the design world has a rich history of animal names (Swan Chair, Ant Chair, Beetle Chair), 2017 top-selling products are decidedly lacking in such beastly wonders. Instead we have a rise in descriptive nouns and verbs related to work. Where do we work? Everywhere, according to Herman Miller tables. What do we do at work? Think, answers Steelcase chairs. Keilhauer surmises we are in Cahoots. And Stylex believes today's workers are Welcome to Share.

One trend identified by Tech Crunch for 2017, however, is evident in Designer Pages' data: **"The first-name trend seems to be intensifying, diversifying and creeping into more sectors."** Within the top 100 most specified products, we find Bob, Joel, Alya, Catherine, Mitt, and Jojo.

If we go back to the oughts and teens, we can see why names became a problem in the first place—domain saturation. And this issue is escalating: The Verisign Domain Name

Industry Brief calculates that the Internet grew to 330.6 million domain names in Q1 2017. Naturally, people in all industries are having trouble coming up with unique, memorable, and available URLs. Naming a product has consequently become **"as hard as naming your first-born child,"** states Meghan Sherwin, Vice President of Marketing at Keilhauer. For the Coy chair, she focused on **"names that represented how individuals feel in the chair"**—a decidedly smart tactic.

Playing with punctuation was a trend early in this millennium, as companies everywhere strove for optimal SEO results. "Punctuating Identity," a 2009 article published in *The New York Times*, catalogues the insinuation of everything from commas and hyphens to pound signs and exclamation points—right into the middle of names.

While this did yield better search returns and increased trademark availability, the punctuation trend, including a capitalization craze that gave us names with tangled upper- and lower-case letters (MiEV, theSkimm), generally has a big drawback. According to *The New York Times*, **"the upper- and lower-case stuff is distracting and somewhat kooky."** In "Silly name, silly company, silly product?," a 2010 article with a repetitive (and therefore searchable?) title, *The Economist* agreed, emphatically concluding: **"We would like to encourage more public mockery of absurd corporate names."**

Thankfully, in the contract market product names have a tradition of including letters and numbers, mostly because manufacturers used them to indicate designers or series. In this context, letters and numbers are not random—but purposeful. This gives product names like CH008 gravitas instead of silliness.

UNORDINARY CAPS

