

A New Domain for Advertising: A Content Analysis of Website Names

Susan Myers*

ABSTRACT

Although a popular and efficient communication medium, the Internet is no longer a novel concept to advertisers or consumers. This research uses a content analysis to confirm that the use of domain names is widespread and to establish that some companies are investing time and creativity in naming domains. This research employed a content analysis of 1,023 print ads in 15 different magazines. A grounded theory approach was used iteratively to identify 10 underlying themes for website naming. The research uncovered themes that offered functional value to consumers by including information that points them to more specific material along with categories that use a more novel approach to naming websites utilizing current campaigns, promotions, or making clever links to the brand. The themes are discussed in detail along with overall implications for marketing creativity.

Keywords: Internet, Branding, Creativity, Advertising, Websites, Novelty, Content Analysis, Domain Name.

INTRODUCTION

During the 2007 Super bowl, Snickers aired a commercial featuring two mechanics who in their haste to devour a candy bar, accidentally kiss. The humorous commercial ends with the two men acting manly, and includes a website in the ad-but rather than the typical brand website name snickers.com, the domain name included in the ad was afterthekiss.com. This is just one example of a growing trend of non-brand name websites. The willingness for companies to abandon the brand for a more novel concept begs the question whether domain names can offer a strategic outlet for creativity in advertising campaigns.

In today's marketplace almost every brand has a domain name and website, and these locations are often included in the communication materials. Having a website is no longer a point of differentiation. Even a great website can get lost in the persuasive clutter. Brands must be motivated to find new ways to stand out. As the Snickers example illustrates, some companies are investing time and creativity on domain name development. Capitalizing on emotion, humour, surprise or simply making sense for the brand and/or the context offer a new domain for website naming and brand building.

BRANDING

A brand is an intangible asset of a company-it is a distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the offerings of a seller and to differentiate those offerings from competitors (Aaker, 1991). From a consumer perspective, brands are how they identify with specific products and services (Weilbacher, 1995) and may offer consumers some combination of symbolic, functional, and, experiential benefits (Park, Jaworski, and McInnis, 1986). Functional benefits focus on solving problems. Symbolic benefits are those that link a consumer to a desirable self image, role, or group. Experiential benefits are aimed at things like sensory pleasure and cognitive stimulation.

Keller (2003) describes consumer brand-knowledge as the accumulation of descriptive and evaluative brand-related information that have personal meanings and are stored in consumer memory. Companies desire to transform these sets of associations into an overall brand identity. Scholars suggest that a brand image should be well planned, nurtured, and supported (Knapp, 2000) and that companies with a cohesive, distinctive, and relevant

* Assistant Professor of Marketing, Department of Marketing & Management, University of Central Arkansas, United States.
Email-id: smyers@uca.edu

brand identity can add value to their offerings (Schmitt and Simonson, 1997). Each piece of information about the brand contributes to this image including online presence and content.

Wee and Ming (2003) suggested that brands go through life-cycle stages. A brand name is initially developed for identification and reference, but the functional benefits of the product are often not enough once the brand reaches the 'brand as personality' stage. Intense brand competition may leave consumers either unable or unwilling to differentiate based on function or performance. Here emotion and symbolism are used to provide differential value. Taken a step further, these emotional and symbolic meanings may actually contribute to consumers' sense of self. Belk (1988) argued that people seek, express, confirm and ascertain a sense of who they are through what they have. Thus our possessions and brands are actually extensions of ourselves.

Thus, from a sociological view, using relevant, symbolic, emotional language in advertising the brand is a key aspect of differentiation. Using that same strategy for website naming seems like a logical leap. But, revisiting Aaker's definition of a brand as a distinguishing name and/or symbol—it seems almost counterintuitive to deviate from that name when directing individuals to a website for additional information.

Using a non-brand element within a website does offer some potential advantages. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) noted that brands are competing to be noticed, to be remembered, to change perceptions, to reinforce attitudes, and to create deep customer relationships. One key issue is that customers and customer needs are continuously changing. This means that even the most well-positioned, highly regarded brand needs to adapt to the environment. A non-brand website name allows an organization to leverage today's brand strengths. Advertising campaigns come and go. Some are more memorable than others, but at that moment it is meant to deliver the brand image in a way that fits in with the societal and situational variables of that snapshot in time. Although using the well-established and potentially well-esteemed brand name as the location of brand information on the internet may seem like the solution that capitalizes on brand equity, it also may overlook the opportunity of the symbolic and emotional benefits other than brand name that the brand has worked so hard to associate in the minds of consumers.

The beauty of an internet presence is that it does not require a singular commitment. When building a brick and mortar store, a company must choose a single location for each store corresponding to a single physical address. The Internet allows multiple locations for the same or similar information. This allows companies to use their brand name and a current advertising slogan each as separate web addresses that lead to the same information or content specific information. Thus, companies can have the best of both worlds.

Domain naming may also be a strategic branding decision meant to relate the web address as closely to the brand as possible. With the expanse of the Internet, many companies may find their brand name unavailable. Concentrating on the emotional benefits or symbolism related to brand may be a good alternative for naming a website that still contributes to the brand image.

DOMAIN NAMING STRATEGIES

Considering the massive availability and low cost of most uniform resource locators (URLs), companies have a variety of options in website naming. In addition, technological advances allow multiple domain names to be directed to one ultimate site allowing brands numerous choices for making and maintaining domain name modifications. Thus, the URL serves a persuasive purpose by catching consumer attention and motivating information search. This is the case with the snickers domain name afterthekiss.com. This simple approach relied on the idea that something about the non-brand domain name is memorable or attractive to consumers. Companies may also believe that consumers automatically associate their brand name with their website, so linking an atypical domain name to their original site would benefit from any recall or persuasive effects related to the name, slogan, tagline, etc. Thus, companies can be as creative as they wish with domain naming, yet keep an integrated message in a singular location by routing all domain names to the same home site.

A second option allows companies to create unique experiences for users who remember and visit the novel site name. With this approach, companies can have multiple unique sites with different messages. For example, Corona brand beer maintained a site called thecoronabeach.com. This site was advertised in a beach related ad campaign and allowed users who visited the site to explore the Corona

beach. Although it still contained important product and brand information, it was different from the brand-named site. State Farm Insurance utilized a similar web strategy for its campaign of commercials with the theme “Now What?” The website name nowwhat.com was included in the advertising. With State Farm’s campaign, visitors of nowwhat.com were again directed to a distinct site, but this time, relevant brand and product information was embedded in an interactive interface that included games and activities like a driving course or a Ninja thief game. After completing the games, information about insurance products was presented (protecting yourself from driving hazards, home break-ins, etc).

In addition to the multiple strategies for URL direction, companies have options relating to subdomains of interest. Subdomains are typically descriptive names placed before the main domain and used to divide websites into different sections. For example, Google has several subdomains for its website i.e. gmail.google.com. Companies may also choose to name pages utilizing the back slash (i.e. Google.com/calendar) in an attempt to describe information, divide content, or both. Here the company is aiming to maintain the existing brand equity by using the brand name and *adding* a unique element either before or after.

Collaboratively, these examples illustrate that domain names offer a new avenue for marketing creativity and differentiation that can be successfully integrated into advertising campaigns. Some brands appear to believe that a creative domain name can add to the buzz or attract web traffic, yet the advertising and marketing research has overlooked the domain name as a variable. The current study contributes to advertising research by recognizing the strategic possibilities in website address names, exploring some of the emerging themes for current web address names, and offering a foundation for future research on this phenomenon.

CREATIVITY AND ADVERTISING

Domain names are closely linked to a company’s overall advertising strategy. First of all, this location information is contained within many advertisements themselves—at the bottom of a print ad or the end of a television commercial. Secondly, like the brand name itself, or the ads created, the domain name is meant to cause some action. Advertising wants to improve attitudes, increase

connections, or encourage purchase, while domain names facilitate those goals by providing additional information. But, like any other brand communication, the website cannot attract customers if they do not visit it. A creative domain name is usually one piece of an overall creative advertising strategy aimed to surprise, amuse, or delight consumers.

The existing research investigating the impact of creativity on advertising is somewhat limited, but the extant studies do indicate that creativity leads to positive outcomes for advertisers and brands. For instance, Kover, Goldberg, and James (1995) found that participants’ perceptions of ad creativity related to their purchase intentions. Ang and Low (2000) also examined the link between creativity and effectiveness, looking at attitudes toward the ad and brand and purchase intentions. They found that creative ads were perceived more favorably, and improved perceptions of the brand as well as purchase intentions.

Similarly, Stone, Besser, and Lewis (2000) found creative commercials more likeable. Their study linked creativity to likeability in that 70% of the liked commercials were rated as creative and only 46% of the disliked commercials were rated as creative. In addition, Till and Baack (2005) found that creativity of an ad led to higher recall.

Although these studies judge creativity based on general perceptions, this logic can easily be transferred to individual advertising and marketing elements. If we define creativity around the process of developing new, uncommon, or unique ideas, then anything from the brand name, to graphics, music, copy, or domain name could be an aspect of creativity that advertisers can consider strategically. Sometimes these creative advertising elements are referred to as novel or atypical. Novel elements in ads have been found to enhance attention (Alsop, 1988), and the novelty can be claim related or execution related (Schumann, Petty, and Clemons, 1990).

Prior advertising research has found that novel/atypical advertisements produce better overall recall (Goodstein, 1993; Houston, Childers, and Heckler, 1987; Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). For example, Houston, Childers, and Heckler (1987) found that semantic discrepancy between pictures and words could produce higher overall levels of recall. Goodstein (1993) found that an atypical advertisement for a shampoo (featuring a subtitled interview with a foreign exchange student) led to better recall than a typical version of the advertisement (featuring

a woman washing her hair). Their findings also confirm that ad-related impression formation is less extensive when ads are typical, and more extensive when they are atypical. The rationale behind this is that an unexpected or novel element in an advertisement leads to greater overall processing of the ad content which results in an overall improvement in ad recall (Houston, Childers, and Heckler, 1987; Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989).

The research on rhetoric gives further support to the idea that creative language elements have potential benefits for advertising. For instance advertisements using rhetorical figures tend to be easier to recall and more persuasive (Tom and Eves, 1999) and puns (using words in a manner varied from common use; Leigh, 1994) appear to draw attention (Redfern, 1982).

Similar to advertising in general, brands are looking for ways to facilitate attitudes and behaviors through their online presence. One reason that companies and brands may be looking for more creativity in their domain names is that the overall novelty of the internet as a medium and the idea of having a website has faded. If the vast majority of our competitors as well as other advertisers maintain a website and advertise that site to consumers, then the mere presence of a website might not be enough to generate any interest. This is the same problem that companies face with advertising—if all of my competitors are advertising—how can I do it better? It makes sense that companies would look for strategies to be different, and that even something as simple as the domain name is a reasonable place to differentiate. The object of the content analysis performed is to answer the following question:

RQ: What strategies do companies use in choosing non-brand name domain names?

METHOD

Sample

This study employed a content analysis of website inclusion in full page print advertisements included in nationally circulated magazines representing a variety of topics that targeted age, gender, race, and interests. These topics included general interest (People, Time), women's issues (Oprah, Redbook), women's fashion and trends (Cosmo, Glamour), family issues (Family Circle), teenage girls'

interests (Seventeen), men's interests (Maxim, Men's Fitness), African American interests (Ebony), health interests (Shape, Health), and sports interests (Sports Illustrated, Golf Digest). The magazines were chosen partly based on availability with a focus on including each gender, as well as diverse ages, multiple ethnicities, and hobbies to ensure a diverse sample. To confirm adequate readership, each of the magazines chosen had paid circulation to over 1 million subscribers with nine of the magazines listed in the top 25 (Alliance for Audited Media 2009). Ads were collected from a single issue of each magazine and the publication dates were within the same 3 month period. These 15 magazines covered a large variety of market segments and yielded a total of 1,023. Of those ads, 794 included a website address (78%). The website addresses were next categorized based on whether they used the brand name or something other than the brand name for the web address. By definition, the URL was characterised as using the brand name if the web address was composed entirely of the brand name or a well known abbreviation of the brand name. If the web address included in the advertisement contained any other words, including those indicated as a subdomain, the ad was placed in the other than brand name category. This means that an ad containing the website address *chevy.com* would be ruled as a brand name URL. On the other hand if the URL listed in the ad were *chevy.com/Malibu* or *Malibu.chevy.com*, it would be included in the non-brand name category. Of the 794 ads with website names, a total of 396 (50%) used a website address other than the brand name exclusively. After deleting duplicate website names, the total sample was 304 unique URLs.

Procedure

The goal of this study was to identify underlying strategic themes in choosing a URL name. This required a qualitative methodology of thematic analysis to discover themes and subthemes and winnow them to a manageable number (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). In grounded theory, themes, or categories can be described as the classification of concepts that are compared against one another and ruled to contain a similar phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) making it comparable to sorting a bag of marbles. Just as marbles can be sorted by color, size, texture, or type, abstract themes must be identified from the data and placed into relevant categories; the categories that emerge

Table 1: Themes and Definitions

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Informational		The brand may be named, but additional information is included. This information may be relative to the product class or the specific brand, product, or model.
Rational		The web address seeks to either describe the product using one or more attributes or give additional information that is not exclusively related to the product category or brand name.
Emotional		An attempt is made to appeal to consumers' emotions and inner feelings ranging from mildly positive moods to powerful emotions.
	Activation	Evoking a sense of arousal or excitement.
	Confidence	Displaying a feeling of competence or control.
	Desire	Evoking a wistfulness or craving for something.
	Elation	Indicating happiness with oneself or situation.
	Moral	Evoking a feeling of reverence or virtue.
Action		Indicates an attempt to illicit a specific action.
Relational		Attempts to relate to something either generally (i.e. a way of life or an ideal) or personally (i.e. a celebrity or individual).
Humour		Using incongruity or deviation from expected beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors.
Promotion		Utilizing a short-term incentive to motivate consumers to purchase either by lowering the price or increasing value.
	Monetary	Using an indication that the consumer will receive some type of price reduction, or monetary reward upon visiting the website.
	Free gift/trial	Indicating that a consumer will be given something for free upon visiting the website.
	Contest/sweepstakes	Lead consumers directly to a specific promotional game whether based on chance or skill.
Target		Indicates for whom the product or information is meant.
Self-schemata		Lead consumers to think about themselves by utilizing possessives.
Location		Gives users an indication on some level of the organisation's location either geographically or physically.

are a product of both the data itself and the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bulmer, 1979). In the current study, categories were not developed a priori but through qualitative analysis (Berelson, 1952).

Qualitative data from the content analysis were analyzed using Glaser and Strauss' constant comparative process (1967). This method of systematic comparison involves an analysis of each website name while answering certain questions: What is the website about? How is it similar or different from the other website names? What other website names does this remind me of? The observed similarities, allowed the web addresses to be grouped together into logical categories. This method of theme analysis was chosen because the web addresses were

short, specifically oriented pieces of text rather than longer, rich narratives. Thus, it was feasible to move through the sample multiple times looking for similarities among the domain names. The process was reiterated multiple times. The process began with a larger number of possible themes, combining only the most obvious similarities together. In each iteration, similarities between the groups were reexamined. The initial questions were revisited: What are these websites about? How are they similar or different from the website names in other groups? This process was continued until the groups were clearly distinctive from one another. Existing research was used in the later stages of the process to reinforce theme distinction. After the themes were identified, two additional coders reviewed the findings. All questions or disputes were resolved through discussion.

Thematic Findings

A total of 10 themes, or categories, were identified from the sample of domain names. Table 1 contains a list of the 10 themes and subthemes and their short definitions. Table 2 contains example URLs from each theme and subtheme.

The theme that was the simplest to classify was the *informational*. The brand is named in the majority of the product descriptive websites, but additional information is also included in the URL. It is unlikely that creativity is the primary motivation in these domain names. Some of the domains in this category include words in the domain name that are descriptive of the specific product being offered. For example rocskincare.com: the brand name is Roc which is a type of skincare product. Likewise, silksoymilk.com includes both the brand name Silk and the product type, soy milk. Similarly, some of the addresses within this category describe a more specific brand or product line than the parent company as a whole. With this strategy, an organization is able to offer the individual more specific direction than using the brand name alone. It can be compared to giving directions to the town or giving direction to the street. This could make it easier for customers to find the information that they are looking for making it less cumbersome to visit the website. Sometimes, this is achieved by using a unique domain name like colgatetotal.com (rather than simply the parent brand name Colgate), or by using separate pages (covergirl.com/outlast). In either case, it is about providing customers with access to the specific information for which they are looking-limiting the time required to find it.

The next set of categories that emerged from the relevant literature about persuasive appeals in marketing. Schmitt (1999) identified a set of strategic modules that managers could use to create experiences with their customers. They were not identified a-priori, but the framework offered an integrated system for understanding several of the identified categories and their relationships. Two of those modules, FEEL and THINK parallel the emotional/rational framework of persuasive appeals which has been extensively studied (Albers-Miller and Royne, 1999).

Rational appeals are rooted in traditional models of consumer decision making where consumers are assumed to make logical and rational choices. Schmitt (1999)

labeled them as THINK appeals involving the intellect and creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences. This type of appeal has also been labeled informational-providing meaningful facts to the consumer (Cutler et al. 2000; Kotler and Armstrong, 1994). The goal of these appeals is to focus directly on benefits or features of the product itself (Puto and Wells, 1984). Within this research this group of domains is labeled as *rational*. The rational theme for website addresses consists of offering facts about the product or its benefits that could be relevant to logical decision making.

The group of rational website addresses seeks to either describe the product or direct consumer to a particular location other than general product/brand material. For example, agedefyingtoothpaste.com describes the benefit of the Arm & Hammer product, and the website palmersworks.com describes a benefit of the moisturizer. On the other hand, the website t-mobile.com/coverage, informs customers the location of specific information relating to coverage area, and tylenol.com/safety leads consumers to safety information. This group is very similar to the informational category, but is differentiated by the type of information. These URLs do not contain the product or brand information exclusively. As illustrated, the domain name can communicate its purpose through the general domain, or secondary pages.

Schmitt's FEEL dimension looks at ways to appeal to customers' emotions and inner feelings ranging from mildly positive moods to powerful emotions. Thus the strategic reason for utilizing emotional domain names relates to evoked feelings. Kotler and Armstrong (1994; 468) describe emotional appeals as an "attempt to stir up either negative or positive emotions that can motivate purchase. These include fear, guilt and shame...along with positive emotions such as love, humour, pride, or joy." We label this group as *emotional*. The subthemes within the emotional category are divided according to the dimensions identified by Batra and Holbrook (1990). Of the 12 types of affective responses that they named, five appeared within this data.

Activation represents a sense of arousal (drivenbywhatsinside.com) or excitement (incredibleegg.com). *Confidence* indicates a feeling of competence (citi.com/neversleeps) or control (iplayforme.com). *Desire* indicates a wistfulness or craving for something. Words like beauty (wnwbeauty.com), pretty (silpadajewelry.

com/pretty3), and perfect (thebodyperfect.com) are indicative of desire as are more abstract domain names that evoke an aspiration (unlikeanyotherring.com). *Elation* is characterized by words like happy, delighted, or pleased. Happiness with oneself (everywomanisaqueen.com) or situations (golfasitshouldbe.com) exemplify this dimension. *Moral* is described as reverent or virtuous. Website addresses that evoke feelings related to important causes (marchforbabies.com) and disadvantaged groups (voicefortheuninsured.com) symbolize this dimension. *Affection* relates to loving (love.cartier.com), affectionate, or pure (purestartshere.com). Although these five dimensions are the ones represented in our data, it is likely that the Batra and Holbrook's other affective responses could be used in choosing website addresses based on evoked feelings.

Schmitt's next category is ACT. These types of appeals are meant to target physical experiences. He uses Nike's "Just Do It" campaign as a classic example of an ACT appeal. Within our data, this group of domains is referred to as *action* because they indicate and attempt to illicit a specific action. Words like, apply (apply.discovercard.com), get (getmaxoderm.com), and go (go2planb.com) are used to motivate consumer actions.

Schmitt's final category of appeals is labeled RELATE. These relational appeals are meant to relate to something outside of an individual's private state. These appeals may attempt to identify the product as a way of life or an ideal, or they may capitalize on a person's desire to relate and be accepted socially. Within the data, domains seem to relate to consumers on both a general and personal level. In general, many web addresses connect to consumers by focusing on how the brand relates to life or a way of living as a whole (canopyliving.com) or by concentrating on specific aspects of everyday life like meal time (beefitswhatsfordinner.com). Other relational web names promote ideals both in being (lunchablesmom.com) and acting (ontrackeveryday.com). Yet other URL names look to personally link consumers with some overall reference group whether a celebrity (ashtonscoolpix.com) or other consumers both on an individual (lipitor.com/john) and group (hrblock.com/people) level.

The next category of domain names involves *humour*. Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer (2000) noted that humour is one of the most widely employed techniques in American advertising, and as a technique, it is widely believed to be

effective (Eisend, 2009). As humour is often incorporated into an advertising campaign, it is logical that an integrated campaign may shift the humour to all aspects of marketing including the domain name. A great deal of research recognizes that part of what makes something funny is the fact that it deviates from expectations. The presence of incongruity leads to surprise (Meyer and Niepel, 1994) and the extent that the content differs from generally expected beliefs, attitudes or behaviors (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer, 2000) leads to varying perceptions of humour. Although humour is subjective, it is reasonable to code intended humour based on the deviation from the expected.

Within the data, there are several examples of this phenomenon. For instance, when an individual hears the term red zone, s/he usually thinks of football (the red zone is the 20 yards nearest the end zone). But financial services firm Prudential used the website address retirementredzone.com to target individuals nearing retirement. This clever name is not what most people would expect from a financial services provider. In another example, Peppridge Farms' Goldfish Crackers takes a very common phrase—wishful thinking—and transforms it into the website address fishfulthinking.com. On the more incongruous end of the spectrum, the ad for the new Volkswagen Routan revolves around the idea that women are having babies as an excuse to buy the vehicle creating a baby boom. In keeping with the ad, the included web address is routanboom.com. The claim is absurd and deviates strongly from beliefs about why women have babies. It is not at all surprising with its wide overall use that marketers focused on integrating their promotional efforts are transferring this same humour to their domain names as well.

The next theme identified was *promotion*. A sales promotion is a marketing communications activity where a short-term incentive is used to motivate consumers to purchase either by lowering the price or increasing value. Chandon, Wansink and Laurent (2000) classified sales promotions as both monetary and non-monetary incentive types that offer consumers a variety of different benefits. Using their research as a guide, we identified three types of promotional themes from domain names. First of all, is *monetary*, which indicates a coupon, price reduction, or monetary reward for product trial. The advertisements themselves highlighted the discount available for readers of the magazine, and sometimes the

Table 2: Web Address Examples

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>Brand</i>	<i>Product</i>	<i>Website Address</i>
Informational		Chevy	Auto--Malibu	chevy.com/malibu
Informational		Aldo	Shoes	aldoshoes.com
Rational		Clearblue	Pregnancy Test	clearblueeasy.com
Rational		Pantene	Shampoo	pantene.com/tips
Emotional	Activation	Intel Centrino	Computer	drivenbywhatsinside.com
Emotional	Activation	Corn Syrup	Corn Syrup	sweetsurprise.com
Emotional	Affection	Cartier	Jewelry	love.cartier.com
Emotional	Affection	Gain	Detergent	ilovegain.com
Emotional	Confidence	Nintendo DS	Video Game	iplayforme.com
Emotional	Confidence	Citi	Financial	citi.com/neversleeps
Emotional	Desire	Verragio	Jewelry	unlikeanyotherring.com
Emotional	Desire	Mariah Carey	Fragrance	Mariahcareybeauty.com
Emotional	Elation	Wales Cymru	Sporting Event	golfasitshouldbe.com
Emotional	Elation	Cotton	Clothing Material	thefabricofourlives.com
Emotional	Moral	March of Dimes	Nonprofit	marchforbabies.com
Emotional	Moral	AMA	Nonprofit	voicefortheuninsured.org
Action		Discover Card	Credit Card	apply.discovercard.com
Action		Barilla	Pasta	discoverbarilla.com
Relational	Lifestyle	Quaker	Food	quakerlivingproof.com
Relational	Lifestyle	Welchs	Aqua Juice	welchs.com/livinglightly
Relational	Personal	Sears	Clothing	sears.com/llcoolj
Relational	Personal	Lipitor	Prescription Drug	lipitor.com/john
Humour	language	Ameritrade	Stock Trading	saveyourself.com
Humour	silliness	SAS	Business Analysis	sas.com/gophers
Possession		Johnsons	Lotion	johnsonsforyou.com
Possession		Lexus	Auto	myownpursuit.com
Promotion	Discount	E Trade	Stocks	etrade.com/offers
Promotion	Discount	Mastercard	Credit Card	golfdigestrewards.com
Promotion	Gift/Trial	Brut	Deodorant	bruttestdrive.com
Promotion	Gift/Trial	Neutrogena	Mineral Makeup	neutrogena.com/beautybonus
Promotion	Sweepstakes	Nivea	Good bye Cellulite	niveachallenge.com
Promotion	Sweepstakes	Secret	Deodorant	secretdiamondgiveaway.com
Target Market		Nutrisystem	Diet Product	men.nutrisystem.com/ad
Target Market		Degree	Deodorant	degreegirl.com
Location		Nissan	Auto--Sentra	nissanusa.com
Location		BSN	Diet Supplement	BSNOnline.net

web address reinforced it: togobrand.com/coupon. Most of the websites in this group utilized secondary pages to direct consumers to the specific offer. As promotions tend to be short lived, this seems a sound strategic choice.

We also uncovered two subthemes that could be characterized as nonmonetary promotions. *Free gift/trial* represents domain names that indicate the consumer will be given something upon visiting the website. For instance drugstore.com/glamourgift or armandhammertrial.

com. *Contest/sweepstakes* symbolizes domain names that lead consumers to a promotional game. These can be sweepstakes that are based on random entry-secretdiamondgiveaway.com-or contests that require an entry of some sort-dawnhandtalent.com. With most of the domains in the promotional category, it appears that marketers are taking a disposable approach to web addresses realizing that unlike their brick and mortar counterparts, the location on the world wide web can be very easily altered to integrate into a campaign or deliver a specific message.

The next theme that emerged is based on the specific target market that the product or ad is trying to reach. Within the domain or subsequent pages, the address indicates for whom the information is meant. The data shows segmentation by gender (degreegirl.com; xomax-man.com), or publication (alienware.com/maxim). This strategy allows for a more customized message for brand names with products for a variety of target markets, clearly identifies to the consumer who might use it, and/or capitalizes on consumers who view the publication as part of their reference groups.

The next theme emerges from research on self-schemata, or the information that individuals use to define themselves (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Knowledge about the self is often more readily accessible (Markus et al 1982), and relevant information about the self elicits greater attention, encoding, and processing (Markus and Wurf, 1987). Self-referencing is a processing strategy that relates incoming information to aspects of oneself (Burnkrant and Unnava, 1995). Activating the self during processing provides the potential to form more associations in memory. Thus, the *self* theme of web addresses leads consumers to think about themselves by capitalizing on possessives like my (myalli.com) and you (johnsonsforyou.com).

The final theme to emerge was based on *location*. With this approach, some aspect of the brand or company location is included in the domain name. This may be particularly useful for multinational corporations (bmwusa.com) that can direct geographically diverse consumers to more specific websites allowing them convenient access to the precise material desired. It may also be based on a more generic location related term (nikestore.com; lorealstudioonline). These domain names all give users an indication of some level of location beyond the brand site.

Discussion

The results in the content analysis support the contention that websites in themselves are not a novel concept. It is obvious from the high percentage of the overall ads that included a website address (78%) that web addresses are an important consideration. In addition, half of the ads with website addresses included elements other than the brand name. This makes for a phenomenon of particular interest to marketers. The prevalence of website references in print advertising suggests why organizations would look for a creative approach to differentiate their website names among the clutter of domain names available to consumers. Thus, outlining some of the strategic possibilities behind the practice is particularly interesting as a first step for researchers and marketers alike. The identification of strategic alternatives in domain name choice opens the door for future research into the usefulness of such strategic decisions.

The 10 themes identified in this research are simply a beginning point for identifying and understanding the strategic alternatives available when considering website names and the potential motivations behind their use. Table 3 provides a summary of the count and percentages for each of the identified themes. The themes also vary on how far they stray from the traditional approach of brand names as website addresses. Some of the themes are right in line with this established course; simply adding small bits of information to facilitate use or clarify details. Other web names indicated substantial deviation from the norm by not including any mention of the brand or product class. Take for example the URL drivenbywhatsinside.com. Is it a car? A food product? A self help book? No, the website provides information about Intel's Centrino2 processors.

The ability to direct consumers to a more specific area of the website may offer consumers some utilitarian benefit. Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra (2002) identified five criteria that users look for when evaluating a website: information content, ease of use, privacy/security, graphic style, and fulfillment. Eliminating the number of clicks required may influence ease of use which in turn affects attitudes, behavioral intentions, and actual behavior (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2002), and the search function is one of the key elements that affects ease of use (Novak, Hoffman, and Yung, 2000). Furthermore,

Table 3: Sample Description

<i>Category</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Total ads identified	1023	
Website included	794	78
Non brand address	396	39
Total number of sample ads	304	
Breakdown of Non-brand Web Addresses*		
Informational	108	36
Emotional	46	15
Rational	33	11
Location	24	8
Promotion	22	7
Relational	21	7
Target	15	5
Humour	14	5
Action	12	4
Possession	9	3

*Percentages based on the 304 unique non-brand address websites (after duplicates were removed)

delivering consumers directly to the information that they are seeking should make the information easier to remember and more usable (Ariely, 2000). Some of the strategies indicate that companies are using information other than brand names not for creative reasons but to provide customers with a better online experience by making relevant material easier for consumers to find and use.

Several of the themes offer either marketers or consumers value that is predominantly functional. By far the most prevalent strategy used in this data was informational with 36% of the non-branded web addresses falling into this category. This is not surprising given that it does not deviate much from the original brand name which allows the company to continue the benefits related to its brand equity. For the most part, these URLs simply provide either additional information or more specific information about the product or brand. In many cases the product category is simply included in the URL (i.e. tridentgum.com in place of trident.com). This action may also be taken because the brand name is a common word or a new company that cannot get access to the brand name URL. Stride gum cannot use the website stride.com because it is owned by a marketing company. Thus, stridegum.com may serve as the closest possible alternative.

Companies may also choose to include the specific sub-brand or model names in the web address as a way of allowing easier access to the specific information for which consumers are searching. For example, as a brand, Quaker makes a variety of food products. Thus, having quakerricecakes.com and quakersimpleharvest.com allows consumers to find information about a specific product with fewer clicks. This may improve the quality perceptions and increase customer satisfaction with the website (Lai, Chen and Lin 2007). This is not really a deviation from the brand-name approach to website naming, but it definitely indicates that there are a variety of strategic choices that must be made about domain names.

Rational naming also offers consumers and marketers functional value by focusing on cognitive elements of the product or brand. Although aimed at function, these rational names contain information beyond the product or brand description. For example, Arm and Hammer's Advanced White toothpaste used the URL agedefyingtoothpaste.com. This url describes a benefit of using the toothpaste. This seems to offer both functional and hedonic value since it describes the toothpaste using a desirable attribute. Other domain names in this group provide functional value by directing consumers to additional information (Tylenol.com/safety; mbusa.com/

thinkblue). Again, consumers are directed to the exact location of specific information that is relevant to that specific ad.

Website names within the location category also appear to offer value that is predominantly functional. Multinational corporations may choose to use geographic location to offer a more targeted message (i.e. nissanusa.com). Other organizations may include the description of a type of location (online or store) to differentiate a specific function of their overall web presence. For instance, nikestore.com is the url for people who are ready to shop for Nike products rather than see other brand information. Including an element of a physical location-store-helps to distinguish this point.

Beyond offering functional value, some companies are embracing the url as an outlet for creativity by using taglines (haveyoulaughedtoday.com), complementing specific campaigns (itstwothings.com), focusing on specific promotions (secretdiamondgiveaway.com), or creating a social bond (skoalbrotherhood.com). Just like any other medium or any other information presented within an advertisement, marketers want to maximize its impact. Using domain names that deviate from expectations in some form may be a valuable tool for combating consumer habituation to website addresses.

The use of unique domain names also suggests that marketers are concerned that consumers are so familiar with the company web address that they believe that they can easily infer the website address-this means that they may not see it as important information to process because they assume that they can remember it if they need it. By altering expectations about what the domain name is, whether to promote a specific campaign or to link back to the original website, some brands may be trying to persuade consumers that the website information is valuable for them to process or that visiting the website offers some benefit to them beyond their existing expectations.

This information is beneficial to advertisers in a number of ways. First of all, domain name choice offers a new avenue for advertising creativity. Although existing research looks at the differential impact of a variety of execution elements (Chang and Chau, 2008; Ang and Lim, 2008; McQuarrie and Phillips, 2005), and individual difference variables (Chang and Chau, 2008; Torres and

Briggs, 2007), the potential impact of the domain name itself has escaped investigation. Nearly every organization has the opportunity to create either subdomains (i.e. finance.yahoo.com) or additional pages (i.e. hanes.com/wedgiefree) that can direct consumers to a specific area of the overall website without even investing the resources in sustaining an additional domain. With relative ease, advertisers can integrate their communications by tailoring the website to the specific ad campaign, media outlet, or promotion. If the ad campaign is particularly memorable or successful, individuals who remember the campaign may have a stronger motivation to visit the website, especially if they are in need of the product or service being offered. This may be especially true for emerging brands where the individual ad or campaign has more equity than the brand name itself.

Domain names may also offer companies a way to customize a message to different markets making these more specific websites more valuable to consumers. Similar to an advertisement or a retail environment, marketers may be able to offer a customized online experience. For example, Mercedes-Benz does not offer the same products to consumers in every geographic market. Thus, along with the international website (www.mercedes.com), they also host a site for the U.S. market (mbusa.com). This allows functional value to the consumer, but it also allows the company to design a space that is attractive to the specified market.

The strategy also gives companies an opportunity to build relationships with their consumers. The State Farm Insurance website (nowwhat.com) is a good example of this. State Farm attempted to use a novel domain name to direct consumers to a site that revolves more around entertainment than factual product information. This may be of particular interest for brands with attributes that are perceived as less fun or exciting especially in targeting younger segments of consumers. The name itself may also serve as a symbol of the relationship. Take, for instance, the website skoalbrotherhood.com. This domain name may be a cue that the people who use the product are part of a tight knit group.

Future research on this topic needs to explore potential outcomes relating to using a non-brand website name including attention, memory, attitudes, intentions, and actual behavior. There is some anecdotal evidence that non-brand website names can elicit visitors. For instance,

Mastercard launched a campaign partnering with Peyton Manning where fans could send customized “pep talks” via email or text message by visiting the website *priceless.com*. This campaign specific offering with its own domain name, earned over 3 million visitors (Adforum, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Money and time is invested in creating awareness for a brand name, but in an environment riddled with clutter, it is not easy to get the consumer’s attention. Organisations appear to be using their domain names as a new key to standing out in the cluttered environment. The themes identified here are a fairly comprehensive starting point for understanding the options available for departing from the traditional brand URL, and the research used in understanding the themes gives specific insights into how the use of each theme benefits the customers and the brands. The domain name offers brands the opportunity to look beyond just the name and identify other symbolic, informational or emotional benefits from the products or services that they provide. In addition, a differentiated strategy for mapping out a website may offer functional benefits.

Finding relevant and appropriate website names may be trying for new businesses making a more novel approach a necessity. More established brands may look to reignite a spark of interest among consumers or adapt to current market conditions by utilizing trends or promotions. Both their existing domains and available domain names offer them the opportunity to do that. Regardless of the mechanism used, domain names have the ability to motivate consumers and influence a variety of outcomes. As with every frontier, advertisers must work to push the envelope in order to stay relevant and fresh. Since the internet itself is no longer a novel media outlet, the innovation in its use for advertising may depend on choosing the best domain name.

More research needs to be done to on the persuasive impact of the different domain strategies and themes identified here. Industry needs to know if departing from the brand name in the domain naming makes the ad or brand more likeable because of the creative element, if it enables people to better remember and link the website name in memory, and if it encourages website patronage. Research should also search for the types of products, industries, and segments that could benefit most from

this type of strategy as well as which specific approaches consumers prefer-it truly presents a whole new domain of strategic implications.

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