How Not to Name a Product

In our previous issue, we considered the requirements of a large industrial corporation, identified in the public mind with fuels, seeking a new marketing name for one of its principal products. We shall now examine a name actually proposed as a solution, in the light of the corporation’s requirements, extracting from it whatever virtues and vices we can detect.

The name proposed was DYNAX, a derivative of the Greek “dynamis,” meaning “power.”

Superficially, DYNAX is an excellent name, conforming with all of the basic conditions laid down by the company:

1. It is short, spelled with only 5 letters, and includes neither an “S” nor an “O” among them.
2. A preliminary survey does not bring to light any company or any product already using DYNAX as a name, though a number of quite similar names are noted.
3. The name conveys the idea of energy very directly, being based on the Greek-derived prefix “dyna-,” which means “Power, Energy.”
4. The name suggests the idea of science very strongly, for the prefix “dyna-” appears mostly in scientific terms such as DYNAMICAL PARALLAX, DYNAMIC METEOROLOGY, DYNAMOELECTRIC, and DYNAMOMOTOR. Furthermore, the terminal letter X is one of the strongest letters in the alphabet; a majority of words ending in X are technical and scientific terms; and X is a prominent symbol in mathematics, being the multiplication sign in arithmetic, the unknown quantity in algebra, and the horizontal axis or abscissa in geometry.
5. The name has a strong international flavor. The prefix DYNAX- on which it is based is of Greek origin and appears in numerous terms that are part of the so-called International Scientific Vocabulary, and which are recognized by speakers of numerous languages. X as a mathematical symbol is likewise recognized by the educated, irrespective of their language.
6. The name suggests size, or even immensity, because it reminds us of the word DINOSAUR. The dinosaurs, a group of now extinct reptiles that flourished in the Mesozoic Era, included the largest land animals ever seen on the face of the earth—reptiles such as the Tyrannosaurus, Brontosaurus,
Diplodocus, and Brachiosaurus. Moreover, the final letter X, also the multiplication sign, suggests multiplication, or magnification, or great size.

(7) The name DYNAX has overtones of benevolence, as well. It suggests DINAH, a Biblical name that occurs in the Book of Genesis. The Bible, representative of religion, suggests benevolence. Also, the letter X with which the name ends is a symbol for Christ, the supreme embodiment of benevolence.

(8) The name can be made to stand out with a high degree of distinctiveness by using it in an initials-acrostic related to fuels—something such as: Drives Your New Automobile Xpertly!

(9) While there is no direct implication of progress in the name DYNAX, the name does convey the idea of science very clearly, and science is inextricably intertwined with progress, so that the idea of progress is there by association.

Our preliminary analysis of the name DYNAX has painted a highly favorable picture of it. In fact, it seems like an ideal name, better than any we had a right to anticipate finding or creating. Is the name really that good?

One important factor that we have not investigated yet, in considering the suitability of the name DYNAX, is the negative associations that it might have in foreign languages. An extended search indicates that DYNAX itself is not a word in any language, any more than it is a word in English. However, the search does uncover words in a number of foreign languages that are close to DYNAX, and which would probably be suggested in those languages by the appearance of DYNAX. Specifically:

In Cornish, DYNAS means "unnatural, unkindly." In Czech, DUNA means "a dune." In Icelandic, DYNA is a feather bed, pad, pillow, or bolster. In Swedish, DYNA is a cushion or pad. In Welsh, DYNAD means "Lo, there!", and DYNA means "a little woman, a girl." The only word here with a highly unfavorable meaning is the Cornish one, and the Cornish language, never spoken by more than a handful of persons, is now regarded as obsolete.

Of course, it is our duty to make a broader sweep of foreign languages, to locate words resembling DYNAX less closely than the examples quoted above, in our quest for possible negative associations. Such a broader sweep turns up all sorts of interesting words. A few examples:

The Albanian DUNAS means "shame, disgrace, insult." The Danish DUNST means "stench, stink, reek." The Dutch DUNNETJES means "rather thin." The French TIGNASSE means "a scrubby wig." In Gaelic, DINAISG is "to disjoin or undo." In German, DUNGSTATTE is "Dunghill, heap of manure." In Icelandic, DYSLA is "to heap stones on the body of a criminal." In Irish, TINNEAS means "a disease or sickness." In Maltese, TINA is "buttock." In Manx, DYNYSS means "unknown." The Norwegian TYNGES is "a burden or weight." The Russian TINISTII means "covetous." The Swedish DYNGA means "dung, muck." In Turkish, DINSIZ means "ashen, ungodly." In Ukrainian, TINYATISYA is "to idle about, to loiter about."

The Zulu DINA is "to be irksome to." And so on.

WORD WAYS


AN EQUALLY DILIGENT SEARCH OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE UNCOVERS A GOOD MANY ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE NAME DYNAX THAT NEGATE ALL OF THE PRINCIPAL IDEAS THAT IT IS SUPPOSED TO TRANSMIT TO THOSE HEARING OR SEEING IT. A FEW EXAMPLES:


DYNAX SUGGESTS DINAS EMRYS, THE MAGICIAN MERLIN’S FORT IN BRITISH LEGEND, BUILT BY VORTIGERN. WHATEVER WAS CONSTRUCTED DURING THE DAY WAS SWALLOWED UP IN THE EARTH DURING THE NIGHT. MERLIN EVENTUALLY DISCOVERED THE CAUSE TO BE TWO SERPENTS AT THE BOTTOM OF A POOL BELOW THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORKS, INCESSANTLY STRUGGLING WITH EACH OTHER. THE IDEA AND PRACTICE OF MAGIC INVOLVED HERE IS ANTAGONISTIC TO THE IDEA OF SCIENCE, OF COURSE.

DYNAX SUGGESTS DINAS EMRYS, THE MAGICIAN MERLIN’S FORT IN BRITISH LEGEND, BUILT BY VORTIGERN. WHATEVER WAS CONSTRUCTED DURING THE DAY WAS SWALLOWED UP IN THE EARTH DURING THE NIGHT. MERLIN EVENTUALLY DISCOVERED THE CAUSE TO BE TWO SERPENTS AT THE BOTTOM OF A POOL BELOW THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORKS, INCESSANTLY STRUGGLING WITH EACH OTHER. THE IDEA AND PRACTICE OF MAGIC INVOLVED HERE IS ANTAGONISTIC TO THE IDEA OF SCIENCE, OF COURSE.

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found his wife living in adultery on his return home, and saved his life by going into exile in Italy. All of these associations with antiquity are diametrically opposed to the idea of progress.

At last, there comes the coup de grâce: a discovery by attorneys that the name DYNAX has already been pre-empted by a British firm. Well, studying DYNAX was fun while it lasted.

In our next issue, we’ll consider another of the names proposed, one very different in quality from DYNAX.

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