

Is Your Tag Line Helping or Hindering Your Business?

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For me, words are a form of action, capable of influencing change.
Ingrid Bengis

I have often thought that politicians could achieve a lot more during their term of office if they talked less about the social issues that disturbed them and simply adopted the Nike principle in actually trying to solve them.

The Nike principle to which I refer: 'Just Do it'. These three words form an integral part of the successful marketing strategy which has helped convey to millions of buyers' world wide the focussed, aggressive and non-conformist image that the Sports Wear Giant behind it wears as its own.

'Just Do it'. Three words. A tag line. Yet a tag line of unfathomable value in terms of the impact it has made on a generation of consumers (and their spending preferences). Whether we are marketing Sports Wear or Thoroughbreds – the Nike example demonstrates a simple lesson: the performance of a product or service is only half of the modern-day sales equation. Brand meaning or significance is the other half.

So what part do tag lines play in creating this brand significance? And how can something as simple as three words become so synonymous with a company that it can be used in an unrelated context and the company name behind it will be immediately apparent to a familiar audience?

The Tag Line

A Tag Line (or slogan) is a short string of memorable words (or a mixture of words and images) that tell other people what it is that your company does. It's not something to just read or say. Neither is it there because you had a bit of blank space to fill at the bottom of the ad.

A tag line forms an integral part of your company's branding strategy and, as a result, should ideally be included on all promotional materials including business cards, stationery, Web site, email signatures, ad campaigns etc.

Why Use One?

Clients should be able to easily describe your business to others. They also need to understand what sets you apart from your competitors – your "unique selling proposition" (or 'USP' if you like). It is only once they discover this USP and form an opinion about it (which will be further moderated by their experience of doing business with you) that their perception of your company is formed.

An easily understood and communicated tag line therefore assists clients in understanding what you do – and what you stand for.

A Necessary Evil?

If you're a Coolmore of the world (who, incidentally, choose not to use a tag line) with a healthy advertising budget, the ability to place your name and logo on a series of high profile advertising campaigns, stand the world's most expensive stallions and purchase widely - with a seemingly unlimited number of blank cheques at the world's largest auctions (or, in other words, attract the type of publicity that most marketing departments can only ever dream about) then it's safe enough to say that it is less important to have a tag line to explain to people what it is that you do.

Similarly if your company name clearly explains your business, eg. "The Royal Family's Saddler" and there are a limited number of competitors who could claim the equivalent then there is less need for you to have a tag line.

If, on the other hand, you are a smaller player in a field with many competitors and/or the name of your company doesn't effectively describe what you do – then a good tag line can do wonders to assist others in understanding what business you are in and what differentiates you from the competition.

Consider these examples:

Equimax. Exclusively Equine. Mitavite

Equimax? Sounds a bit like worming paste doesn't it? Exclusively Equine? Well, if that's not a catch all for everything then I don't know what is. And of course, Mitavite is all about horse feed ... or is it?

Look at the difference when the tag line is added:

Equimax: *Where Jobs and Horse People Find Each Other*

Exclusively Equine: *Your source for equine books, gifts, videos & more*

Mitavite: *Better Feed Through Innovation*

You can see, therefore, that a tag line not only tells people what a company's services are, it also conveys what makes a company/services unique. As a result we also see that MitaVite isn't just about horse feed. It's the innovation the company incorporates into the making of the feed that offers buyers (and their horses) the advantage.

Starting from Scratch

Ok, so you want to draft yourself a tag line ... or examine the one you already have. Here's a list of things you need to think about before you start:

- What are you selling?
- Whom are you selling to?
- What do you know about your clients?

- What do you want the clients to do as a result of knowing about your company/service?
- What words can you use that will get them to act?
- How will you know it worked?
- What ideas might work?
- What are some words that describe the image you want to present (eg. Conservative, modern, traditional, radical, sophisticated etc)?
- What is your key message?

Great marketing tag lines will make a direct and memorable connection with a reader. To discover what counts as 'memorable' you can do a lot worse than flicking through the pages of some Industry-related magazines. You'll soon see what the opposition are doing in their advertising and whether or not you consider one approach better than another. Once you have this in mind, get out some paper and a pen and write down some words that describe what makes you unique. It doesn't need to be perfect straight off. It's starting the process which is usually the hardest thing.

What Are You Selling?

"Service fees"

"Tried race horses"

"Training services"

"Agistment"

Ok, that's fine - but loads of other people sell the same things as well.

Remember that a tag line is a useful way of making your services stand out - and making people readily remember you.

Hollywood Lodge has this down to a fine art. Their tag line is simply: *Home of Durbridge*. Windsor Park is another one: *New Zealand Breeder of the Year 1998 & 2001*. Massie Lodge scores well on the differentiator too. The commonplace "we agist horses" has become, for them, *Boutique Style Accommodation for your Horse*. A US company that sells pedigree research has also incorporated an effective tag line to set them apart: Equineline.com: *The pedigree source that sales companies choose*. If the sales companies pick them, then they must be good. But I wouldn't have known that just by seeing their company name. They would have been just another equine related company selling something over the Internet.

Who Are Your Clients?

Entire books have been devoted to the subject of clients so I'll try and keep this section brief. Contrary to popular belief, your clients are not 'everyone who likes horses, owns horses, wants to own horses or who may have once patted one at a farm down the road'. Your product/service will cater (at most) for one or two market

segments. Examples of market segments include: those farms who stand commercial stallions (by country, State, number of stallions, average service fees etc); broodmare owners (by owner's income, State, number of mares, quality of mares etc); hobbyists; pinhookers; syndicators; trainers; stud owners; people who require agistment; owners who require breaking & training services etc, etc.

Each segment – and the product/s and service/s that serves it – will require its own marketing strategy/positioning.

Some companies try and cover the full gamut of market segments but I have yet to see this strategy employed successfully. If anything, it merely confuses the public about what differentiates you from your competition. A useful (non-thoroughbred) example is the global accounting and legal firms who are currently struggling to convince buyers about what makes them stand out from every other (remarkably similar) professional services firm. It's a strategist's and advertising team's worst nightmare. The Firms arrived in this spot of bother for the simple reason that they tried to be all things to all people. Now it's costing them a fortune in expensive re-branding exercises... and they're losing – not gaining - market share.

Alanbridge Stud understands their client base. They know that their stallions won't be covering broodmares whose owners are willing to pay \$125,000 service fees. Their tag line is therefore the effective: *For a value for money way to breed a star.* It's a good differentiator.

Knowing your client base also allows your tag line to appeal to what is important to them. A conservative client base for example would be reassured by Inglis' tag line *Bloodstock Auctioneers and Agents since 1867* as the words show that a client is dealing with a company that has been in the market for a long time. That's important in many fields where 'risk', 'honesty' and 'reliability' are at play. A more entrepreneurial or spontaneous client may be attracted to the USA Breeders Cup sponsor (DODGE)'s tag line "Grab Life by the Horns".

What do you Clients Get from You?

For clients to buy from you they need to understand what they get as a result of using your services. Whilst this may seem all a bit basic – it is sometimes easy to forget that clients are bombarded with conflicting messages to buy from a mind-boggling number of suppliers. If your message doesn't communicate why they should use you (instead of your 14 competitors) the first time round ... you may not get a second chance.

A tag line therefore offers the advantage of allowing you to fine tune the message you want to communicate.

Let's look at some examples: I want long term boarding for my horse not just a six week spell. Who will I contact - Westminster Stud. Why? Because their tag line told me that they offered *Permanent Boarding and Spelling.*

I want to see what my fillies' half siblings are doing on the track and check a Stallion's performance at Stud. But I don't want to have to do it by cross-referencing ten books. My solution: T2ol.com, which at first glance looks like nothing at all to

do with thoroughbreds or pedigrees/performance until I see the tag line: *Thoroughbred Tracking Online*. Bingo.

Meaningful and compelling

If your tag line is compelling people will understand your company services more quickly, and as a result, you'll attract more attention, interest, and response. Strive for clarity, simplicity, brevity, and a description of benefits -- all wrapped up in a few words (or a combination of words and images). Look at how Brisnet.com achieved this: *Information is our Business*; or Bart Cummings with his Stables' tag line *244 Group One Successes – You can be part of it too*.

I must confess that the bigger companies have an advantage in this area. Any company with a sufficiently high public profile and advertising spend that ensures people are familiar with its name can be a little more vague (or indeed generic) in their tag line and get away with it: for example - Three Chimneys: *The Idea is Excellence*; Vinery: *Creating Generations* and Arrowfield: *Where Breeding is Everything*. They're good tag lines. Arrowfield's is actually great. But they are tag lines that would never work for a smaller operation as they are too general.

Clarity and Consistency

John Ruskin had the right idea when he said "Say all you have to say in the fewest possible words, or your reader will be sure to skip them; and in the plainest possible words or he will certainly misunderstand them."

When drafting a tag line you should therefore avoid the following:

- A tag line that is so general it communicates very little useful information;
- The overly clever tagline that will confuse some people or outdate itself quickly
- Words with double entendre (double meaning). This is particularly important in an increasingly global world where clients derive from a number of different cultures; and
- Zippy slogans or phrases which will date quickly.

Look at the following examples and see just how easy it is to confuse an audience:

- *Expect More*
- *If you don't know where you are going, how can you expect your horse to know?*
- *Your Current and Future Source*
- *It's Your Move*

Compare these with:

- *Where Breeding Winners is a Tradition*
- *Permanent Boarders and Spellers*
- *For all your Bloodstock Insurance Needs*

Can Anyone Else Use it?

If a competitor could potentially use the same tag line as you – then you should be doing some more thinking. If you entered the market first you can sometimes get away with adopting a more general tag line but if you don't have a strong public profile then a fast-moving competitor may just shoulder in and wrest it off you. Whilst there is always the fall back position of legal action, beyond the general (and unwanted financial) hassle of having solicitors involved, the rights accrued under the law of passing off will be of little or no benefit to a very small company with a limited public profile.

Leaving aside the legalities, general tag lines also fail to sell to an audience. Anything I come across that incorporates "perfection", "excellence", "(anything to do with) breeding/choosing/selling/trading/training champions", "success", "number 1", "quality" ... will always struggle to get my attention. The reason is that the thoroughbred industry as a whole is one that courts quality, money, and success. Companies that work within it will therefore have to do better than to merely rely on the same tired adjectives that everyone else has been using for years.

A geographical differentiator – and one of my favourites – is that used by Widden. Their tag line: *Valley of Champions*. It has that hated word in there – Champions – but its *how* they've used it that is so clever. Technically speaking there are a number of stud farms in the Widden Valley that could pay reference to elite horses that they have bred/raised on the lush pastures beneath those ghostly white sandstone escarpments. But Widden grabbed the tag line first. Bad luck to the other studs that share the same view and the same boundary fence (and maybe even better success in the breeding/racing stakes) but now have to come up with a completely different way of advertising that fact!

Does my tag line work?

Once you've developed your tag line you ideally need to take it out for a test run to see if it effectively communicates your core message. You know its right when it elicits a favourable response - when people ask the right follow-up questions, and want to know more about that you do. If, on the other hand, people say, "What do you mean?" or "Why do people/companies need that?" you're probably off track. If that happens, it's back to the drawing board.

The Only Reality is the Customer's

Once you've adopted your tag line don't change it just because you're tired of it. You may look at it every day on your letterhead, ad campaigns etc but it is fair to say that you are a lot closer to it than your clients will ever be. If you keep changing it then there is only a limited chance that people will begin to associate it with you. Don't confuse them by adopting a new one unless absolutely necessary.

And remember

Like many politicians, a number of modern businesses have "too many high sounding words, and too few actions that correspond with them". A great tag line won't help you if your product/service plus the rest of the marketing mix are poorly managed and presented. Before anyone starts drafting a catchy tag line you need to go back

to the basics of creating demand (like over delivering on promises and supporting claims) and you have to come up with a thorough list of reasons why customers need your product/services, then concentrate on marketing those. A good tag line will only help you communicate how you stand out from the crowd – and help you stay there - once you're at that point.

Tag lines used by some of the thoroughbred related companies around the globe

Company name	Tag line
William Inglis and Son Ltd	Bloodstock Auctioneers and Agents since 1867
Magic Millions	It's All About Winning The Thoroughbred Success Story
Arrowfield	Where Breeding is Everything
AAP Racing and Sports	Forging the Future of Racing Technology
Boomerang Berrima Stud	Giving the horse every chance
Boscobel Stud	More Success
Burwood Stud	It's Your Move
Eureka Stud	There is an art to producing good horses
Fulmen Park	Offering the Complete Range of Thoroughbred Services
HollyLodge Thoroughbreds	Home of Durbridge
Lindsay Park	Where winning Cox Plates is Tradition
Mungrup Stud	Looking to the Future
Meadowland Stud	Welcome to our Business
Marodar Stud	The First Step to Breeding a Winner
The Macquarie Stud	IF you don't know where you are going, how can you expect your horse to know.
Newlands Thoroughbreds	At Newlands Thoroughbreds we understand that the serious breeder expects the very best, and we certainly deliver
Oaklands Stud	Where Breeding Winners is a Tradition
Rheinwood Agistment	Quality Care for your Valuable Thoroughbred
Raheen Stud	Giving broodmare owners a realistic chance
Tolka Stud	Value for money, Stallions all VOBIS qualified Where Broodmare and Foal Management are the Priority

Tremon Thoroughbreds	Breeders of Quality Race horses
Tyreel Stud	Tyreel broodmares have produced 43 Group winners including 15 Group One winners, 15 Group 2 races, 13 Group 3 races and over \$220 million in prize money... The Quality Continues.
Wattle Brae Stud	Nature's Homeland
Westminster Stud	Permanent Boarders and Spellers
Widden	Valley of Champions
The Australian Bloodhorse Review	A monthly magazine devoted to the thoroughbred
T2ol.com	Thoroughbred Tracking Online
Lawton Thoroughbred Racing	Share in the Dream
Breeding & Racing	Official AUSHORSE magazine
IRT	Your horse couldn't be in better hands
Mitavite	Better Feed Through Innovation
Graeme Webster	The only business award winning stable in WA!
Vinery Stud	Creating Generations
RACETRACK	Australia and New Zealand's biggest selling bi-monthly racing and breeding magazine
Koorungal Stud	Established 1910 A great family tradition
Melbourne Cup Carnival 2003	The Celebration that Stops a Nation
Alanbridge Stud	For a value for money way to breed a star
Yallambee Stud	A Few Good Men
Gow-Gates Insurance Brokers	For all your Bloodstock Insurance Needs
Massie Lodge (QLD)	Boutique Style Accommodation for your Horse
Vin Cox Bloodstock.com	Making Bloodstock Work For You

Brain Mayfield-Smith Racing Stables	Fate is what you are given. Destiny is what you do with it.
Graeme Rogerson Racing Stables	Winning the Racing World Over
Aquanita Racing	Where owners and horses come first
Bart Cummings	244 Group 1 successes – you can be part of it too
Lee Curtis Racing Stables	Where Dreams are Made Come, Share the Glory
Darley Australia	(nothing on Web but ad campaign "We've got Winning Ways" AND on their brochure "We have all the lines")
Star Thoroughbreds Pty Ltd	Syndication 100% of the thrill for a fraction of the cost
CompuSire	A new breed of software The world's most popular pedigree software
Let It Ride.com	World's largest online community and business network for horse racing
Logan's Livestock Insurance Agency	Australia's Oldest Bloodstock Insurance Agency. Respected Insurance Experts since 1965.
Virbac	Animal Health
Pencarrow Stud	Where only Perfection will do
Three Chimneys	The Idea is Excellence
Chequers Stud	History in the Making
Fayette Park	The Classic Connection
Haunui Farm	Certification of Class Auckland's Established Thoroughbred Breeding and Management Operation
Highview Stud	Where excellence is the only way
Java Lodge	Your Success is our Reward
Omahanui Thoroughbred Stud	Equine Excellence
Slade Farm	New Zealand Thoroughbred Nursery

Te Akau Stud	Where Success Breeds Success
Westbury Stud	An investment in quality – is a quality investment
Windsor Park Stud	New Zealand Breeder of the Year 1998 & 2001
Adena Springs (USA)	You Current and Future Source
Taylor-Made Stallions (USA)	25 years ... thanks to you
The Bloodhorse	International Thoroughbred Breeding and Racing
The Bloodhorse (Advertising)	Our Strength ... Your Advantage
EquineLine.com (USA)	The pedigree source that sales companies choose
Eaton Sales (USA)	Setting the Standard
Summerfield (USA)	The future starts here ...
FASIG-TIPTON	Since 1898
National Thoroughbred Racing Association	Go Baby Go
NATC (National Association of Two Year Old Consignors)	Bid. Buy. Race with Confidence
Darby Dan (USA)	For Classic Results
InterVet (USA)	Expect More
Adena Springs Kentucky	Buy. Breed. Race. Sell
Exclusively Equine (USA)	Your source for equine books, gifts, videos & more
Gainseway.	A New Way. Power. Passion. Performance.
TVG	The Interactive Horseracing Network
Paramount Sales (USA)	Integrity. Horsemanship. Experience. Innovation
Classic Star (USA)	Making the 'Sport of Kings' a Solid Business Opportunity
DODGE (USA)	Grab Life by the Horns
Ulti-Mate 2000	The World's Most Powerful Breeding Software
Equimax	Where Jobs and Horse People Find Each Other

WWW.Hammondequine.com	Knowledge. Experience. Innovation
BRISNET.com	Information is our business
Adena Springs	Your Current and Future Source
Camargue Stud (Sth Africa)	All you need to know about thoroughbreds
Clifton Stud (Sth Africa)	The stud that commands a reputation of absolute integrity and sincerity in all its dealings
Milkwood Stud (South Africa)	Fine horses bred by horsemen
Riethuiskraad Stud (S Africa)	The Cradle of Racing excellence

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