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FROM THE DESK OF DAVID POGUE

# The Dr. Seuss Jumble: Naming Web Sites

By DAVID POGUE  
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Could it possibly be true? Has all wit and cleverness already dried up in the naming of Web sites, less than 15 years after the Internet was opened to the public?

In the beginning, Web sites announced their own names. You pretty much know what you're going to find at Sears.com, Staples.com, McDonalds.com and Microsoft.com.

If you didn't already have a brand to maintain, you could always invent a brand-new domain name that explained itself, like "FreeCreditReport.com," "AddictingGames.com" or "GetFirefox.com."

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Even startups used to make at least a feeble effort to associate domain names with their functions. "Amazon" was meant to invoke the world's most voluminous river, hinting at the online store's massive sales capacity. "Flickr" suggests the millions of photographs pouring onto its pages. "Google" suggests a catalog of one googol Web pages. ("Googol" is a mathematical term that refers to 1 followed by 100 zeroes.)

But that's all gone now. These days, startups take the lazy way out: they choose goofy-sounding nonsense words. They think they're being clever by being unclever.

These are all actual Web sites that have hit the Web in the last year or so: Doostang. Wufoo. Bliin. Thoof. Bebo. Meebo. Meemo. Kudit. Raketu. Etelos. Iyogi. Oyogi. Qoop. Fark. Kijiji. Zixxo. Zoogmo.

These startups think that these names will stick in our minds because they're so offbeat, but they're wrong. Actually, all those twentysomething entrepreneurs are ensuring that we won't remember them. Those names all blend together into a Dr. Seuss 2.0 jumble.

So little imagination is on display nowadays, you could create an algorithm that spews out comparable domain names with the click of a button.

And that, in fact, is exactly what the Web 2.0 Name Generator does (at Dotomator.com). It coughs up new-age Web site names as fast as you can click the mouse.

Names like Cojigo. Roombee. Kwiboo. Trundu. Oobox. Ceelox. Myndo. Ababoo. Vible. Yambo. Eizu. Twimba. Yanoodle.

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As you can tell, these made-up names are absolutely identical to the actual company names listed above--equally meaningless.

(And a disclaimer. As the site says, "No, I don't promise that any of these names are actually available.")

Look, I know it's hard to come up with a great domain name. You want a name that's short, easy to type, and, above all, available. That's a challenge when thousands of good names disappear every day, snapped up by domain-name squatters or by legitimate businesses. The obvious choices, like Dictionary.com, Flowers.com and Music.com, were taken sometimes in the Paleolithic era.

(It's hard enough just coming up with a trademarkable product name in the real world. Years ago, I wrote user manuals for a professional sheet-music program called Finale. When the company wanted to spin off a simpler, less expensive version of the same program, they spent months trying to find a name that wasn't already registered to somebody or other. Want to know what they finally came up with? MusicProse. They actually named the program MusicProse.)

These days, though, you get the impression that today's startups aren't even trying. They go directly for the Web 2.0 Name Generator. They think that if Google or Yahoo got away with cryptic names, they can do it, too.

But here's a little wakeup call: People will learn to love your site's wacky name only if they fall in love with the site itself. Google and Yahoo became household nutty names only because everyone loved their services. They did not succeed because they had silly names.

And when you name your site Yambo or Roombee, that's a lot less likely to happen. You're stacking the deck against your own success.

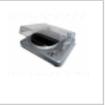
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