



# How to name a thing at Monzo



# How to use this guide

## **If you're using it for the first time**

Read the whole thing, please. There's context up front that you'll need before you get going.

## **If you've used it before**

Feel free to skip to the naming principles and process, starting on page 11.

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# This is the Patagonian Toothfish. A real looker, don't you think?



The Patagonian Toothfish was not a popular fish. When it appeared on menus, people tended to avoid it.

But a smart marketer in the 1970s realised the toothfish just had an image problem. So he renamed it the Chilean Sea Bass.

It was a masterstroke – suddenly Chilean Sea Bass was all the rage. The same fish, cooked the same way, was way more popular under a new name.

Patagonian Toothfish went for \$8 a pound. Chilean Sea Bass? \$25 a pound.

**“People don't choose  
between things, they  
choose between  
descriptions of things”**

Daniel Kahneman

# Names matter

The Patagonian Toothfish isn't a one-off. Researcher Lera Boroditsky proved that “even a single word can have a powerful influence over ‘well-informed’ decisions”, and that people don't even realise the influence particular words have.

So what we name things matters.

We should do everything we can to show people the benefit of what we're offering. And we have a responsibility not to mislead people about what they're getting.

## **Our names need to feel like part of the family**

We have a set of visual design principles, so everything we do looks like it comes from Monzo.

We have a tone of voice, so everything sounds like Monzo.

These principles do the same job for names.

As we get bigger, release more features and move into different markets (and languages!) it's more important that we've got a structured approach to how we name things.

# Things to know before you name a thing

## **Naming is subjective – there’s no such thing as a perfect name**

A lot of people initially thought Facebook was terrible, and Google sounded too much like ‘goo’. But now they’re classics because of the companies themselves. (Equally, a popular name can’t save a terrible idea.)

## **Don’t get too tied to a name – someone else might have used it**

Naming should be polyamorous. Keep a shortlist of at least a few you’re happy with just in case, and don’t get fixated on one dream name. Remember – there’s no such thing as a perfect name.

## **No one name can do everything on its own**

A couple of words can’t summarise everything about what something is and does. Think about how a potential name might fit (or not fit) with messaging, visual design and so on – the name doesn’t exist in a vacuum.

**“Even a single  
word can have a  
powerful influence  
over ‘well-informed’  
decisions”**

Lera Boroditsky



# First thing to ask before you name a thing

Does this need a name?

Not everything needs a name. Some things just need a description, or a way of talking about them. Take ‘Coin Jar’ as an example.

Originally, our Coin Jar was a single thing. And that thing needed a label. We needed to be able to say: “Hey, this is a ‘Coin Jar’. It rounds up your purchases and saves the change for you.”

But now, any Pot can be a ‘coin jar’, so it’s not a thing any more – it’s a process you go through when you create a Pot and decide if you want it to round up your change or not. That process doesn’t need a name; all we need to do is describe it clearly:

“When you set up a Pot, you can choose whether to round up your transactions and save the spare change into it.”

# Second thing to ask before you name a thing

Is this a stand-alone thing, or does it belong to a family?

For example, if this is a new savings feature, what else might come along later? Is it a type of Savings Pot, and we might have variations on a similar theme? Will people ever have to choose between these things side-by-side?

## **If it stands alone**

Nothing to worry about except our standard naming principles, on page 11.

## **If it's part of a family**

If the family already exists, just make sure it fits with any extra naming conventions for that family.

Eg if it's a new kind of Pot, it needs to have a one-word descriptive name followed by 'Pot': Savings Pot; Investment Pot; Committed Pot.

If it's a new thing that will become part of a family (so the first of its kind, but other similar things will follow), think about what conventions this mini family of names will need.

How will people be able to tell they're part of the same group, but also easily compare and contrast the differences between them?

# The Monzo naming principles

## PRINCIPLE 01

We keep it brief: no more than 2 words without a really good reason

Why? To protect the character count in the app, and because short names are more memorable.

## PRINCIPLE 02

We make things easy for people: don't sacrifice clarity for catchiness

Why? A name that's intuitively easy to understand is more important than a fun one – but a name that's both is best of all.

#### PRINCIPLE 03

## We use real words: don't invent abstract names for things

Why? Because we're transparent: a name should give some idea of what the thing is.

#### PRINCIPLE 04

## We respect our name: no riffing on Monzo

Why? All of the things we create and release are part of Monzo, and shouldn't compete with or dilute our name.

#### PRINCIPLE 05

## We use words customers use: strictly no financial jargon

Why? Because we don't use any elsewhere.

Caveat! Some bits of jargon are so widely used that we risk making things more complicated if we avoid them altogether. For example, 'Direct Debit', or even 'ISA'. But we should always have the debate about common terms before we use them, to see if there might be a better way to frame things.

## PRINCIPLE 06

# We avoid aggressive language: no military metaphors

Why? We're positive, friendly and inclusive.

## PRINCIPLE 07

# We don't mush: no sticking words together

Why? We can't do it with every name, so it leads to inconsistency.

# The naming process

## Step 1

Explain everything that's good and useful about this thing in writing – list each benefit separately.

## Step 2

Get Harry A to run a namestorm to come up with names. He'll use the list of benefits to approach naming from different angles.

## Step 3

After the namestorm, he'll whittle down the names based on:

- our naming principles
- if they have any inappropriate connotations
- whether they're trademarked by other companies

## Step 4

From what's left (if anything), he'll put together a short list.

## Step 5

You'll get together to pick a winner!

Note: this process won't rely on one person forever. But it does for now.

# Questions?

Chat to a writer in #writing-ask any time