PICKING AND PROTECTING YOUR BUSINESS NAME

How to choose a name that works, check that it's available, and secure it before someone else does.

TYPE: GUIDE REVIEWED: NOVEMBER 2026 TIME: 7 MINUTES LEVEL: BEGINNER

AT A GLANCE

- A good name is **easy to say, easy to spell, available and not too close to a competitor's**.
- Check **four places** before you commit: your state's business registry, trademark records, domain names and social media handles.
- Registering a company name with your state doesn't give you trademark rights. See **B-08 Trademarks, Copyrights and Patents in Plain Language**.

Why it matters

Changing your name after you've printed signs, built a website and earned reviews is costly. Using a name too close to another business's can lead to a demand to stop, or a lawsuit. A few hours of checking up front avoids that.

What makes a good name

- **Easy to say and spell**, in the languages your customers speak
- **Memorable and distinct** from competitors
- **Room to grow**: "Lina's Bakery" can add catering; "Lina's Cupcakes" is narrower
- **Available** as a business name, domain and social handle
- **Not confusingly similar** to an existing trademark in your industry

Step by step: checking a name

1. **Brainstorm 10 names.** Say them out loud. Ask 5 customers which they remember.
2. **Search your state's business name database.** Most states won't register a name that's the same as an existing business.
3. **Search trademarks.** In the US, search the official trademark database at uspto.gov. Look for similar names in similar industries.
4. **Search online and on maps** for businesses using the name, even if unregistered.

5. **Check domains** (.com and others) and **social media handles**.
6. **Pick your top choice** and secure it the same day: register the business, buy the domain and claim the handles.

Where to check	What you're looking for
State business registry	Exact or very close matches in your state
Trademark database	Similar names for similar products or services
Web and map search	Unregistered businesses already using it
Domain registrar	An available domain you like
Social media	Available handles on the platforms you'll use

> EXAMPLE
>
> **Amara** loved the name "Glow Mama" for her skincare line. A trademark search showed a registered "GlowMama" for cosmetics. She chose "Hush Skin" instead, found the domain and handles available, and secured all three that afternoon.

Using a different name from your legal name

If your LLC is "Amara Okeke LLC" but you sell as "Hush Skin," you may need to register a **DBA** ("doing business as") or **fictitious name** with your state or county.

Common mistakes

- **Falling in love with a name before checking it.**
- **Assuming state registration protects your brand.** It doesn't stop others in other states.
- **Choosing a name that's hard to spell.** Customers won't find you online.
- **Waiting to buy the domain and handles.**

Your checklist

- ☐ Brainstorm and test 10 names
- ☐ Search your state registry
- ☐ Search the trademark database
- ☐ Search the web and maps
- ☐ Check domain and social handles
- ☐ Secure your choice the same day

Key words, explained

Word	What it means
Trademark	A name, logo or slogan that identifies your products or services.
DBA / fictitious name	A registered name you do business under that differs from your legal name.
Domain	Your website address.

Where to go next

- **B-08 Trademarks, Copyrights and Patents in Plain Language**
- **L-01 Building a Brand on a Small Budget**
- **B-02 Registering Your Business, Step by Step**

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