Bad Startup Names

May 26, 2025 • spencerburleigh.com/bad-startup-names

I generally believe that good startup (and product) names are short, fairly easy to remember / spell, somewhat distinctive, and you can buy the .com / .ai domain name. I'm also a sucker for things that rank first alphabetically. If you meet (most of) these criteria you get a 4/5.

5/5 names have something extra that ties to what you do. This is great if you have high confidence you won't pivot but that isn't the case for most startups. Some of my favorite names of the last few years:

- Anthropic (might be a little big brain but the word means "relating to humans")
- Cameo
- Databricks
- Liquid Death
- Rainmaker
- Starlink

It’s pretty important to get this right. Changing your name once you’ve launched is really hard almost to the point you shouldn’t do it. Rebranding takes a ton of time, and pushes your startup back towards no one caring.

I also think it’s quite easy to have a bad startup name:

Startup names are bad because they are overused

almost all of these I have seen 3+ times!

Updated January 2026. Send me more bad names and I’ll add them here!

- Agora
- Alloy
- Apollo
- Arc
- Atlas
- Beam
- Bloom
- Bolt
- Central
- Cover
- Delta
- Feather
- Gather
- Haiku
- Hatch
- Ladder
- Lambda
- Landed
- Levels
- Lever
- Magic
- Marathon
- Orbit
- Patch

- Puzzle
- Radar
- Slope
- Sonder
- Spark
- Tandem
- Trellis
- Whisper
- Zest

Startup names that are bad because they have other flaws

- Random nouns unrelated to your business that are hard to rank on. Always check how many Google results the name you want has! Bonus points if you do a search on the Delaware Division of Corporations database [a]!
- Names that box you in. My last company, Rent the Backyard was a great name for customers but a bad name for investors who thought we only ever wanted to build backyard homes.
- Names that someone can't spell if they need to be able to spell it (matters directly proportional to the number of customers you have).

The cardinal rule? Know your audience

Corollary: b2b names probably matter a lot less than consumer!

Sometimes being last is best: "US Airways" was a great name

Excerpt from View from the Wing [b]:

"US Airways took over American Airlines a decade ago and kept the American name, just as America West kept the larger airline's name when it took over US Airways. The US Airways brand went away in 2015.

...

I simply assumed that the 'US' name was chosen to give the carrier a more national brand. But it may have had a much more practical explanation, according to a story that long-time airline CEO Ed Colodny would tell new hires when they onboarded.

- His main interest in the airline's name change was the phone book.

- Allegheny was the first airline listed in the yellow pages. People would shop for ticket prices by going to the phone book and calling airlines, calling Allegheny first and calling United Airlines last.
- When they would reach United, which would have a price similar to others they'd called, they'd be on the phone *anyway* and ask to make the purchase rather than starting over and dialing another carrier."

Links

a. icis.corp.delaware.gov/ecorp/entitysearch/namesearch.aspx
b. viewfromthewing.com/the-brilliant-name-change-that-helped-us-air-outsmart-every-competitor-in-the-industry