

Product Branding Strategy: When to Give a Product a Name vs. Using a Generic Descriptor

By Raúl Belluccia



Giving products distinctive names and logos can add value, but it also entails significant risks. When is it beneficial to opt for proprietary names, and when is it better to use generic descriptions?

A classic dilemma every manager faces when creating a new product or service can be summarized as follows: 'Should we give it a proprietary name and logo, or should we identify it by its generic description?'

Suppose a company called 'La Sureña' has been manufacturing, packaging, and selling jams, canned goods, and dry pasta for years. Its packaging has always featured the La Sureña brand as the primary identifier, and the products were described generically: orange marmalade, whole plum tomatoes, spinach noodles, etc.

One day, the company acquires the well-known brand 'Tucosol,' a ready-to-use pasta sauce. For the first time, it owns a product with a proprietary name and logo that enjoys high brand awareness and equity. Consequently, the La Sureña brand moves to the bottom of the Tucosol packaging, not as the main brand but as an endorser brand.

At that moment, an eager manager will surely appear and ask the bombshell question: 'Wouldn't it be beneficial to give each of our other products a distinctive name as well? For instance, our orange marmalade could be called 'Kity,' our noodles 'Doña Pepa,' and so on.'

If this company were a bank, the dilemma would be whether to give names and logos to its various loans, account types, and service packages. The question of whether to brand products and services is crucial. At first glance, branding seems entirely positive, with no downsides. However, this is not the case. One must proceed with caution.

The key is knowing when it is useful to brand a product or service and when it is better to define it generically. Unfortunately, as is often the case in business, this choice is not arbitrary; it does not depend on personal preference. The outcome is not the same regardless of the path taken. It is not like choosing between one shirt color and another. In many cases, the decision is clear. It is obvious that if Ford launches a new car model, it must be named, but it is not so easy to know if La Sureña would benefit from having a 'Kity' orange marmalade.

It is no secret that launching a new brand is not free; it requires a significant investment in communication and resources. Furthermore, it implies a fragmentation of marketing efforts: previously, all initiatives built equity for La Sureña, but now two brands must be nurtured (and in communications, a budget for two does not always stretch to feed three). This branding effort could end in failure.

Risks of Creating a New Brand

A new name, no matter how good, does not magically solve anything. Here are some of the dangers that lie behind a misguided decision:

- The public may never adopt the new name, continuing to call it 'La Sureña Marmalade.'
- The new product brand may never achieve the prominence of the parent brand, leaving both with diluted equity.
- Nurturing the new brand may require a greater investment in promotion and advertising than 'Kity' actually warrants.
- The company may ultimately decide to discontinue 'Kity' and revert to the previous state, resulting in a loss of brand image, money, and effort.

Before giving a product a brand name and logo, it is wise to consider a few points to avoid problems. The temptation to brand everything is often irresistible, but the consequences of a poor strategy are unavoidable.

Guidelines for Product Branding

Let's examine the main conditions that a product or service should meet to merit its own brand name and move beyond a generic descriptor.

For a bank, is it advisable for its 'home loan credit line' to be renamed 'Procasa'? For a brewery, is it beneficial for its 'dark, strong, and intense' beer variety to be called 'Brava'? For a company that sells legumes, is it a good idea for its 'chickpeas' to be named 'Garby'?

This is no small dilemma. It involves a strategic shift from a 'corporate brand + generic product' model (a branded house architecture) to the management of two linked brands: a product brand and an endorser brand. As mentioned earlier, this runs the risk of doubling the complexity instead of simplifying matters.

Experience shows that a product or service identified by a generic name could be given its own brand when it meets one or more of the following conditions:

- The product or service in question has a significant value proposition that makes it distinct from and superior to the generic equivalent. (This is the difference between an 'aseptic package for food' and 'Tetra Brik').
- The product or service requires a significant advertising investment to achieve market penetration; that is, it needs to have its own 'first-person' narrative. (Consider the difficulties an automaker would face in advertising if its models did not have their own names).
- The generic description is a barrier to sales, either because it is confusing, too long, or difficult to understand. (Imagine the difficulties a faucet salesperson would have if the product lines lacked specific names for identification).
- The product or service's expected lifespan is long enough to allow the public to learn, remember, and use the name. Short-lived models rarely have their own brand name. (This is often the case with most home appliances, which are known as 'Moulinex,' 'Sony,' or 'Braun,' rather than by a specific product name).

Final Conclusion

Giving a product its own brand is a serious, financially burdensome, long-term undertaking that can become a costly burden for a company's marketing and communications. The purpose of this article is to provide some general guidelines for approaching the subject (it is not a prescriptive recipe), acknowledging that each case has its own unique nuances that must be taken into account.

The initiative will be successful if the public adopts the name and naturally calls the product by it. But if a father, knowing his son is going to the supermarket, tells him, 'don't forget to buy me a jar of La Sureña orange marmalade,' then the unfortunate 'Kity' brand will have failed.

Published on 19/12/2025

FOROALFA

ISSN 1851-5606

<https://foroalfa.org/en/articles/product-branding-strategy-when-to-give-a-product-a-name-vs-using-a-generic-descriptor>

