Good and Bad Names for Scholarly Communications Projects

David W. Lewis
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Introduction

I have spent the past several weeks research projects and organizations that create and manage tools and services the support digital scholarly communication. Based on this experience I would like to offer some advice to those looking to find names for new projects of services.

The Standard Advice

A quick Google search will provide any number of sites that provide guidance on selecting names for products and companies.[1]

The consolidated advice from the web guides from this group is:
1. Research the names before using it.
2. Think about a real word that describes the service or a key feature of the service the startup will provide.
3. Having a name that ties into your idea isn't bad, but don't make it so narrowly focused that if you change your idea the name no longer works.
4. Avoid names that don't clearly relate to your line of business. They are likely to cause confusion with consumers and probably won't show up in Internet searches for your type of product or service.
5. Names should have two syllables (or close) having a name close to two syllables helps it pass the phone test and makes it easier to remember.

6. The name needs to pass the phone test? Is it easy to say and spell correctly over the phone or in a loud room?
7. In general, shorter is better. Less to type, less to shorten, less to remember.
8. Plug the words into LeanDomainSearch (https://leandomainsearch.com). It will give you a list of available dot com domains that contain these words.
9. The domain name doesn't matter. The name itself matters much more than having the same domain name. Pick a great name, go with a tweaked domain name.

This general advice would suggest that names like Archive-It, Data2paper, DuraCloud, EndNote, and Unpaywall are good names. And I think they are. They are all descriptive – the names point to what the product does without being overly specific. All are two syllables or so. They all pass the phone test, though the "2" in Data2paper might need some extra explaining. Examples of the URL tweak are https://projectblacklight.org or https://sparcopen.org.

Lewis' Advice for Scholarly Communications Names

Again, my perspective is colored by the experience of try to find information on various projects and services. Based on this experience I would add several other pieces of advice. The objective is to be able to be found. People will want to find basic information about projects and since most scholarly communications projects are small you want to make sure you give them the best chance of doing so.

1. Stay away from names that are used in many contexts and describe many things or a thing that is very common. For example: Portico, Blacklight, Fulcrum, or Dimensions. A good rule of thumb is that if Wikipedia has a disambiguation page go with something else. Hypothes.is, by using the period dodged this problem, but like "2" in Data2paper, the period needs to be explained. Symplectic might not seem like a common term, but it turns out it is in mathematics, so it has the same problem.

2. Names made up of multiple common words are better, but still have problems. For example, Digital Commons or Humanities Commons.

3. The name should have at least eight characters. More in not a bad thing. It might be that the smaller the organization the bigger the name should be.

4. Unique is important, even if it is not obviously descriptive. HathiTrust is good. As are Omeka or Islandora. If Microsoft Word thinks the name is misspelled you have probably passed the uniqueness test. Editoria might seem to pass this test, but it turns out that it is a common word in Italian.

5. The best names are unique and descriptive. More characters are not a bad thing up to a point. Good examples are: Archivematica, BitCurator Consortium, DataCite, or Educopia Institute

Also, get project a Wikipedia article. Even a really short one with warnings about insufficient sources is useful as a way of getting people to your website.

Happy naming!

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[1] See for example: "The Igor Naming Guide: Strategies, Tactics & Insights," https://www.igorinternational.com/process/naming-guide-product-company-names.php; Alina Dizik, "3 Common Mistakes to Avoid When Naming Your Business," Entrepreneur, March 4, 2013, https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/225859: "Find Cool Project Names (No Hair Pulling Required)," UsersThink, https://usersthink.com/startup-names/, and Joel Gascoigne, "How to Name Your Startup, Buffer, https://buffer.com/resources/how-to-name-your-startup