

Tips for choosing the right small business name

- 1) **Check that the name isn't already taken:** The first thing you should do before applying to set up a company is search the index at Companies House to see whether there already are companies with similar names to the one you had picked out (www.companieshouse.gov.uk/info). It might also be worth checking the phone book and reading trade press to see if any other business is already using the name you've thought about
- 2) **Don't break the rules:** You can't pick just any name for your company – there are rules to follow. For example, the name must end with 'Limited', 'Unlimited', 'Public Limited Company' or their abbreviations. Your company name could also be rejected if it's the same as another company's name or if it's offensive. In addition, some names need approval from the Secretary of State before they can be registered, e.g. if you would like to include words like England and English in the name
- 3) **Business name vs company name:** The two are not the same so don't get them confused. The business name is the name used for carrying on business and can be different from the registered company name. Business names aren't registered with any government department any longer, however, some rules still apply for choosing your business name – check with Companies House
- 4) **Secure a matching name for your website:** Before finally deciding on the company or business name it is also worth checking that your preferred domain name is available. There is a body managing all the registered UK domain names on the internet, called Nominet (www.nominet.org.uk). Nominet doesn't proactively sell domain name registrations, but can provide advice on registering and maintaining your name
- 5) **Trade Mark is a separate issue:** Registering a name prevents another limited company from having the same name but it doesn't mean that another business can't use it, for example to name a product. If you also want your company name to be a TM, you need to contact the Patent Office (www.patent.gov.uk). This is also worth doing to avoid getting into a difficult and potentially expensive situation where your company or business name proves to be a TM owned by somebody else