

From the Kitchen

7 October 2009

A few days ago I saw someone in a wheelchair. My jaw dropped and I stared. Not at the person wheeling along, but at the name on the chair – the brand name: *KARMA*. I'm not kidding. You can look it up on the Web; I did, as soon as I got home.



Who would come up with such a name? Who would allow it to be attached to a wheelchair that they want to sell? Who would sit in such a wheelchair?

I'm now on the look-out for other choice branding. I'm expecting to see a pram with the label *LUST*; crutches called *IDIOT*; condoms with the name *OOPS*; the next incarnation of the Windows operating system: *DUKKHA* ...

Given the possibility that in life, as in the world of physics, there is an equal and opposite reaction to every action, perhaps the name for the wheelchair is appropriate. Maybe it was someone's joke in the wheelchair factory and it was taken seriously. *My* jokes often are.

Branding is usually aimed at attracting customers and at saying something about the product. So, you could expect to see a hairspray called *TEXAS HOLD'EM*, a car called *GRUNT*, coffee called *HEART-THROB*. But what has people use names such as *ORGASM* for a drink or *SEX* for a perfume? Mind you, there *is* a perfume shop in Mount Eliza called *BREATHLESS*. Given that I have difficulty around strong smells, I wouldn't mind if it was called *LAST GASP*.

Recently I saw a sign on a lingerie shop: "Fashion for next to nothing". *NEXT TO NOTHING* would have been an appropriate name for the shop. Another lingerie shop is called *BRAS AND THINGS*, right next door to a pawnbroker called *BRASS AND THINGS*. In Richmond there used to be florist called *SHOOTS*; diagonally opposite was a shop selling artificial flowers, called *OFF-SHOOTS*.

There are churches which indulge in punning on their, sometimes, billboard-sized signs. Many years ago, one in Malvern, boasted, "We are the soul agents for this area." Another: "Are you a mess? Join the mass."

Slogans can be catchy, clever, annoying, memorable, or all of these. A road safety campaign once advised that "Children should be seen and not hurt." What about the campaign to have people wear helmets on bikes? "Don't hit the road without one." I'm old enough to remember the television advertising in the '60s, promoting appliances: "Don't kill your wife with work, let electricity do it."

There are underpants called *NO KNICKERS*; they could be "The clothes you don't wear when you're wearing clothes", or "un-Clayton's undies".

My own slogan? "Bringing ideas to life". Ideas are just that. They can be thought, voiced, debated and argued about. They become (potentially) useful when manifested in such a way that they lead to something new, or improve someone's life, or inspire people to do something worthwhile. Sometimes people have ideas but lack the experience or wisdom or knowledge to take them further. Sometimes people have ideas but lack the experience, wisdom and knowledge to realise that it would not be useful to take them any further, or to know that someone else has already done so.

Product names and slogans can work well when they're tongue-in-cheek, as with *NO KNICKERS* and the advertising campaign that went with it. So we could have a baby stroller called *PUSHY* or dark sunglasses called *HIDING*. I could start a gardening service franchise and call it *MOW HAWK*, with a suitable portrait on its vehicles and trailers.

When it comes to catchy slogans, one has to choose one's words carefully. There was a well-known security company that boasted, "We are the best in security." Abbreviations can get you into trouble: there was a property agent called Universal Network, which advertised this on its office windows as "*UN REAL ESTATE*". Maybe they were selling building blocks on the moon.

You have to be very careful if you want to be taken seriously. When I lived in London, there was a travel agent called *UP IN THE AIR RESERVATIONS*. I remember a hairdresser/barber offering "Cut-throat prices". Ouch! And a tyre business offering "Low prices – to beat inflation".

It's time to take my Spoodle (Spaniel x Poodle) to the forest. In the USA his breed is called 'Cockerpoo' (Cocker Spaniel x Poodle). Now here's an idea: cross a standard Poodle with a Great Dane and end up with a Great Doodle. I could also try breeding a German Pointer with a Schnauzer and I would have a GPS to guide me on my walks.