

## How to find the right branding agency

In the search for a branding or naming agency, some screening criteria should be kept in mind. Unlike with advertising agencies, there is no so called „pitch“ in which companies present their initial ideas for a small fee. Thus, the question is: How to assess the quality of the selected branding agencies?

### **1. Do I need a branding agency or would a traditional advertising agency be sufficient?**

Branding agencies specialize in the creation of brand names and consulting in this respect along with all peripheral services. Besides the linguistic checks and conceptual tests, these services include, above all, the extensive similarity trademark searches. In contrast, advertising agencies mostly focus on creative skills for the development of name ideas. Comprehensive trademark searches and the resulting usability appraisal of name proposals are rarely offered. Therefore you should question precisely whether and in which scope the agency specializes in the creation and evaluation of brand names.

### **2. References**

As in other areas, also branding agencies should present a sufficient number of references. That means both a list of customers as well as some name examples of the agency's creative work. It will give you an overview about the branches, company sizes and projects the agency has been active before. Even if it's not possible, due to non-disclosure-agreements, to show the whole range of customer references, a certain number should be published anyhow to provide proof for the agency's expertise.

### **3. Expertise & special knowledge**

In addition to the references, also the duration of market activity (For how long does the agency already exist?), the special knowledge and the vitae of the individual employees will give an overview of the branding agency's expertise. The expertise should not be confined to a single person, but spread over several heads with different specialist priorities.

### **4. Legal and economic independence**

Also the question for the agency's set-up should not be dismissed. Not infrequently, the branding services are provided by subsidiary companies or business units of large agency networks that are neither legally independent nor free in the selection of their internal and external resources. Occasionally, there are also fran-

chising companies in which the executives of the respective national affiliates only hold a minority interest and are subjected to fixed purchasing rules (e.g. trademark searches and trademark database providers). The best possible creative freedom is given if a company works free from group directives, network dependencies or franchising guidelines.

#### **5. Agency & project size**

When selecting a branding agency, make sure that it suits you well - with regard to both the team size and the size of the past and current projects. Occasionally, naming services are also offered from individual entrepreneurs without the resources and the knowledge to conduct e.g. trademark searches in more than 150 databases. Moreover it is important that the branding agency and the acting persons fit to you as a customer. This ranges from the collaboration on the interpersonal level and the necessity of having a project leader right from the agency's managing board up to the technical expertise of the individual team members.

#### **6. Are the relevant services carried out inhouse or sourced externally?**

In addition to the creative work of developing a new brand name, the conceptual and the detailed legal trademark searches for a name proposal are of particular importance prior to the selection of a brand name. It is important that those key tasks are part of the agency's core competences and carried out inhouse by permanent employees. If the creative services and above all the important search work is carried out by external network partners or alternating persons, it can't be guaranteed that the results are provided with a consistent quality and with the utmost search care.

#### **7. Authenticity & honesty**

Apart from all the screening criteria mentioned before, especially the agency profile, the plausibility of the promised performance and the authenticity of the project managers play a significant role for the final assessment. Often, it is the gut feeling that decides if the agency has what it takes for a long-term cooperation. Since a branding project is often a multistage process, in which the customer's requirements have to be precisely screened and understood, it is extremely important that you have the feeling of being understood as a principal. It is the only way to secure that you have found the right partner and that you can expect excellent results.