



## TEL EPISODE #045:

### ***Hello, My Name Is Awesome* with Alexandra Watkins**

Show Notes: <http://www.theelpodcast.com/tel-045-hello-name-awesome-alexandra-watkins/>

*Welcome to The Entrepreneurs Library, the only book-centric podcast that reviews all the top-selling business books and shares author's perspective, firsthand. This is your resource to finding the next great book that will enable you to grow personally and professionally. Welcome your host, Wade Danielson.*

**WADE:** Thank you for joining us on The EL. Today we have Alexandra Watkins, author of *Hello, My Name Is Awesome*. Welcome, Alexandra, and thank you for joining us on The Entrepreneurs Library.

**ALEXANDRA:** Thanks, Wade. Great to be here.

**WADE:** Will you take just a moment to introduce yourself and tell us just a little bit about you personally?

**ALEXANDRA:** Sure. Alexandra Watkins. I am a self-taught person; I surprisingly didn't go to college. When I was in 8th grade, I knew I wanted to be in advertising, and I was able to talk my way into an internship with an ad agency and eventually land at Ogilvy & Mather.

I've kind of talked my way into a lot of things over my lifetime, and becoming a namer is one of those things that I talked my way into on a Match.com date, believe it or not. The entire thing was rated "G." But yeah, that's how I got into the naming business. I'm an interesting person; I've traveled to more than 45 countries, including Libya, Zimbabwe, and Cuba.

**WADE:** Excellent, thank you for sharing that. Now let's jump right into your book, which in my personal opinion is one of the best book titles I've heard to date, which is *Hello, My Name Is Awesome*, which was made available for purchase on September 15th, 2014.

Alexandra, we're going to move fairly quick, but we're going to cover the questions that our audience, which is made up of entrepreneurial readers, what they basically want to listen to. The first one is, what was the inspiration behind writing Hello, My Name Is Awesome?

**ALEXANDRA:** Great question, Wade. I did not want to write a book. My parents are authors, and I know that writing a book is a lot of work for not always a lot of money, so I never had entertained the idea.

Then I got an email. It was from a publishing company, from the managing editor, and the headline said "Thought about a book?" The email said, "Hey, we love your website, we love the writing on it, we love your names. You need to write a book, and we would love to publish it." That's how the book came about.

Now, I didn't jump on it right away. I really struggled with "Do I want to take all this time to write a book?" I knew I'd be giving up my weekends and my social life. I probably deliberated about 3 weeks over it, and then I finally decided to do it. And wow, I am so glad I did. This has been such a great ride, and the book is just now coming out, and I've already gotten so much mileage out of it. I love that I have a book now.

**WADE:** What would you say differentiates your book from others regarding the same topic?

**ALEXANDRA:** Well, there are no other books on naming. There's plenty of books on branding; there's some really old, dinosaur books on branding, *The 22 Immutable Laws of Branding* – these books were written in the '70s. My book about naming, the rules have changed. Ever since the internet, everything has changed in the name game. So that's what's great about my book.

But I'll tell you why no one has ever written a book on naming: because namers are traditionally linguists, and you cannot teach linguistics in a skinny little book. You need to go to school for years and years and years to get linguistic training. Well, I don't use linguistics in my naming; I just teach people how to name things

using concepts and being clever. So that's why I was able to write a book, because I can actually teach people how to do what I do. There's no science involved at all.

Also, I wanted to tell you one of the reasons I decided, after deliberating should I write this book, is about 90% of the people that contact my company, Eat My Words, to hire us, can't afford us. And I hate turning people away, so I thought the book would be something at least that they could get and it would help them on their own. So that was part of it.

There's a quote in the beginning of my book that kind of encapsulates that, and it's from Picasso. It says "The meaning of life is to find your gift. The purpose of life is to give it away." So my colleagues think I'm insane, and I might be cannibalizing my own business, but I don't think so. I'm just trying to let everybody see – kind of pull the curtain back, and "Hey, here's how it's done, and you can do it too."

**WADE:** Going along with what you're saying as far as the audience that's going to be reading this book, how would you want them to engage with your book? Is this a book that you start from beginning to end, or is this one they can jump in and jump out as a resource?

**ALEXANDRA:** I'll tell you this: for entrepreneurs, they're probably going to want to jump straight to Chapter 3 on domain names. I would say if you could have a little restraint and back up and start from the beginning, the book really is written in sequential order, and it's a skinny little book. It's 96 pages. You can read it in an hour. Well, I can read it in an hour; maybe you want to take a little more time and highlight things and really ponder some of the thoughts.

But yeah, it's not a jump-around book, but I do think the domain chapter is probably the one that will be the most enlightening to entrepreneurs.

**WADE:** Okay, excellent. Now that we know a lot of the background behind the book, this is my favorite part, where I'm going to hand over the mic and basically allow you just to take us from A to Z. Take us through your book and give us a great summary of what it's all about.

**ALEXANDRA:** All righty. My book is organized in a fashion that makes it – first, before you jump into creating names, you really need to understand what makes a name good and what makes a name bad. Because if you don’t know that and you’re just getting to the brainstorming chapter and going for that, you haven’t learned anything. You don’t have any filters yet.

So the book starts off with a chapter called “SCRATCH,” and SCRATCH is an acronym for the 5 qualities that make a name great. I’ll tell you before I dive into that that – I’m sorry, it’s SMILE. Okay, I have to start over with that one.

The book starts out with a chapter called SMILE, and SMILE is an acronym for the 5 qualities that make a name great. Now, SMILE comes from my philosophy “a name should make you smile instead of scratch your head.” So the first chapter is “SMILE,” the 5 qualities that make a name great, and the second chapter is SCRATCH, when to scratch it off the list because it makes you scratch your head, and that is another acronym.

I’ll just tell you SMILE. The “S” in SMILE stands for suggestive. You want to have a name that suggests something about your product. It can’t say everything, obviously, but you don’t want a name that just doesn’t give people a clue.

Then the “M” in SMILE stands for meaningful. You want your name to be meaningful to your customers, not just to you. We had a potential client tell us that they named their company after their daughter. That is meaningful to her; it’s not meaningful to any of her customers, and it says nothing about the company. So that’s where you have to step out of yourself and think of your customers and how they’ll view your name.

The “I” in SMILE stands for imagery. People remember pictures and images much more easily than they remember words or letters. If I were to say the name of two energy drinks to you, Wade – these are both women’s energy drinks, so you might not have heard of them – one of them is called Bloom and the other one is called Enviga. Which one of those conjures up imagery?

**WADE:** Bloom.

**ALEXANDRA:** Bloom, yeah. Flower, right? It's easy to remember. So when you're at the grocery store facing a wall of energy drinks, and you're like "What was that one I was supposed to pick up for my wife or girlfriend?", you can remember. That little flower pops into your head, and like, "Oh, Bloom." But Enviga – how would you spell Enviga, by the way?

**WADE:** E-n-v-i-g-a? (laughs)

**ALEXANDRA:** Yeah, that's a really good guess, because I would spell it like invigorate, with an "i," and it did – it's no longer in existence – it did start with an "e." But Bloom, it's one of those names that lends itself to visual imagery. Other names like that are Irish Spring, Timberland, Range Rover, Leapfrog.

The "L" in SMILE stands for legs, and that's when your name lends itself to wordplay so you can have some extended mileage with it. The example I like to give is of my own company, Eat My Words. Our blog is called The Kitchen Sink. Our visitor parking space has a sign above it that says "Eat My Words client parking only. Violators will be eaten." We have a wireless network called Candyland; our passwords are always fun, related to food. We have packages Snack, The Whole Enchilada, The Big Cheese, Just the Meat – so you get the idea. We have a lot of fun. And if you have a name that lends itself to wordplay and it has long legs, the possibilities are endless.

Next, the "E" in SMILE stands for emotional. This is really important. You want your name to make an emotional connection with people. 50% of purchasing decisions are based on emotion. Think of a time when you purchased a bottle of wine; you've never tasted it before, but you like the label. Maybe the label jumped out at you for the graphics, maybe it was the name, but you bought the wine because of the label. That's an emotional purchase. Remember, 50% of names are based on emotion, so you want a name that makes an emotional connection with your audience – and again, not just with you.

The next chapter, SCRATCH, are the 7 deadly sins, when to scratch it off the list. If your name is spelling challenge. Now, here's something that used to not matter. Before the internet, who cared how you spelled your name? Before email, domain names, Siri – didn't matter. Now it does. If your name looks like a typo, scratch it off the list.

Say your name into your iPhone; see if Siri knows what you're talking about. Then type it in an email and see if it gets flagged as misspelled. Same in a Word document. That's a problematic name, and not only will it drive people crazy with the Spell Check flagging it, it's going to drive you crazy to always have to spell your name for people. Or worse, journalists get really mad – I don't know if they get really mad, but they get annoyed. Your name looks like a typo, they look it up, like "Oh really? They spelled 'ship' s-h-y-p? Yes they did."

The "C" in SCRATCH stands for copycat. A great example of copycat is the "i" in front of everything. Apple owns that – iPhone, iPad, iCloud. Apple owns it, you don't. Don't even go there. Don't try it. It just smacks of being a copycat. So be original and come up with your own new idea.

The "R" in SCRATCH stands for restrictive, and restrictive names are limiting. Those are names where you don't look into the crystal ball, and then the next thing you know, you've outgrown your name. There's a store in Canada called Canadian Tire. Now, down here in the States, I've been to a tire store probably twice in my life; in Canada, 9 out of 10 Canadians shop at Canadian Tire at least once a week. But they sell more than tires. They sell toothbrushes and toilet seats and tackle boxes and trees and tropical plants and toys and telescopes and tents – you get the idea. It's kind of like the Sears of Canada.

They outgrew their name. Now, it's fine for everyone in Canada, because they all know – there's over 400 locations of Canadian Tire. But what if Canadian Tire wanted to roll into the U.S.? They'd have to spend a whole lot of money explaining to people "we're more than just tires." And by the way, that was their tagline in the '80s.

The “A” in SCRATCH stands for annoying. That’s when your name, maybe it’s spelled backwards, or it’s two words forced together. It just doesn’t feel good.

Tame is the “T” in SCRATCH, and that’s when your name just doesn’t stand out in a sea of sameness. You can’t afford to be tame as an entrepreneur. You need to have your name be loud.

The second “C” in SCRATCH stands for the curse of knowledge, and that’s where you know something, but your customers or prospective customers don’t. It’s hard to unlearn what you know, so again, you have to step outside yourself and make sure that your name isn’t cursed. And a lot of times this happens where somebody will name something in a foreign language, forgetting that “Oh, yeah, I know Swahili, but my customers don’t.”

And finally, the “H” in SCRATCH stands for hard to pronounce. Anytime a name is hard to pronounce, it’s unapproachable, unfriendly – your name is part of the customer service experience. It’s the first thing people probably encounter when they come across your brand. Don’t make it unapproachable. You want it to be easy to pronounce. You don’t want it to be like when you’re in a restaurant and you see something on the menu that you’d like to order, but you don’t know how to pronounce it, so you don’t order it. It’s happened to all of us. You don’t want a brand name that has the same effect.

And I’ve got to tell you, the woman that did the audio for my book, Gina, she was telling me how hard it was to pronounce a lot of the names in this book, because there’s no rhyme or reason to some of these. So that’s SCRATCH.

Once we get through SCRATCH, then we jump into the domain chapter now that you know what makes a name good or bad. This is where I really help people out. The #1 misconception in naming something is first of all, people start in the wrong place. They start by seeing if there’s an available domain. That’s not important. In fact – and I’m being very honest here – it’s often the very last thing we look at at Eat My Words when we’re naming something. Our clients know that if you can’t get an exact match domain name, that’s okay. You can add a modifier.



Tesla – great car, fancy car, expensive car – what’s at tesla.com? Not Tesla. Tesla’s website is teslamotors.com. Does it matter? No. Let’s say you sell your startup to Facebook. First thing you want to do, you buy a Tesla. You go online and you type in “tesla.com,” you get to some really weird parked page. What are you going to do? Are you going to give up? Are you going to say “Eh, no, I can’t bother to find Tesla”? No, you’re going to go to Google and type in “Tesla cars,” and boom! There it is. You click on the picture or the link and you’re on the Tesla website.

Have you even noticed what their domain name is? No. Do you care? No. Are you not going to buy a car from them because they don’t own the domain? No. Do you not trust them because they don’t own the domain? No.

Let that sink in. Really think about it. The next time you’re trying to find something online and it’s not at the exact domain name where you think it’s going to be, observe what you’re doing. Are you giving up, or are you just going to Google and finding it that way? Many big companies have started out not owning the pure domain of their name. Oh by the way, did I tell you it’s teslamotors.com is their domain name?

For instance, Facebook started out as “thefacebook.com” and in 2005 acquired facebook.com, reportedly for \$200,000. Slideshare was slideshare.net for a long time. They still use that. Square continues to use their original domain name, which is squareup.com. Basecamp for years was basecamphq.com. They had over a million users, and their domain name was basecamphq.com.

So stop obsessing over having the domain name. You’re not going to get it, and if you can just put that aside as a criteria, it is going to open up your world.

In that chapter, I also talk about other strategies you can do. One thing that we love to see people do is create a phrase. For instance, there’s a company – I go to the Fancy Food show every year, and I love peanut butter. There’s like 14 peanut butter booths, and I always stop by and have a sample. One year, I turned the corner and I saw a banner above a booth, and it said “ilovepeanutbutter.com.” I have never forgotten that.



Now, remember, I went to 14 peanut butter booths that day, but which one did I remember? Ilovepeanutbutter.com. That's not the name of the company. The company is Peanut Butter & Co. But if you go to peanutbutterandco.com, which is a domain that they own, it actually redirects you to ilovepeanutbutter.com, which is their official URL. That's a name that makes a strong emotional connection, and they have a great domain name that makes people smile, and they probably paid \$9.95 for it.

In the book, I give you a long list, almost 30 different extensions – not extensions, but words that you can put before or behind your name. One that's not in here that I've seen lately is "hello." Hellonextstep.com. We're using it on Join.me; our Join.me name, someone else has Eat My Words, so we're Hello Eat My Words. Hello is just a really friendly thing.

So don't obsess over the domain name now. Wait until your company is really big or well-funded and then go in and buy the pure domain. But don't let it stop you now. And I promise you, you will be able to sleep at night.

So domain names, tell you what not to do. Using one of those crazy top-level domain extensions, like .ly – .ly is the country code for Libya, and I've been to Libya and I didn't even know that. Stay away from trendy stuff like that; .com is king. I think it always will be. I'm surprised – I thought people would go to .biz, but they didn't. Maybe one day, though. Just like we ran out of 800 numbers and we switched to 877 and 866, and now nobody cares what your area code is, I imagine at some point we're going to have that same thing happen.

All right, Chapter 4 is the really fun part. That's the precursor to the really fun part, the Creative Brief, and that's where you are given a roadmap to follow and a lot of questions to answer about what are the goals for your name? Everything from what's your brand positioning to who's your target audience, what is your brand personality. In this chapter, under all of those things, I give examples so you can see "Oh, that's what they're talking about." Because I know not all of these are familiar terms to people that don't do marketing for a living. We have it filled out for a sample client, Cartwheel Kitchens, and you can see what they wrote and then go back and recreate it for yourself.

Once you have a completed Creative Brief – and I do urge you, spend a lot of time there – then you get into the brainstorming part. That’s the really fun part. Now, contrary to popular belief, brainstorming meetings, I find them completely ineffective. Sitting in a white room staring at a whiteboard is not where colorful ideas come from, right? They don’t just materialize out of thin air.

The best brainstorming resources are online, and I have many of them. It’s way more than a thesaurus. There are many, many places to go to get ideas and inspirations – everything from Google Images to iTunes.

I was naming a chili pepper flavored brownie, went to iTunes, I typed in the word “burn” and searched song titles. The Elvis song “Burning Love” came up, and I remembered those great lyrics “hunika hunika burning love,” and that became the flavor name of the brownie, Hunika Hunika Burning Love. Would I have ever come up with that sitting in a white room, staring at a whiteboard? Mm, probably not. So the internet is your best resource for brainstorming. I give you all kinds of websites to go to. That’s a lot of fun.

And then finally, I give you some ideas on how to review names. It’s easy to come up with the names sometimes, but it’s hard to get everybody to agree. This chapter tells you, if you have more than one person on your team, how to build consensus. I have 12 rules for building consensus. I’ve developed these over the years by having to do it constantly with our clients, and they really work. I talk a little bit about focus groups and why you shouldn’t use them.

More than anything, I think the most important thing here is if you just think of some names that would’ve been killed if they were focus grouped – Fossil. Fossil fashion brand. This is what somebody might’ve said: “Eww, dirty old relic.” Or The Body Shop, that great store franchise for lotions and potions. “The Body Shop? Gross, makes me think of a greasy mechanic.” Or Coach. Luxury brand Coach. “Coach? That’s a sweaty guy with a whistle. Coach? That’s the worst place to sit on an airplane.” That’s why we don’t believe in focus group testing names. If Richard Branson had asked people to weigh in on what they thought of the name “Virgin,” it would’ve never flown.

So that's the hardcore chunk of the book. There's also a chapter on name changes and the pros and cons. You may have a name right now that you already know is a bad name because people can't pronounce it or it's troublesome with the spelling or nobody knows what it means, and you might be considering changing your name. This chapter tells you the pros and cons, and it's pretty much there's so many good reasons to do it, and they far outweigh the bad reasons to do it – the #1 bad reason being you might hurt the feelings of whoever came up with the name that you have now that you don't like.

There's a little bit on logo and identity design, and I also give a list of our really trusted service providers that we use for everything from trademark screening to brand identity and web design. And that is the book.

**WADE:** Thank you very much for taking us through that. It sounds like there's a ton of information, and even the resources that you're talking about that are actually within the book, it sounds like it's plentiful. So I can't wait to actually dive in myself and look at – one, I'm already going to learn some of the mistakes that I've already made, so I don't make with companies that we start in the future. I think that'll be kind of a fun process.

But with that being said, there's a ton of information, a ton of content and context which you just went over, and that's why I believe this next question is somewhat difficult but still very important. And that's if the reader could only take away one concept or principle or action item out of your entire book, what would you personally want that to be?

**ALEXANDRA:** Well, this is it, and listen closely: any time you have to explain how to spell or pronounce your name or what it means, you're essentially apologizing for it, and that devalues your brand. When you're starting with a blank slate, don't even go there.

**WADE:** That's huge. Very good. My next question is along the lines. I believe that your book, if people really sit down and focus on reading it, they're going to see

some different – I know just from listening to you that I’ve had some paradigm shifts on some things that I’ve done wrong in the past.

This next question is, if there was only one other book that you could recommend based on the paradigm shifts it created or the way it’s impacted your life – and again, this doesn’t have to be an entrepreneurial book or an advertising book or anything like that, but what’s a book that really had a huge impact on you?

**ALEXANDRA:** A book that I absolutely love is *Give and Take* by Adam Grant. It’s about how people that are givers, like myself, are more successful, and then there’s takers, and then there’s matchers. Adam is a professor at Wharton, and the book is a fascinating read. Lots of really good stories. For the givers, it makes a great gift to give to the takers. That’s a book I love.

And just a plug for one more book that I love is *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath. That’s the book that inspired the SMILE and SCRATCH test, and Dan Heath actually endorsed my book. His endorsement’s on the cover. Those guys have been really inspirational to me in my career.

**WADE:** Excellent, thank you for sharing those. Alexandra, before we depart, can you recommend the best way for our listeners to get more information on you and your book, *Hello, My Name Is Awesome*?

**ALEXANDRA:** Yes. Go to [eatmywords.com](http://eatmywords.com), and on the top of the page, in the top nav, click on “Book.” That will open the micro-site for the book; you can download a free sample chapter, too. The domain name chapter is right there for you.

**WADE:** Excellent. You were talking a little bit about your services that you do, I guess earlier in this interview. Is that also the resource or the best place for them to go if they want more information on your expertise or what you guys do there?

**ALEXANDRA:** Yeah. Under our Services page, you’ll see it’s a dollar sign in a little green icon. Click on that; it has our packages and prices. We just today introduced a new package for apps, because we’re getting asked to name so many apps. We love to name apps. And it’s called The Appetizer. (laughs)

**WADE:** Oh, awesome. (laughs)

**ALEXANDRA:** Yeah, we're excited to have something special, because we love apps, we love to name apps, and every app developer we work with has been a lot of fun. And there's usually just one decision maker, which is why we're doing something special for this particular audience.

**WADE:** Perfect. Alexandra, thank you so much for coming on and sharing such an awesome resource with our audience.

**ALEXANDRA:** Thank you. It's been a great interview.

**WADE:** Thanks again for listening in today. If you would like to get your hands on *Hello, My Name Is Awesome* or any of the other resources mentioned by Alexandra, just look at the show notes at [TheELPodcast.com](http://TheELPodcast.com). And if there is a book you would love to hear reviewed by the author, please visit us on iTunes and leave us a review with that book title.

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