

## A Red by Any Other Name

**R**azzmatazz. Manatee. Inch Worm. These are just a sampling of Crayola's newer colors. Whatever happened to red, blue, and yellow? They're still there, of course, but over the years, they've been joined by Jazzberry Jam and a rainbow of other ambiguous hues. But why would Crayola come out with names that don't describe their crayon colors? Because when it comes to using color—and flavor—to name products, the more imaginative and non-descriptive the name, the likelier consumers are to prefer the product. And we're not just talking crayons.

From Ben & Jerry's Chubby Hubby ice cream to Gatorade's Riptide Rush sports drink to nail-polish manufacturer Hard Candy's shade of Trailer Trash, vague color and flavor

names proliferate in the marketplace. "I was curious about all these weird names," says Elizabeth Miller, assistant professor of marketing at Boston College, "and wanted to find out how they were affecting people's purchasing and preferences." When Miller, along with Wharton marketing professor Barbara Kahn, conducted a study on the effect of color and flavor names on consumer choice, they discovered that consumers are increasingly drawn to offbeat names that give little information about a flavor or product color.

For example, when Miller and Kahn held an experiment with jellybeans, they found that people were more apt to choose moody blue, Florida red, and monster green than the more typical and descrip-

tive blueberry blue, cherry red, and watermelon green names. In a second experiment, participants were asked to order sweaters out of a catalog without seeing the actual colors. Again, Miller and Kahn found that, rather than choose sweaters with descriptive colors like dark red and light brown, people were more apt to pick sweaters labeled antique red and lucky brown. On top of that, individuals were likelier to order greater quantities of the ambiguously named sweaters.

"People are always trying to figure out why a marketer chose a name," Miller explains. At the same time, she adds, "they know that marketers exist to try and sell a product, so people figure that there must be some pos-

itive reason why a marketer chose an unusual name." Though they may not understand that reason, an ambiguous name tends to pique their curiosity. Therefore, why label a product yellow or lemon yellow or even rain-slicker yellow when you can call it party yellow?

But before you start attaching strange color and flavor names to your products, Miller is quick to point out that such naming strategies don't always succeed. "Unusual color and flavor names work best for hedonic product categories, like fashion and food goods," she cautions. But they wouldn't work in other product categories. Razzmatazz Health Insurance or Inch Worm Savings and Loan, anyone?

—VADIM LIBERMAN

of a googol of late-night talk-show-host jokes no matter what its name? After all, there are plenty of bad names that turn out good.

Last fall, Nintendo announced that its new game platform would be named Wii. "Wii sounds like 'we,' which emphasizes this console is for everyone," the company painstakingly explained. "Wii can easily be remembered by people around the world, no matter what language they speak. No confusion. No need to abbreviate. Just Wii. Wii has a distinctive 'ii' spelling that symbolizes both the unique controllers and the image of people playing it."

Everyone hated the name, and Nintendo faced a firestorm of criticism. "Think of all the objections," says Steve Manning of San Francisco-based Igor International. "Not only is

it slang for urination, but Nintendo also had this problem where they were perceived by gamers as skewing to a younger audience, while the company was really trying to elevate the product to an older audience, a segment that they haven't been able to tap into. That was a huge controversy."

But the controversy turned out to be a PR bonanza for Nintendo. When Manning wrote a blog post suggesting that the name was so bad that Nintendo must be "punking" its customers and would announce the real name when the product shipped, his readership jumped six-fold to thirty thousand page views. "Nintendo didn't have to put a dime behind it," says Manning. "All they had to do was say the new name is Wii and it just lit up the Internet, and the press as well, because everybody came out and said, 'What a crappy

