



## A FEW POWERFUL WORDS

**M**arketing has become a science. Almost everything can be tracked, and analysis can be conducted to see if firms are getting the desired return on investments. However, creating an amazing tagline is still more an art form than a science.

First, a definition. A tagline is a brand element, and it's usually the first thing that a prospect sees about the firm. It consists of a few words, designed to make a positive first impression. Usually, a tagline is placed in close proximity to a logo. A tagline differs from a slogan because a slogan has a shorter lifespan related to a specific marketing campaign.

The tagline conveys the firm's most important message—sometimes without clearly stating what that is. Nike has one of the best taglines of all time: “Just do it.” Nike didn't say, “We make the best athletic shoes.” Instead, it transcended its own products and became a part of America's culture.

Ingredients to a strong tagline include impact, longevity, simplicity, and originality. The tagline should deliver an important and relevant message about the brand that is powerful to its prospective clients, existing clients, and all other stakeholders. It should be able to stand the test of time and to be used consistently as a foundation of the organization, but it does not need to be permanent. The tagline should be succinct and easy to understand and recall. The greatest taglines are short, fresh, differentiating, and catchy. That's how a company connects with a target audience.

NAPFA's board of directors developed a new tagline for the organization earlier this year: “The Power of Trust.” While it's not likely to become as familiar nationwide as “Just do it,” the tagline does succinctly convey a very important and clear message about what NAPFA advisors are all about.

### HOW TO HIT A HOMERUN

Creating a tagline is a challenge even for the best marketing minds. As NAPFA learned, it takes a lot more work and time than is apparent to produce a simple, memorable statement. Although writing taglines is an art form, here is a process that increases the odds of success.

**Step 1: Conduct company research.** This is an area that is under-appreciated. Start by conducting a strengths-weaknesses, opportunities-threats analysis of your firm.

**Step 2: Be aware of the competition.** Identify where your firm has a competitive advantage and know where your firm is at a disadvantage. Track which words your competitors use and what messages they convey.

**Step 3: Have a purpose.** Know your mission and core values, your short- and long-term business plans, and your brand. Define the personality and character of your firm.

**Step 4: Research your clients.** Understand what your clients value and why they choose to stay with you. What terminology do they use to describe your firm?

**Step 5: Involve key players.** There's a fine line between having too many cooks in the kitchen and not including the decision-makers at an early stage. You want to avoid having someone derail good ideas because he or she was not brought in at the ground floor. A strong leader is important.

**Step 6: Brainstorm.** Early in the process, no idea is a bad idea. Capture key words and phrases. Encourage individuals to play off each other.

**Step 7: Shorten the list.** Select from among the ideas, and then share them with clients, prospects, strategic alliances, and other staff members. Be prepared to repeat the process if the results are mixed or if promising new ideas emerge.

**Step 8: Go live.** When you make your tagline public, use it in every communication (website, brochures, letterhead, etc.). Consistency will lead to impact.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Here are a few ideas to keep in mind as you develop your tagline. First, a weak tagline is worse than not having one at all. A weak or inaccurate tagline will not only confuse prospects, but it will have to be replaced, at additional effort and expense.

Second, avoid using industry jargon. For example, although the word “fiduciary” is powerful within the financial services industry, it's not well-understood by the public. Using it in a tagline would probably reduce the power of the tagline (although it was effective for NAPFA's educational campaign).

Third, consider a wide range of approaches for your tagline. Many firms start with a direct, literal approach, rather than a figurative approach. Literal can be effective, but it's not the only option. Here's an example of two taglines used by the charitable organization The United Way: *Live United* (figurative), or *Give. Advocate. Volunteer.* (literal).

Finally, it can be very helpful to get assistance from a third party. A marketing professional can walk the key players through the process and even suggest terms for a tagline. But the outsider does not have to be a marketing professional—a spouse or a focus group of clients can be highly effective. The point is to research whether a tagline resonates with an intended audience. 

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