**What’s in a Name?**

The importance of having a great name for your game should be obvious, right? And in many ways it is – a good name should not only not only attract and intrigue, but tell the consumer something about the game and the experience they are about to have. Quite a lot to ask from one or two words on the front of the box!

But there are pitfalls, particularly in international markets, where that idea for a great name can lead to difficulties. One of the biggest issues (as well as a big opportunity) lies in that word ‘international’. Games are sold all over the world, and many are marketed by international corporations, who are selling the same game in different language versions to different countries.

Although games are, by their nature, culturally based, and require communication, and therefore language, to play, if you want to market a game across Europe, with its 24 official languages, the less you have to translate the better. Having one name that can go on all those boxes, feature in the commercials, and race to the top of the bestseller lists is a big plus!

Hence *Settlers of Catan*, launched in Germany by Kosmos in 1995 as *Die Siedler von Catan* and translated into many languages using variations of that phrase when it was introduced, has gradually morphed into the simpler and much more international *Catan*.

Making up a name, or using a combination of words to create a new word, can also be a solution – it worked for *Pictionary* for example. Evocative words from related languages - examples include *Uno*, *Ligretto*, *Coloretto*, *Hanabi*, and *Inis* – are also an option.

Latin has been a popular , if unlikely, choice , going back to the 1940s and before. In English, *Parcheesi* is known as *Ludo*, which is Latin for ‘I play’. This inspired Anthony Pratt to call his new detective game *Cluedo* … sadly this didn’t mean a lot in North America, so it ended up being known as *Clue*. Now a new generation of designers in Europe are looking back to Latin for names, rather than their own languages, resulting in *Mysterium*, *Terra Mystica*, and more.

If your native language is English, you do start with an advantage. More games sold under a single brand name (as opposed to those increasingly rare examples where the name is translated) have English words or phrases as titles than any other, reflecting the domination of English as an international *lingua franca*. From *Monopoly*, *Scrabble* and *Trivial Pursuit* to *Pandemic*, *7 Wonders* and *Codenames*, English is almost universal.

However, even if you are coming up with a name in English, here are some of the things you really ought to to think about …

1. **Which came first – the game or the name?**

Great game ideas can come from all sorts of places and inspirations – a conversation, some random bits and pieces you were playing with in a bar, something you dreamt up to keep your kids amused in the. Sometimes it starts with a name that comes from a well known phrase or saying. However, that saying may not be as well known to your audience as you thought.

For example ‘ When Pigs Fly’ is a phrase many of us will be familiar with – as well as conjuring up an amusing image, it has that additional meaning of something that is very unlikely to happen. A variation (Pigs Might Fly) was the inspiration for a game that Spear’s Games sold successfully in the UK back in the 1990’s – but when it came to marketing the game in other countries, we discovered that the phrase meant very little! The French would say ‘quand les poules auront les dents’ (when hens have teeth); the Germans ‘am Sankt Nimmerleinstag’ (on St Never-Ever’s day) and the Italians ‘quando Pasqua viene a maggio’ (when Easter comes in May) – none of which worked too well with a game based around flying pigs.

1. **False friends**

There are words in other languages that look familiar … but that can be misleading! ‘Gift’ in German means ‘poison’. ‘Bang’ in Dutch means ‘afraid’. ‘Hot’ in Swedish means ‘threat’ – and there are many more. Using one of these words can lead to unfortunate misunderstandings. I once worked on a game themed around car racing - we were looking for a brand name that was internationally viable, and didn’t infringe on any of the obvious racing brands; after some time, we came up with ‘Super Route’. I will have to leave you to ask an Australian or New Zealander why that’s not a great name for their market, but suffice to say it wasn’t deemed appropriate for a kid’s game!

1. **Protection**

It may seem very obvious, but think about whether your name can be protected. If the name is too obvious or purely descriptive, it is very unlikely to be trademarkable. You might have just come up with the greatest game about monkeys ever seen, but you are not going to be able to register ‘The Monkey Game’ as a name. Trademark attorneys can assist you with this, but a simple internet search of the appropriate trademarking bodies is an essential first (and free!) step.

So, without rejecting an idea just because it started when it was raining cats and dogs, bear in mind that, if the theme and design of the game are dependent on the name, it would be sensible to make sure that that name is

a) available

b) protectable

c) international

Having said that – the licensor may well decide to change it anyway, but at least they will have paid for the privilege …