Do Quibi's Problems Come Down to a Confusing Name?

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I will come right out and say that I think Quibi is a confusing name. But that isn't necessarily a bad thing. Let me explain. Good names are usually only good in the rearview mirror. At the time they are created, they seem risky and sometimes dumb. Are Google and Apple inherently good names, or do they have the benefit of a rosy rear view? Probably the latter.

Terrible timing has certainly contributed to a difficult start for the Jeffrey Katzenberg-founded mobile-video platform, which launched earlier this spring. Still, maybe it isn't just the timing. Maybe they made bad decisions. Maybe the product doesn't fit. A name should be judged based on how well it matches the company's criteria, not on public perception. Because, as mentioned, success shades how we perceive the company, not the strength of the name. Phil Rosenzweig calls this tendency to be biased by success *The Halo Effect.*

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A company that raises nearly $2 billion should plan for success. They certainly planned a naming strategy with that in mind. The criteria assumed rapid adoption in the U.S. and

quick adoption abroad. Quibi is purpose-built for travel. It feels familiar in the UK with its close tie to the slangy *quid*. You can imagine the French embracing it as “Kee-bee,” similar to *Quebec*. It is at home in Arabic and Hindi. The alternating consonant/vowel, consonant/vowel construction is reminiscent of one of the most well-traveled brands, Coca-Cola.

However, those positives aren’t positive in the current light. If the naming strategy assumes rapid usage in the U.S. and that doesn’t happen, the international flair puts up barriers to a skeptical stateside audience with more time on their hands than usual. The primary obstacle is unclear pronunciation.

We have all been in a bar and become interested in an exotic beer, only to order the IPA because we didn’t know how to pronounce the other one. Same with a dish in a restaurant or an author in a bookstore. People, in general, don’t like to look stupid, and few things make you feel as stupid as saying something incorrectly.

There are a couple of ambiguous points in Quibi. I mispronounced it before I heard someone say it. Rhyme is one of the factors that improve memorability in a word; maybe I was trying to force it into the name. Also, the decision to end the name in “-i” rather than “-y” makes the word look more French. I found myself saying “Kee-bee” as I was reading to myself. It feels more snappy, more energetic and in-line with quick snippets of content.

The second hangup is with the tagline. Currently, it reads: “Quick bites. Big stories.” That leads you to think the name is a blend of the words *quick* and *bite*. But, as the reader, you quickly reconsider this because pronouncing it “Kwi-bye” doesn’t seem right. It doesn’t feel or look right, and you are left a little confused. If you combine *quick* and *big*, you get closer to the right pronunciation, but *quick* and *big* aren’t as

meaningful as *quick* and *bite*.

I will admit to Googling the name to figure out its pronunciation. There were several videos, which probably isn't a good sign. The name is intended to be pronounced like "Quimby" without the *-m*, which is the last point of confusion. With this pronunciation, you would expect the more standard English spelling of Quiby.

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All is not lost, though. Defying expectations can be a good thing. The result is memorability. The more you have to think about the name, the more likely you will be to recall it. If Quibi can overcome launching in a pandemic by providing users with great content, and assuming it can move quickly abroad, then I think we will all be looking back in 10 years thinking: "Damn, Quibi is a really great name." If not, I am afraid it will end up with the Nova in the dustbin of misunderstood and misremembered names that we don't like because the product didn't live up to our expectations.

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