BuildUp BOOKINGS

BONUS 02 OF 11 · MASTERING VACATION RENTAL MARKETING

Naming Your Vacation Rental or Property Management Company

A companion resource to the 2nd edition

WHAT YOU'LL HAVE WHEN YOU FINISH

A shortlist of names that survive both a creative test and a legal one, and a clear decision about the single most consequential naming tradeoff in this industry.

INSIDE

01 Do this now
02 The depth
03 Worked example
04 Your turn
05 How you'll know it worked
06 Where this lives in the book

By Conrad O'Connell
BuildUp Bookings

Facts checked November 2026
buildupbookings.com/book-bonuses

PART 1

Do this now

Start here. Each one works on its own.

---

1 **Write down what your company actually stands for, in one sentence.**
Not a slogan. The thing that would still be true if you renamed tomorrow. Everything below is downstream of this.

2 **Generate twenty names before you evaluate any of them.**
Separating generation from evaluation is the entire trick. Judging as you go kills the good ideas along with the bad ones.

3 **Decide the geography question early.**
Whether your market's name goes in your company name is the biggest structural decision here and it is close to irreversible. The short version: if you can imagine ever managing properties outside your current market, keep the market name out of the company name and put it in your page titles, headings and Google Business Profile instead — those are free to change and that is where the search benefit actually lives.

4 **Run your top five through SMILE and SCRATCH.**
The creative test and the practical test. Both, not one.

5 **Check the four availability gates before you fall in love.**
Domain, federal trademark, state registration, social handles. A name that fails any of these is not a candidate, no matter how good it is.

6 **Say it out loud to someone over the phone.**
Then ask them to spell it back. This finds problems no amount of desk work will.

7 **Check it against Google's business name rules.**
Your Google Business Profile name must reflect your real-world business name. Padding it with locations and service terms you cannot substantiate as your actual name is keyword stuffing, and it now risks having the name edited or the profile suspended. Keywords are fine when they genuinely *are* your name, on your signage and registration. This trips up more vacation rental companies than any other item here.

PART 2

The depth

The full method.

Start with substance, not sound

Before naming anything, define what the business is. Your name has to be able to sit on top of this for a decade.

- **What do you stand for?** Three to five values you would actually defend when they cost you money.
- **Who is your guest?** Families, couples, groups, remote workers, adventure travelers.
- **What is genuinely different about you?** Not "great service." Something a competitor could not claim with a straight face.
- **What does your place feel like?** The landscape, the light, the season people come for.

Then mine your surroundings. The best names in this industry come from the specific rather than the generic: local landforms, historic names, the river, the ridge, the mill, the light on the water at a particular hour. Local folklore is an underused source. Generic aspiration — Premier, Elite, Luxury, Dream — is the most crowded shelf in the category.

Generate before you judge

Fill pages. Twenty names minimum, and resist evaluating any of them until you have all twenty. Work through these prompts:

PROMPT	WHAT IT PRODUCES
Words from your values and mission	Names with built-in meaning
Images your market evokes	Sensory, memorable names
Synonyms and metaphors for those images	The less obvious options
Local landforms, history, folklore	Names nobody else can copy
People, places, books that shaped you	Names with a story behind them
Compound words and unexpected pairings	Distinctive constructions

The best names usually have a story. If you cannot explain in one sentence where the name came from, you have a word rather than a name.

The one decision that is hard to undo

Does your market's name go in your company name?

This is the biggest structural choice in vacation rental naming and it deserves an honest accounting of both sides, because the standard advice is bad in both directions.

The case for putting it in. Guests searching for accommodation in your market type your market's name. Being *Broken Bow Cabin Rentals* means instant relevance, immediate comprehension, and a name that explains itself in a search result. For a single-market operator with no plan to expand, this is genuinely a real advantage and I would not talk you out of it.

The case against. It fails the R in SCRATCH — Restrictive — completely. The moment you take on properties in the next valley or the next state, your name is fighting you. Rebranding after you have built recognition and links and reviews is expensive and slow. And you are competing on a name that half a dozen companies in your market have some version of, which makes you harder to distinguish and harder to remember.

Where I land: if you can imagine ever managing properties outside your current market, do not put the market name in the company name. Put it in your page titles, your headings, your Google Business Profile description, and your content — all of which are free to change, unlimited in quantity, and where most of the search benefit lives anyway. The search advantage of a geographic name is real, mostly in Google's map results, but it only counts if the name is genuinely yours everywhere, and the cost of outgrowing it is high.

The middle path that works: a distinctive brand name plus a geographic descriptor in your positioning rather than your legal name. The brand travels; the descriptor changes as you grow.

The SMILE test — is it a good name?

Watkins' creative test. A strong name hits most of these.

	TEST	THE QUESTION
S	Suggestive	Does it hint at what makes you distinct?
M	Memorable	Will someone recall it a day later?
I	Imagery	Does it put a picture in the mind?
L	Legs	Does it give you a theme to build on — visuals, copy, sub-brands?
E	Emotional	Does it make someone feel something?

Legs is the one people skip and the one that pays off longest. A name with legs hands you a visual language, a tone, and room for property collections and sub-brands without inventing a new identity each time.

The SCRATCH test — is it a bad name?

Watkins' elimination test. Failing any of these is close to disqualifying.

	TEST	FAIL CONDITION
S	Spelling	Anyone has to ask how to spell it
C	Copycat	Too close to a competitor, or not legally ownable
R	Restrictive	Boxes you into one place, one property type, one size
A	Annoying	Forced, gimmicky, or trying too hard
T	Tame	Flat, descriptive, uninspired — says what you do, not who you are
C	Curse of knowledge	Only makes sense if you already know the business
H	Hard to pronounce	People aren't sure how to say it, so they avoid saying it

Spelling deserves particular weight in this industry, because your guests will hear your name from a friend, in a podcast, or over the phone, and then have to type it. If they cannot get from hearing it to finding it, the name is costing you bookings in a way you will never see in any report.

The four availability gates

Run these before you get attached. Most naming advice skips them, and this is where favorite names usually die.

1. Domain. You want the exact `.com` if you can get it. Not `.net`, not a hyphen, not a deliberate misspelling — the guest who hears your name will type the `.com`. If the exact match is gone, a short natural addition is fine (`ridgelinecabins.com` rather than `ridgeline.com`) but a contorted workaround is a tax you pay forever.

2. Federal trademark. Search the USPTO's Trademark Search system at **tmsearch.uspto.gov**. Note that this replaced the old TESS system in late 2023, so any guide still telling you to use TESS is out of date. Search your name, obvious misspellings, and phonetic equivalents, in the classes that cover lodging and property management services. A clear search is not legal advice — if the name matters to you, pay a trademark attorney for a real clearance search before you file. It is cheap relative to rebranding.

3. State business registration. Check your Secretary of State's business entity database. A name can be federally clear and still unavailable to register in your own state.

4. Social handles. Check the platforms you will actually use. Consistency across handles is worth real money in recognition, and it is far easier to get on day one than to reclaim later.

Then do the search test: search your candidate name and see what already owns those results. If page one belongs to a national brand, a band, or something unfortunate, you will be fighting that forever.

Google's business name rules — read this before you decide

This is where vacation rental companies get themselves into avoidable trouble.

Google requires your Business Profile name to reflect your **real-world business name** — the one on your signage, your website, and your registration. Adding descriptors, locations, service terms, or promotional language purely for search benefit is keyword stuffing, and it now risks having your name edited by Google or your profile suspended.

The distinction that matters: **Google does not penalize keywords that are genuinely part of your name.** If you are legally and consistently *Broken Bow Cabin Rentals* — registration, signage, website, invoices — that is your name and you are fine. What gets you suspended is being *Ridgeline Cabin Co.* everywhere in the real world and *Ridgeline Cabin Co. | Luxury Broken Bow Cabin Rentals Hot Tub Pet Friendly* on Google.

So if you *want* a keyword-rich name, commit to it as your actual name everywhere. If you do not, keep your profile name clean and put the keywords in your categories, services, description, and website — where they belong and where they carry no risk.

Then narrow, honestly

Shortlist five. Run all five through both tests. Do not rush it — this name will be on every confirmation email, every sign, every invoice and every review for as long as the business exists. And do not decide it alone: say each candidate out loud to people who are not invested, and watch which one they remember when you ask them again the next day.

PART 3

Worked example

One example, all the way through.

How the fictional Ridgeline Cabin Co. — the running example across these bonuses — got its name.

The substance, first. A mountain cabin operator with 40 properties, all in one valley but with a real intention to expand into the next market within three years. What they stand for: properties they have personally inspected, honest photography, and being reachable by an actual human. The place itself: a long exposed ridge that everyone in the area uses as a landmark and orients by.

Twenty names, generated before any evaluation. A sample of the range:

> Ridgeline · Fox Hollow Cabins · Summit Stay · Bearfoot Retreats · The Long Ridge Co. · Alpenglow Cabins · Timberline Stays · Broken Bow Premier Cabin Rentals · Blue Hour Cabins · Switchback Cabin Co.

The geography decision. *Broken Bow Premier Cabin Rentals* was the instinctive front-runner and they killed it deliberately. It would have performed well in search on day one, and it would have been actively in the way by year three, when they plan to take on properties two hours away. It also fails Restrictive and Tame simultaneously, and there were already two similar names in the market. They put the market name in page titles and their Google Business Profile description instead.

The shortlist, scored.

NAME	SMILE	SCRATCH FAILURES	VERDICT
Ridgeline Cabin Co.	Suggestive, memorable, strong imagery, excellent legs	none	**Winner**
Alpenglow Cabins	Beautiful imagery, emotional	**Spelling** — heard on a podcast, nobody types it right	Cut
Bearfoot Retreats	Memorable, playful	**Annoying** — the pun wears out; also crowded	Cut
Summit Stay	Clean, easy	**Tame** — could be anybody, anywhere	Cut
Switchback Cabin Co.	Good imagery, good legs	Close second — lost on being slightly harder to say	Runner-up

Why Ridgeline won on Legs, which was the deciding factor: the ridge gives them a visual system (the contour line as a graphic device), a naming convention for property collections (Ridgeline Signature, Ridgeline Pines), a tone, and a genuine local story — everyone in the valley knows that ridge. None of that came free with *Summit Stay*.

The four gates.

GATE	RESULT
Domain	`ridgelinecabins.com` available — a natural addition, not a contortion
Federal trademark	Clear on `tmsearch.uspto.gov` for lodging and property management classes; attorney ran a full clearance before filing
State registration	Available
Social handles	`@ridgelinecabins` available on the three platforms they planned to use

Google Business Profile name: `Ridgeline Cabin Co.` — exactly as it appears on their signage, site and registration. Nothing else. The market name, “cabin rentals,” “hot tub,” and “pet friendly” all live in their profile description, services and website content, where they carry search value and no suspension risk.

PART 4

Your turn

Your worksheet. Print it and fill it in.

Substance

What we stand for (3–5 values):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Our guest is: _____

What is genuinely different about us: _____

What this place feels like: _____

Generate — twenty names, no judging

1.	6.	11.	16.
2.	7.	12.	17.
3.	8.	13.	18.
4.	9.	14.	19.
5.	10.	15.	20.

The geography decision

Could we ever manage properties outside this market? ☐ Yes ☐ Genuinely never

Therefore the market name goes: ☐ in the company name ☐ in titles, profile and content only

Reasoning, in one line: _____

Score your top five

NAME	S	M	I	L	E	SCRATCH FAILURES	KEEP?

The availability gates

NAME	.COM	USPTO CLEAR	STATE CLEAR	HANDLES	SEARCH RESULTS CLEAN

The spoken test

Say each finalist to three people over the phone. Ask them to spell it back, then ask again tomorrow which one they remember.

NAME	SPELLED RIGHT?	REMEMBERED NEXT DAY?

The decision

Our name: _____

Where it came from, in one sentence: _____

Google Business Profile name will be exactly: _____

☐ Domain registered ☐ Entity registered ☐ Handles claimed ☐ Trademark attorney engaged

PART 5

How you'll know it worked

What to check, and when.

Immediately — the spoken test is your real signal, and it is available before you commit. If people spell it back correctly and remember it the next day, the name works. If they do not, no amount of design will fix it.

Within a month of launch — watch for people finding you by name. Branded search volume starting from nothing and climbing means the name is transmitting. Watch also for how often you have to spell it on the phone. If it is every time, you chose wrong, and it is better to know at month one than year three.

Within a year — the test is whether the name has stretched. Have you been able to build a visual system on it? Name property collections without inventing new brands? Add a market without the name fighting you? That is Legs, and it is the only part of this you cannot evaluate on day one.

The failure you can still catch early: if you registered a Google Business Profile name padded with keywords that are not genuinely your name, fix it now rather than waiting. A suspension takes your Maps presence with it, and reinstatement is slow.

PART 6

Where this lives in the book

Where to read more in the book.

Chapter: *What's in a Name?* and *Choose a name and trademark it* — Step 1 of Building Block 1 (Your Branding) in the Featherweight chapter, right after the ideal guest persona. Almost everything else in the book gets easier or harder depending on this decision.

If you already have a name, run it through SMILE, SCRATCH and the four gates before changing it. Rebranding is genuinely expensive once you have accumulated recognition, reviews and links, and you are often better off building on what you have.

Then use the **Brand & Style Guide** bonus to turn the name into a full identity, and the **Vision & Mission** bonus to write down what it stands for.

BUILDUP BOOKINGS

Want help putting this to work?

We've worked with more than 300 vacation rental companies on direct bookings, homeowner acquisition, SEO, paid media and AI search. If you'd rather not do this alone, book a free call at **buildupbookings.com**.

All eleven book bonuses: **buildupbookings.com/book-bonuses**

© 2027 BuildUp Bookings. Use it freely in your own business. Ridgeline Cabin Co. is fictional. Platform rules, fees and features change; the facts in this guide were checked in November 2026.