

## CHOOSING NAMES. © Ian D. Richardson

Back in 1996, when I left the staff of BBC World Service, I set up Richardson Media Limited with plans to write newspaper articles, do consultancies and teach television journalism. I did all three for a number of profitable years, but then, by accident, I stumbled across the story of a tragic scandal in my extended family. This led to a book and a screenplay, both called *God's Triangle*.

Having witnessed the unhappy experiences of a number of my former BBC colleagues who went down the traditional publishing route, I chose to self-publish. This was when I began to have doubts about my company name. Despite the growing acceptance of self-publishing as a legitimate route for authors, there is still the residual stain, if I can call it that, of vanity publishing.

It became clear when I first published *God's Triangle* that it didn't look good to have a book by Ian Richardson, published by Richardson Media Limited. Indeed, I was asked by more than one person "Weren't you able to find anyone to publish your book?" My answer, whether they believed me or not: "I didn't try because I didn't want to see months, perhaps even years, go by with *God's Triangle* and my later books gathering dust in trays on the desks of various publishers. Anyway, I had the advantage of a background in publishing, printing and public relations, plus a wife with excellent editing and design skills.

Self-publishing worked with *God's Triangle* because I had it in circulation in Australia and the UK within weeks and a couple of months after that, I had a film offer. But I remained uncomfortable about the name, so my wife/business partner and I decided to change it. But to what? We didn't want to keep "Richardson" or "Media", so that left only "Limited".

It took many days and advice from family and friends before we settled on Preddon Lee Limited. So why that name? Well, first of all, we wanted something that meant nothing, so that should the company change its operations in the coming years, it wouldn't matter.

Some of the world's most successful companies have names that mean zilch. They are just names. That said, we needed to avoid names that had negative connotations, such as Gloomy Limited, Downbeat Limited, Death's Door Limited or Smartarse Limited. Additionally, we needed to consider whether the chosen name might be negative -- rude even -- in any of the major foreign languages. Then there were other equally important questions to consider: 1) Was a chosen name already registered at Companies House? 2) Was it similar to a company name that already existed? 3) Was it easy to spell? 4) Was the domain name available? and 5) Did the name have a good chance of being at the top of a website search page?

Our accountants assured us that changing the company name was "very easy" and would not cost much. They were right. It was easy and the fee was not much more than £100, but that proved to be a small part of the story, not least because it meant changing a business email address that had been in wide circulation for more than a decade. Then there was the legal requirement that I stop using Richardson Media Limited as a trading name at the earliest opportunity. This was not easy when I had a website of that name that had been in existence for at least 10 years and still generated a great deal of traffic. That was solved by our Internet Service Provider posting an announcement of the name change and the new URL.

There were some other naming issues that arose and needed to be dealt with. First, there was the name that I originally gave my latest screenplay and book: *The Moral Maze*. Some of you will know that this is the name of a long-established programme on BBC radio. I didn't consider that a hurdle, because there is no copyright on titles and there were no other possible legal obstacles, other than, perhaps, accusations of "passing off". This latter issue could not be a problem as my work was a screenplay and book, while the other *Moral Maze* is a debating programme on Radio Four.

No further thought was given to having the same name as a BBC programme until a remark by a friend made me realise that there might be a difficulty with the search engine ratings. And there certainly was! A quick search of *The Moral Maze* brought up tens of thousands of results, almost all of them to do with the radio programme.

Our initial reaction was to scrap the name entirely, but after days of head-scratching, we decided we would try *The Mortal Maze*, a title with an extra “t” and which still fitted the story. A rummage around the search engines proved very promising, and we also discovered that the internet domain name was available. My wife then had a brilliant idea as we organised the design of the book cover: How about inserting a different coloured T into the “moral”, thus giving the book two titles in one? This we did and we are thrilled with the results.

A further issue tied to Internet search engines was my own name. I'd always been happy to be plain "Ian Richardson", but when I put that name into any search engine, the list was dominated by references to a famous actor of the same name. Even putting "Ian Richardson, journalist" didn't help because my actor namesake's most famous role was in the original TV series *The House of Cards* in which he played a sinister British politician who murdered a journalist. Additionally, there appeared to be quite a few journalists named Ian Richardson. The problem was mostly solved by adding the initial of my middle name Duncan. Henceforth I always was listed as "Ian D. Richardson".

That dealt with, naming challenges still existed. Although my book is a work of fiction, it is openly inspired by my experiences as a senior news editor in BBC World Service radio and television. Therefore, I needed to take great care with the names chosen for the characters. As a further protection against legal problems, some of the holders of real BBC posts were switched from being men to women and vice versa.

I thought I had all that sorted until I realised just weeks before publishing the ebook version that the BBC had recently recruited a news executive with a name almost identical to my troubled anti-hero. So that name had to be rapidly changed. Then two days later, I was listening to BBC radio when I learned that a newish reporter had the same surname as another character in the book. So that also had to be changed. Worse, though, was when a friend pointed out that I had given a terrorist the same name as a prominent Muslim journalist working in TV news. It was at this point that I felt a family of luck-shattering black cats must have crossed my path.

Finally, after checking with BBC friends and double-checking with Google, I was confident that my story didn't include names of real people related to television journalism. But if there is ever a BBC television reporter called Jackson Dunbar, who has an addiction, who has been corrupted by the intelligence services, whose personal life is a mess and who reports from the Middle East, I am very, very sorry. I really didn't mean to smear your reputation.

Paperback and ebook versions of my thriller, *The Mortal Maze*, my non-fiction book, *God's Triangle*, and my novel, *Florrie – A Life Unexpected*, based on a true story, can be found on Amazon.