Big, fat, but oh so common

**BIG...**

The Big Bird

Size matters and big is better, at least in the restaurant scene.

There are restaurants with the word “big” in their names – Big O, Big Bad Wolf, The Big Bird, Big Bites.

The newest “Big” is three-month-old Big Bad Wolf in Tanjong Katong Road, which serves burgers and cottage pies.

The owners wanted a name which reminded them of their childhood.

Co-owner Leong Wai Khai, 65, said: “Big Bad Wolf is a hit with their children and some customers even dressed up as the characters in The Little Red Riding Hood while dining there recently. As for The Big Bird at Balmoral Plaza in Bukit Timah Road, no prizes for guessing what it sells.

Owner Derek Chen, 63, said: “Big Bird is the yellow chicken in Sesame Street so it’s appropriate since we sell chicken rice.”

Another Big, Big O Cafe and Restaurant at Wheelock Place and Paragon, was named after a best-selling three-layered cheesecake.

Its director, Ms Wendy Choh, 44, said she wanted to keep the name simple. “We wanted a name with not more than two syllables so people would remember. And which kid doesn’t know the word ‘big’.”

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**THAI...**

Thai-tanic may not be the most auspicious of names for a Thai steamboat restaurant, but owner Raymond Lim is unfazed.

The 30-year-old, who started the eatery in Jalan Besar last December, said it is far from sinking. In fact, customers have found the name, which puns on the movie Titanic, catchy and easy to remember.

His Thai wife, Madam Yiwa Benjana Manetchai, 24, chose the name as she liked the movie. She said: “There’s a restaurant named Thaitanic in Bangkok and they even serve noodles in a boat-shaped bowl. It’s very cute.”

Other Thai restaurants here are named Thai-serial, Thai Thai and Mai-Thai.

Thai-tanic in Orchard sells Thai hawker fare. Co-owner Dave Jaswal, 31, insists he did not choose the name because of its sexual connotations, even though it is located in Orchard Towers, notorious for its sleaze. “We decided on Thai-tanic because we want customers to experience ecstasy after eating our food,” he said.

But he conceded that “a lot of people don’t understand the word ‘tantric’.”

Simpler to understand may be Mai Thai at Chip Bee Gardens, named after the famous Thai cocktail drink.

Owner Jessuda Sununta, 41, said: “If you don’t have the word Thai, people might not know what you’re selling.”

Likewise, Ms Elyna Tan, marketing director of Malaysian-based firm Sea Cuisine which runs Thai Thai, said the name suits the customer profile of Mandarin Gallery. “The shopper profile includes tai-tai. And with this name, you can’t miss the fact that we serve Thai cuisine.” Tai-tai is a Chinese term for wealthy women who do not work.

But, quirky names aside, customers say food quality matters more than anything.

Mr Sam Cheak, who works in a bank, has been frequenting Thai-tanic twice a month for the last two years with his wife.

The 42-year-old said: “I’ve never really noticed the name before, but now that I know, I think it’s apt.”

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Many businesses think they have original names but when others adopt similar names, this confuses customers and the impact is lost

Tay Su-an Chiang

What's in a name? A whole range of businesses seem to have the same idea when it comes to naming their companies.

For a start, "Ministry" appears to be a popular choice. It has nothing to do with the civil service, but furniture, food and haircuts. There is the Ministry of Design, Ministry of Chair, Ministry of Food and even a Ministry of Hair.

At least three Thai restaurants in Singapore have, you guessed it, the word "Thai" in their names, such as Thai-tanic, Thai Thai and Mai Thai.

Two other popular words for food businesses are "Big" and "Fat". There is Big O, Big Bad Wolf and The Big Bed, and The Fat Cat, Fatboys and Fat Cow Ice Cream Cafe. With such similar names, are business owners lacking originality?

Mr Martin Roll, business and brand strategist of his own firm, the rather unexcitingly named Martin Roll Company, says "it depends on how the name is used and in what context".

He adds: "Originality is always important, but if everyone goes in the same direction, it can potentially lose impact."

Associate Professor Gregor Halff, who lectures on corporate communications at Singapore Management University, says the trend of using similar words in business names "is not creative as they are just being followers".

A spokesman for the Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority (ACRA) says that "businesses should avoid names which are identical to that of other businesses already on ACRA's register".

It adds that "businesses should also avoid names which are so similar to the name of another business so as to be likely to be mistaken for it". If that happens and if the registrar receives a complaint about the similarity in names, the business may be required to change its name.

A good business name, says Dr Halff, should be "distinct, not just from competitors, but should be attractive to its audience, too". He cites the example of budget airline, Jetstar Airways. Rather than have the word "budget" in its name, "it focuses on providing its clients with a quick getaway through the use of the word 'jet'."

Mr Roll says: "Businesses must assess what they are aspiring to become and work those traits into their naming strategy.

Brand consultant Jorg Dietzel says naming is a tricky business, adding: "You want to own your name and want it to reflect how unique your brand is."

Mr Dietzel, who also teaches strategic brand management and advertising at Singapore Management University and National University of Singapore, says: "You want it to send the right message about who you are without it being too gimmicky."

He says that names with Ministry, Fat or Big can be fashionable, "but just for the moment."

Dr Halff says that for businesses with Fat or Big in them, "unless what they are offering is really fat or big, the name is meaningless."

Brand experts say that using certain words in the business name could be misunderstood.

Mr Dietzel toyed with the name Ministry of Brands when he was naming his company, but decided against it. "People might think I'm from the Government and claim up," he says. So he used his own name instead for his consultancy firm.

The Accounting and Corporate Regulatory Authority says that, under the laws relating to approval of business names, "a name will be disallowed if it is undesirable or one which the Minister for Finance has directed the registrar not to accept for registration, such as the word 'Temasek', unless the proposed entity is related to Temasek Holdings Pte Ltd."

It adds that undesirable names include those with words which are offensive, vulgar, abusive or obscene in nature.

In the case of using "Ministry", it says there is no rule against the use of the word, so long as the use does not render the business name undesirable.

Mr Roll says that while a name is a strong identifier, "its equity is really what actually goes behind it, how the brand delivers on its promises."