

Xerox, thermos, frisbee.
Everyday words that actually
started as brands.

Intermediate +

Warm up

Discuss the questions:

- 1) What brands are your favourite ones? What are they and why do you like them?
- 2) Do you think branding is important? Why (not)?
- 3) Do you think brands are overrated? Why (not)?
- 4) What does it take to make a brand famous?
- 5) What are the top 3 brands do you think? Why?

Answer: Coca Cola, IBM, and Microsoft.

Are you surprised? Why (not)?

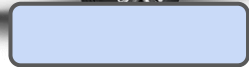
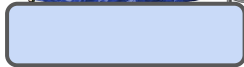
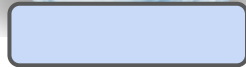
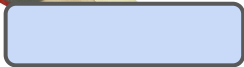
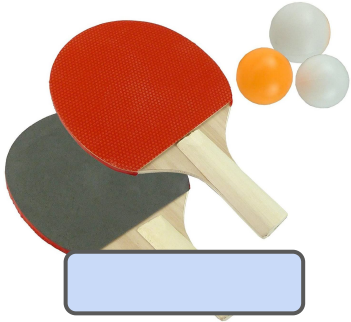
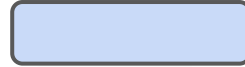
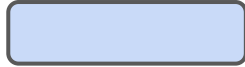
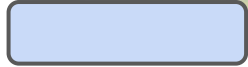
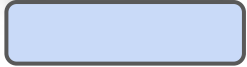
- 6) Do brands die? Why?



Task 1. What are they?



Task 2. What were they supposed to be called?



Task 2. Read and check your guesses

1) Believe it or not, trampoline was once a brand name – the proper generic term for the contraption is actually a rebound tumbler. The first modern trampoline was made in 1936 by US gymnast George Nissen and his trainer Larry Griswold, and trademarked not long after, but the trademark was lost once the word became generic.

2) In 1957 US toy company Wham-O snapped up the trademark for the Frisbee, but the gliding plastic disc didn't become huge until the early 1960s. The name derives from the Frisbie Baking Company in Connecticut — the company supplied pies to Yale University, where students discovered that throwing the plastic pie tins was a fun form of entertainment.

3) Wham-O also introduced the Hula Hoop a year later in 1958. The plastic hoops, which were inspired by Australian bamboo exercise rings, fast became a fad and, though the name has become generic, the Hula Hoop trademark is owned by Wham-O and ultimately its parent company InterSport Corp.

4) The German Thermos company trademarked its vacuum flask in 1923. Thermos, LLC is big on temperature control. Its mantra, "Hot matters. Cold matters. It matters.," has apparently resonated with consumers who enjoy their lunches at a certain temperature, as the Thermos has withstood the test of time. It lost its trademark when the term was declared by the US court generic in 1963.

Task 2. Read and check your guesses

5) Sticky tape is referred to as Sellotape in a number of countries, but people in the US, Canada, France, Spain and Brazil call it Scotch Tape. This comes from the popular product made by American conglomerate 3M.

6) Many people refer to the full gamut of removable computer memory devices such as USB flash drives and memory cards as Memory Sticks, but the term is actually a trademark owned by Sony for its proprietary format. Sony branded portable flash memory as a Memory Stick in 1998. The first Memory Stick held up to 128 MB.

7) “Procter&Gamble”-owned Pampers became a synonym of diapers because of its leading role in Lithuania’s diapers market. It was one of the first brands to enter the market and has been actively running TV commercials ever since. Pampers is a strong global brand, so hardly surprising it became a common name for diapers in other countries too, such as France and Russia, to name a few.

8) Xerox has been used for decades as the generic term for a photocopy or to photocopy a document in North America, which irks the tech giant. Xerox tried its best to fight the genericization of its name, publishing a series of ads urging people to remember the trademark. According to the company, “you cannot xerox a document, but you can copy it on a Xerox brand copy machine”.

Task 2. Read and check your guesses

9) Ping Pong is a brand of table tennis products owned by Parker Bros. The name was coined in 1901. The founders thought the sound the small ball made when it's hit across the table sounded like "ping pong."

10) Though Chrysler was not the creator of the SUV (Sport utility vehicle), known as Jeep, they have gone to great advertising lengths to ensure no other sport utility vehicle is masquerading as a 4x4. In one of its rugged, off-road advertisements, Chrysler says that it's a good thing Jeep is trademarked, because there's "no telling what kind of jacked-up station wagons [competitors would] be trying to pass off as Jeep vehicles otherwise."

Discuss the questions:

- 1) What facts did you find surprising?
- 2) Which brands from the article do you use?
- 3) Why do you think public associates some brand names with the generic class of product itself?

Task 3. That's why that happens.

Read the text and answer the questions:

- 1) What is a generic term?
- 2) Why do brand names become generic words for a type of product?
- 3) What happens when a brand name becomes generic?

Some consumers' brands are used as synonymous with products. In some cases, a generic term becomes so popular around the world that many consumers have no clue that a word they use is actually a brand. In other words, their products were so successful that they came to represent an entire category. While many consumers in different countries think that Jacuzzi means a hot tub, in fact, it's an Italian-American corporation's brand name.

To become the most loved brand in a market and synonymous with a category is a dream of every company. On the other hand, what companies fear the most is that their brand name could end up in the dictionary as a common noun. From time to time a brand name becomes so widely used in the language to describe a product that it is "genericide" – in other words, loses its trademark protection. It means that not only consumers but also competitors can use this word for their products.

For example, Cellophane was a brand of a cellulose film, invented in 1908 by a Swiss chemist. Nowadays a cellophane is a frequently used word to describe plastic film products. It is a generic word in the US, but still a registered trademark in the UK.

Task 3. That's why that happens.

Many more words that are included in dictionaries used to be brand names. They still might retain trademark protection in some countries, but are declared generic in others: thermos, aspirin, linoleum, videotape, zipper, and trampoline are among the most famous examples.

It takes time to enter the language, but some brands, such as Google, joined a list of generically used brand names in less than a decade. Even though Google wasn't the first search engine in the market, it managed to become the number one very quickly. It's no wonder that "I'll google it" became a very common phrase in many countries.

In different countries different brands have gone generic.

While some global brands are used as generic terms in several markets, usually, in different countries different brand names become synonymous with products. If a French would ask you to pass a Stabilo Boss, hand him a highlighter, if a Nigerian demands Maggi, give him a bouillon cube.

"We have many examples in the UK. A vacuum cleaner we call a Hoover since the Hoover brand has been around for more than 40 years. The word hoover has become a verb meaning to vacuum clean. A tissue we call Kleenex and Biro is a name for a pen, made by the same company, Bic, who invented disposable razors", says Chamouni Stone, English teacher.

Task 4. Project work

- 1) Find more brands that have become nouns.
- 2) Find out what they were supposed to be called.
- 3) Do companies continue to hold the trademark?



Keys

Task 1

- 1) Xerox
- 2) Scotch
- 3) Hula hoop
- 4) Memory stick
- 5) Thermos
- 6) Ping pong
- 7) Pampers
- 8) Trampoline
- 9) Frisbee
- 10) Jeep

Task 2

- 1) A copy machine, photocopier
- 2) a sticky tape
- 3) a plastic hoop
- 4) a memory card
- 5) a vacuum flask
- 6) table tennis
- 7) a diaper
- 8) a rebound tumbler
- 9) a gliding plastic disc
- 10) SUV (Sport utility vehicle)