

BUSINESS  
JAN 24 2017, 6:13 AM ET

# What's in a Name for Trump's Brands? Everything.

by NICOLE SPECTOR

Donald Trump's success as a businessman may have helped him get to the Oval Office, but it won't help him stay there, at least not without a good deal of backlash.

A Trump Organization spokesperson confirmed to NBC News on Monday that Trump [has resigned from 400 of his businesses](#) and a set up a trust for his sons Donald Jr. and Eric, who will take over his business holdings.

A recent post on the Trump Instagram account reflects the passing of the Trump brand torch:



"He has gone above and beyond in what he has done to make sure there are no conflicts," White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Monday. But is that enough?

## A Name That Sticks

One of the obstacles Trump faces is to disassociate himself from a brand that is built almost entirely on his name, personality, and celebrity.

This is presumably why photos of Donald Trump have started to vanish from the websites of Trump hotels on foreign soil including [Trump Tower Philippines](#), as have photos of Ivanka Trump on India's [Trump Towers Pune](#) (though a photo and biography of Donald Trump are [still on the site](#)).

"We've long associated the name Trump with glitz, glamour, wealth, and power," said Margaret Wolfson, founder and creative director of River + Wolf. "What is interesting about the pre-political Trumps is that they intentionally capitalized — literally and figuratively — on the association between their name and the aforementioned attributes. It was a strategic decision to license the Trump name to 'elevate' ordinary things, from water and steaks to buildings and fashion. In all these cases, one could safely argue that the name is just as much the product as the offering or company itself."

Trump is hardly the first person to name a business after himself. Bacardi, Bose, Chrysler, and Cadbury are all companies that are named after their founders. For most consumers, the fact of its founders is more trivia than obvious fact; certainly that's not the case for Trump, which is exactly what Trump wanted — to make a name for himself that was quite literally a money maker, one that is so well-known, it can be licensed like a valuable property.

## The Conflict of Interest Factor

It's important to note that being affiliated with a brand or running a business is not in itself a conflict of interest for the president, so long as it doesn't influence his direction or choices as a leader.

"A conflict of interest for a sitting United States president exists when there is anything that could compromise the president's ability to put America first," said James Goodnow, an attorney and legal analyst with Fennemore Craig, P.C.

**Related: [Ivanka Trump Promotes Fashion Line from RNC Stage](#)**

"President Trump has been elected to the highest office of the land, and he owes the country his undivided loyalty," said Goodnow.

In the financial disclosure forms Trump filed to run for president — different than his undisclosed taxes — Trump valued his name and, hence, brand at \$3 billion. Although it's difficult to ascertain exactly what the value of the 'Trump' brand is, it's clearly significant.

Whatever it's worth, it's certainly been driven up now that Trump is president.

"With Trump's name plastered all over skyscrapers and casinos around the world, the actions he takes as president will almost certainly have a direct impact on the economic value of his brand," said Goodnow. "If President Trump were to ever make a policy decision that was in any way influenced by a concern for the value of his brand, then that's a textbook definition of a conflict of interest."

Though Trump has stepped away from management of the company, Goodnow insists that this doesn't solve the problem of a potential conflict of interest.

**Related: [Trump's Businesses Are a Web of Potential Conflicts](#)**

"The key point is that Trump still has an ownership interest in his companies," said Goodnow. "His bank accounts will grow or shrink during his presidency. Whether that knowledge is driving Trump's policy decisions or not, the reality is that the economic value of the brand he's created is going to fluctuate with his decisions."

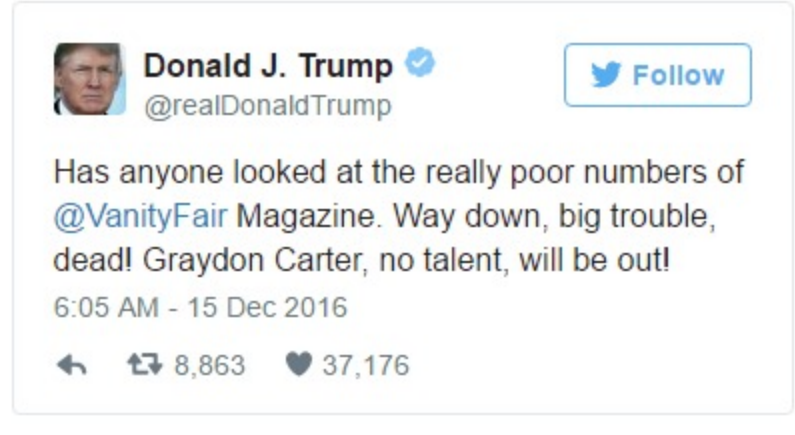
## Stop Touting the Hotels — And Ease up on Twitter

To avoid any conflict of interest, Wolfson says that "all Trump brands should be in blind trusts run by impartial outsiders. But more than this is needed to satisfy the spirit of the law: The names of their companies should bear no resemblance to the Trump name."

It's quite unlikely that Trump will sell his stake in his company, rename the brands he created, or hand his business trust to an impartial party, but he could still be doing more to distance himself from the Trump brand.

"I highly doubt he will be continuing to make these appearances at the [Trump] hotels and [his other] businesses," said Lauren Wright, a political scientist, author, and a board member of the White House Transition Project. "[These appearances] invite controversy, and while he doesn't tend to take advice from experts or from his communications teams, I would think they're really pushing him to eliminate those appearances altogether."

Trump could also better separate from his brand, at least in public perception, which Wright says "is everything in American politics," by easing up on Twitter, where he recently lashed out at Vanity Fair for criticizing the Trump Grill.



NICOLE SPECTOR

TOPICS BUSINESS NEWS, POLITICS NEWS, U.S. NEWS, WORLD

FIRST PUBLISHED JAN 24 2017, 6:13 AM ET