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Muddling Your Marketing

What do acronyms, corporate jargon and company-speak have in common? Turns out, they all produce the same result—muddled marketing. When unwitting prospects are unsuspectingly hit with rich, thick and complexly intricate company-speak, laden with industry jargon, marketing becomes nothing more than gobbledygook.

How many times have you visited a company website only to sigh in frustration as you try to make sense of information that has been made cryptically complex? Corporate speak is not only annoying it also defeats the fundamental purpose of marketing. Instead of content that swiftly leads a reader to comprehension, marketing messages that are muddled down with corporate speak leave a reader at best confused, and at worse, quickly moving on.

So how do we “create the storyboard” that will move us away from “blue sky thinking” and help us do a “deep dive” into marketing content that will create a “win-win solution” for all? It is easier than you may think.

Stop Corporate Gobbledygook

Sometimes illustration is a supreme form of flattery, other times not. Take this statement peeled directly from a business

website:

“Our unique, proven and collaborative approach of combining doctorate level theoretical analytics, strategy and world-class creative execution delivers ground-breaking, game-changing initiatives for ambitious brands.”

Executive Insights



Cheryl Isen

leaving you bewildered?

We all know the answer. Unfortunately, every marketer and corporate executive (myself included), has been guilty of producing some form of corporate gobbledygook. The purpose of the illustration is not to point blame, but to combat the infliction.

Finding a fix requires careful diligence, persistence and a willingness to work hard to break free from absent minded, jargon-laden corporate-speak. If you are interested in making a change, consider these ideas when you set out to construct or review your marketing messages.

Common Red Flags

- Be wary of jargon, slang and lingo: Every industry and company has a shortcut way of speaking. The trouble comes when everyone isn't indoctrinated, rendering the lingo meaningless to outsiders. For example, in addition to business jargon, the medical, military and legal industries also have their own code. Most lawyers, but few others, might know that a “ham sandwich” occurs when opposite sides negotiate a trade and “meat” in the middle. Although a ham sandwich is good, it doesn't have a place in good legal marketing.
- Decipher acronyms by spelling them out: Many companies complicate their marketing with the overuse of acronyms. Although the purpose of acronyms is to simplify, if an acronym isn't clear to others it has the opposite effect. For example, business leaders know that a SWOT is an acronym for an assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Likewise, RFP (request for proposal) and TQM (total quality management) are commonplace. However, if a company uses TMA (too many acronyms) the end-result is the

OOWID (opposite of what is desired). We're forced to RTM (read the manual) to decipher.

- Avoid superfluous words and simplify. Unlike restaurant menus where superfluous, descriptive adjectives might actually help to sell a basic entrée, most business services that are laden with a quadruple onslaught of adjectives will do nothing more to sell the service. However, they cause confusion. So leave the, "hand selected, tender, organic artichoke hearts sumptuously melded between organic baby spinach and five, fresh-shaven Italian cheeses, served with fresh out the oven, crispy tortilla chips" to the restaurateur's, and keep company marketing descriptions simple.

Stay Diligent With These Tips and Tricks

The need to use gobbledygook to make a point is a myth. It isn't more professional. Your audience is made up of real people seeking real answers. Re-humanize your interactions. Talk to your readers, don't "dialog" with them. Five things to remember:

1. Put the reader/prospect first. Start with what they need to know, not with what you feel you have to tell them.
2. Minimize self-importance and aggrandizing. Most readers don't care to be reminded more than once that your

company is the market leader, most unique and a world-class innovator.

3. Promote clear, simple language. Everyone needs to be reminded that it's far more impactful to say, "we will try to help you" vs. "we will endeavor to assist you". Business communication doesn't have to be formal or abstract. Find words and phrases that are less punishing. Replace "as a means of" with to; "commence" with start; and "due to the fact that" with since.
4. Have an outsider review company marketing. From time-to-time, I conduct marketing audits for clients. This is a highly useful exercise because as an outsider I have the opportunity to sniff out potential confusion and can help a company hone in its messaging so that communication is on point, clear and reflects exactly what the company is trying to say.
5. Don't follow the crowd. Jargon frequently masks real meaning. Oftentimes corporate-speak and jargon comes from mimicking others, which is easy and lazy. Don't fall into the trap of inserting jargon, which is easier than taking the time to think through a thoughtful, meaningful explanation in a unique way. Given that marketing's job is to differentiate, it doesn't serve a company to follow the crowd.

The next time you read your marketing and find statements about your company's ability to leverage synergies with leading providers or find yourself prepared to announce another flexible, scalable groundbreaking, cutting-edge new solution, stop. Think about your reader. Think about what they really want to know. Ask yourself how you can provide the answers swiftly, cleanly and directly.

This column is written by Cheryl Isen, founder of Isen & Company, a strategic marketing and public relations firm that helps companies increase visibility and brand awareness. Contact Cheryl at (425) 222-0779, Cheryl@IsenandCo.com.

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