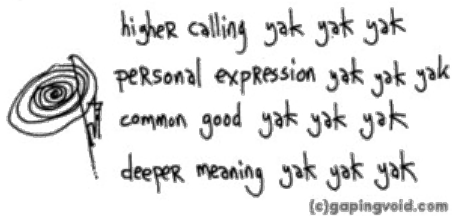


“Authentic” is dead. And so is “is dead.”

by Jason Cohen on July 14, 2024

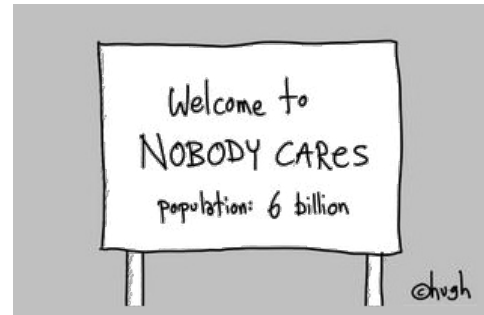
It's lazy writing. It's boring and undifferentiated. Say something meaningful, specific, evocative, so your website wins, and you can be proud of it.

It's time to retire the following phrases. They should no longer be used, ever, in any context except derisive mocking:



- Fast and easy
- Putting customers first
- The Holy Grail of
- The leading provider of
- Legendary customer support
- Designed with you in mind
- All new
- And more
- Win-win
- Proven track record
- For everyone
- The go-to choice for _____
- Transforming the way you _____
- The future of _____ is here
- _____ is broken
- _____ is dead
- _____ sucks
- Saves you time, so you can get back to doing what you do best.

Also eschew these words, as devoid of meaning as a yogi's mantra and as useless as a simile that doesn't contribute new information:



- **Authentic**
- Solution
- Turnkey solution
- Genuine
- Powerful
- Secure
- Simple
- Innovative
- Insight
- Revolutionary
- Unsurpassed
- Unparalleled
- Groundbreaking
- Cutting-edge
- World-class
- State-of-the-art
- Game-changing
- Disruptive

These words have been corrupted by those who claim to honor their meaning but do not act accordingly.

When a company claims to “put customers first” but then uses “Level 1 support” as a shield to prevent customers from intruding on profits, we realize talk is cheap.

When a company claims to have “secure” payments but then 100,000 credit card numbers are stolen, we realize you don't need a permit to claim that you're secure.

When a company claims to be “innovative and disruptive” but then pitches an idea you’ve heard ten times in the past month, it reminds us that if you have to say it, it’s probably not true.

When 78% of “About Us” web pages claim “the leading provider” of something, we are no longer impressed.

Like a song over-played on the radio, like a restaurant over-hyped in the magazines, **repetition of even powerful, wonderful phrases will kill them.**

Oh I know 21% of you stopped reading as soon as you saw that “authentic” made the list, and shot over to Twitter to unleash a scathing missive explaining how “authenticity” is the prime mover of modern marketing, honorable salesmanship, and meaningful relationships.

I agree! In fact all these words and phrases should *theoretically* carry meaning, but theory is for people who don’t need to sell \$2,600 more software by next Friday so they can make rent.

And sure, it actually *is* good to be “authentic.” I respect the work of all those bloggers and Twitter-ers and lecturers and consultants who drove this word deep into our psyches. Indeed, it’s a gift: bringing concepts like authenticity, genuineness, and give-first-sell-later to the traditionally aggressive, non-engaging, selfish world of marketing. The more people honor this new code, the better for us all.



“Buzzword jargon buzzword, hyperbole buzzword buzzword, trite rhyming platitude... Yep, looks good.”

Nevertheless, it’s time to retire words like “authentic.” The misuse is too widespread, the abuse too deep.

So what should you do instead?

Be specific.□

Many of the dead words weren’t especially illustrative to begin with. As far as I know, a “solution” just means product and/or service, so the word doesn’t add information anyway. Instead, be specific and inspire me.

- Instead of “easy” say “so straightforward, you won’t need a manual.”
- Instead of “inexpensive” say “just a dollar a day.”
- Instead of “powerful” say “processes 6,253,427 requests daily.”
- Instead of “disruptive” say “72% of our customers say they’ll never go back to a normal email client.”

Want even more specifics? [Here](#).

Show, don’t tell.□

Some dead words are descriptive, but they don’t paint a picture. “Powerful” sounds nice I suppose, but how does that change my life? *Showing* something in action is more evocative than *describing* it.

- Instead of saying it’s fast, show a speed test (especially against competitors).
- Instead of saying it’s easy, have a video demonstrating your tool solving someone’s problem in 60 seconds flat.
- Instead of saying you have eager, responsive, intelligent tech support, put a “chat now” bar on every page of your website.
- Instead of a bullet-list of benefits, quote actual customers describing your impact on their lives.
- Instead of saying you value your customers, tell them to call you and answer on the second ring.

Face it.□

My favorite way to start a sales pitch is to make fun of typical sales pitches. What I always said at Smart Bear:

I know you were hoping for a 22-slide PowerPoint deck with our mission statement and company history. I'm really sorry to disappoint! 'Cause I'm just going to start the demo and let you interrupt me with questions.

And:

People claim that peer code review tools will do magic things like make your developers smarter or fix existing social problems with the team. Actually, if anything, code review can magnify latent social issues! However, I do believe our tool will save you time and aggravation in these 4 specific ways so as we go through the demo, see if you agree.

Because you're willing to say the quiet bit out loud, to say what others hide, especially when we all know it's the truth, you earn credibility. Now folks are more open to your claims—even those that are well-worn.

Own it.

You *can* still use an abused word if you totally, 100% own the concept.

You can claim “legendary customer service” if you back that with first-ring, human phone service, online chat from your home page, quick-response Twitter monitoring, and 15-minute turn-around time on tech support emails even at 3am on a Sunday. Be sure to communicate all that too, because if you *lead* with the dead phrase I'll leave before you get the chance to prove it.

“*Be the change you wish to see in the world.*”

—Gandhi

When old ideas become cliché, that's an implicit call for new ideas. This time around, can you lead instead of follow?

Of course this is a bit unfair. Quick: Come up with a compelling new philosophy for human interaction and global communication, marketing, sales, and relationships!

Yeah it's an unreasonable expectation, and not certainly required, but remember the best ideas often aren't (excuse the clichés) ground-breaking, innovative, out-of-the-box, Earth-shattering epiphanies. **Often great ideas are a synthesis of other ideas** with just a smidge of novel insight, or just **putting into words what others sense but cannot articulate.**

This is the hardest and most time-consuming way to break out of the mundane, but also the most rewarding. And if you do come up with something, there's a lot of people who will love to help you spread the word.

You're a little company. Act like one. Many people will love it.

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