

The leading provider of meaningless marketing solutions

by Jason Cohen on November 11, 2008

Marketing buzzwords and generic phrases hurts your brand. Use clear messaging instead of meaningless jargon.

Why do so many marketing departments seem to thrive on ambiguity and meaninglessness?



Witness, for example, this gem of a company description. As Dave Barry would say, I'm not making this up:

Omniture, Inc. is a leading provider of online business optimization software, enabling customers to manage and enhance online, offline and multi-channel business initiatives.

Huh? Turns out they do web analytics. Oh. They could have just said so and spent the rest of their words telling you how they're different from other web analytics companies.

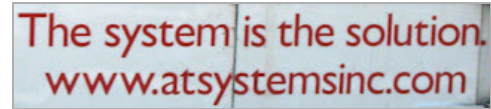
What's the purpose of this language? Does the phrase "a leading provider of" mean anything to you? When you read it, do you whisper under your breath:

Awesome, I found the leader! They lead the other providers around like cattle. Then agin, they are a leading provider, not the leading provider, but still, one of the leaders! I'm impressed.

Nah. At best you gloss over it—an overused phrase, devoid of meaning. At worst you lose interest and click the "Back" button.

Perhaps the worst offender is the word "Solution." What is a "solution," and how does it differ from, say, a product? The main menu of many web sites makes me choose between "Products" and "Solutions." How oh how do I choose?

My favorite example is AT Systems. Their proud motto:



Now that you know the company name and their motto, here comes the question: What do they do? Turns out this printed on the side of an armored truck. They move money around. Oh?

So back to the question: Why do marketing departments churn out meaningless phrases?

Possible Reason #1: Fear.

Generic, widely-used phrases don't offend. They avoid lawsuits; it's hard to sue over meaningless words. This excuse might work at Big Company Inc, but in a start-up you can't afford to be bland and wishy-washy.

Possible Reason #2: Laziness.

Saying "A leading provider of business solutions" is a lot easier than taking the time and effort to nail your message. It's hard! You have to know your customer, boil your company down to its essentials, and be succinct and evocative and specific. It's easier not to.

Possible Reason #3: Incompetence.

What if you don't actually know what sets your product apart? What if you can't articulate the niche your company owns? What if you can't describe your perfect customer? Then you have to resort to generic phrases.

None of these excuses are valid, though. If you can't articulate your product in a few, choice, specific, words, your potential customers won't get it either.


I'll leave you with a tragic example of what not to do. See if you can guess what this company does:

webMethods (Nasdaq: WEBM) provides business integration software to integrate, assemble and optimize available IT assets to drive business process productivity. webMethods delivers an innovative, enterprise-class business integration platform that incorporates proven integration technology with next generation capabilities into one interoperable set of tools that delivers a unique combination of efficiency, agility and control. webMethods combines industry leadership with a zealous commitment to customers to deliver tangible business value.

Take a scalpel to your marketing content. Make every word count.

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