

Communications 2.0: Avoid Leveraging These Lame Terms

RAY TUTTLE

We've all heard buzzwords that pass for communication in meetings, presentations and conversation around the watercooler.

The odd thing is, the words that turn into buzzwords do have a place in business and casual conversation. Yet, excessive use of such terms isn't always the best way for professionals to make their point.

"If you don't know what you're talking about, shut up. Faking it will do more damage to your credibility than acknowledging a gap in your education or experience," said Ryan Rex, CEO of Rex Public Relations.

Not all buzzwords are bad, though.

"Many have a place when used appropriately and in the proper context," Rex said.

The *Tulsa Business Journal* turned to several professional communicators in Tulsa to learn the annoying words and overused terms they've heard. And, for advice on how to communicate.

Annoying

Overuse and misuse can make them "buzz kill," said Michael Willis, senior account executive at Schnake Turnbo Frank I PR.

The most annoying buzzwords to Mandy Vavrinak, founder of Crossroads Communications LLC, are those centered around "x2.0," as in, "We're implementing HR 2.0 to leverage our best talent."

The Rex PR team compiled a list of overused buzzwords and phrases:

Solution
Quality
Best practice
Buy-in
Repurpose
Deliverables
Facilitate
Synergies
My two cents
To be honest
Our way of giving back
Issue
Actually

Or using the term "PR 2.0," she said.

"As a professional communicator, I've noticed that people have a tendency to rely on buzzwords when they aren't certain how to explain a concept in plain English," Vavrinak said. "It's easier to say something is a 'game-changer' than to clearly communicate why that is so. It might sound a bit harsh, but I think a dependence on buzzwords weakens communication and limits conversation."

Pump It Up

Too often, people of a certain profession pump themselves up by using industry-specific jargon, Willis said.

"You get the feeling it makes them feel good that they are talking about something you don't even understand because of jargon or acronyms."

Then there are people who use words like "synergy" and "leverage" who really don't know what they mean, Willis said. "But, they use them because they've heard others do it and they think it is impressive," he said.

The drawbacks of using jargon and worn out buzzwords is that people stop taking you seriously, Willis said. "You can be perceived as an empty suit, and, obviously, reputation is everything."

The Challenge

In public relations, the challenge is defining a company's services without using buzzwords that don't really mean much to the public, said Nicole Morgan, director of accounts and operations for Rex Public Relations.

"Everyone makes a 'quality' product. 'Transparency' is always key and who wouldn't want to be on the 'leading edge?'" she said. "But, by using these vague words, you water down your strengths."

To deliver a compelling message, companies must dig deep to the core of what sets their company apart from the competition, Morgan said.

"Determine the emotional and rational benefits of your product or service as well as the characteristics of your brand. Then, describe these strengths with original words that convey meaning with accuracy and color," she said.

Be Direct

The key to better communication is to simply say what you mean, said Rex.

Also, communicate clearly by keeping it simple and straight forward, Willis said.

One-on-one communication will always be critical as people hear the tone, read an attitude and see gestures.

"Face-to-face meetings are dwindling, but they still have value," Willis said. "

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