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By Heather Reimer

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I recently wrote an article that asked readers, "Does Hype Work on the Web?" My contention was that today's web users are too savvy to fall for hyper-inflated sales language like "Totally insane offer!" and "Expires soon, don't delay!" and we're jaded from having been subjected to it by TV advertisers over the years. The response I got to that article suggests my theory was mostly correct.

A group of e-booksellers and publishers used the article to jump start a discussion on their forum about marketing hype. Rod Purnell concluded that whether we like it or not, hype is effective.

He said, "Hype still works and I think people as a whole are still eating it up, even if they don't want to admit it." He contends that the excitement created by hype is contagious and can actually drive people to buy.

But Teresa King of eBookWholesaler.com says there's a fine line between using hype and using a strong call to action to create excitement. If you cross that line, she says, you lose your credibility.

"I think enthusiasm is very important. I think a page that promises to show you how to make 400 extra dollars per month is way more realistic than a page that says make a million in six months. Those are so hyped up that they come across as totally unbelievable."

Usability expert Jakob Nielsen would agree with that. He and John Morkes conducted a study into the way people read online and found that users detest what they dubbed "marketese" - the promotional writing style that uses boastful, subjective claims like "hottest ever". He says credibility suffers when users can clearly see that a site exaggerates.

"Promotional language imposes a cognitive burden on users who have to spend resources on filtering out the hyperbole to get at the facts," Nielsen wrote. "When people read a paragraph that starts 'Nebraska is filled with internationally recognized attractions,' their first reaction is 'No, it's not' and this thought slows them down and distracts them from using the site."

Another problem with hype is the word itself. It can mean both a flamboyant promotion (yay) and a questionable, exaggerated claim (boo). So if old man Webster can't even figure out which way it swings, how can webmasters and copywriters?

Online marketer Andrew Tegenkamp of <http://lightningbiz.com/ipc/> has an answer to that dilemma. He posted this on the forum: "I think that if creating hype on your sales letter makes you lie, you've gone too far. If you're still selling the truth but using words that inspire people, you're two things... a genius and an honest business owner!"

Nobody ever said being a genius was easy, however. Writing web copy that's exciting and persuasive without using false claims or inflated language is a tall order. But it's a challenge that pays off in the end. After all, using hype-free copy means never having to say, "Your results may differ from those you see in our promotional materials."

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