

# Jargon: Handle with Care

By Marcia Yudkin

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When I reviewed business Web sites for the Webby Awards earlier this year, one of the most common and annoying obstacles I ran across was jargon - insider language that got in the way of understanding what the business behind the site actually did for its clients. The same barrier detracts from the effectiveness of many press releases.

Troublesome jargon comes in at least three varieties: buzzwords, or trendy phrases used by people who consider themselves on the cutting edge of their field; acronyms, the dizzying alphabet soup of obscure abbreviations; and technical or specialized phraseology that just isn't much known outside of a particular niche.

"GCKL's Enterprise-level Viral Marketing Solutions Offer Leading Value-Add for the P2P Revolution": that's a fictional headline containing no less than seven buzzwords. Most journalists hate buzzwords, and you should therefore avoid them, just as you should try not to complete the previous thought in this sentence with "like the plague." If you think my made-up headline makes perfect sense, then please take my word for it that the number of people who truly understand such messages is extremely small. Usually when you attempt to translate buzzwords, all that comes from the effort is mush.

Acronyms such as "CRM," "CSS," "CSP" and "CTR" are a bit trickier to provide advice about, because they are much likelier than buzzwords to become elements in searches of the Internet at large or press release databases. In other words, potential clients and media people might actually search for "CRM for small business" or "CSS tutorials," so that you want those phrases to appear in your release if that's what you do.

Even so, you need to remember that many media people and potential clients may not have a mental definition for such acronyms. For instance, publishing insiders can email each other about "POD initiatives," but in a

press release "POD" should not only be clearly explained as "publishing on demand" but that term given a brief gloss as well. By using both the acronym and the written-out words that the letters stand for, as well as further definitions when a phrase is relatively new or specialized, you communicate clearly and set the stage for your news to be found through search engines.

Now what about specialized vocabulary - "hematoma," "habeas corpus," "chakra" and "candlestick charts"? Such phrases have precise and established meanings in certain fields, but people who don't use the terms every day may have a hazy comprehension of them. Thus, you should handle them as I recommended for acronyms. Provide a brief, unobtrusive definition in close proximity to their first use in a release.

When you do this subtly, tucking an explanation into your release, neither the in-group nor the outsiders take offense. For instance, within Eastern medicine "qi" is a standard term. You could define it discreetly as in this sentence: "Acupuncture restores balance and regulates the flow of qi, the basic life force." The last four words prevent both confusion and insult.

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