

VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS



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Maximizing Our Skill Sets to Enable Synergistic Crap

Why advertising people speak like idiots

Today's deliverable is a best-in-class solution.

So why aren't you psyched about reading more? After all, business people the world over get paid big bucks to spew that kind of nonsense.

That's what I realized while reading a great new book called **"Why Business People Speak Like Idiots."** A quick and easy read, it implores people to use their own voice at work—because that's what people like and remember, as opposed to using jargon and doublespeak that makes you sound like everyone else.

Of course, that argument made perfect sense to me as someone who writes with a distinct voice. But then, reading the book's real-life examples of corporate bullshit, I got chills down my spine as the ugly truth dawned on me:

Advertising professionals and marketing people use as much meaningless jargon as the most PowerPoint-addicted management consultants. And even the supposedly best creative boutiques are guilty of this.

I once sent my portfolio to such an agency—one that had a cleverly written web site that even poked fun at unnecessarily complex marketing jargon. After an initial inquiry and a few work samples, the Creative Manager sent me a cheery note that said, "Send it all! We are looking and I'd love to see the rest of your work. Any format you have. Look forward to seeing the rest of your stuff!" Yes, she tossed in the exclamation points for added eagerness and perkiness.

Two weeks later, I got a clearly generic cut-and-pasted reply stating, "At the moment we do not have any openings that match your skill set. However, we will keep your information on file and contact you if something appropriate arises."

I politely replied, inquiring for specific feedback, but got no response. It was as if aliens swooped down and replaced a human Creative Manager with a robotic corporate drone. But even worse, such language ran directly contrary to the agency's brand "philosophy" as demonstrated on their web site.

And that's the point. Ad agencies as a whole, are brands unto themselves, the people at the agency (and their correspondence) an extension of that brand. Treat your employees, co-workers, clients, and all the other people who come into contact with your agency like human beings and only then will you have an authentic, respectable brand. Pepper your communication with jargon and your agency will sound like an insurance agency, not an advertising agency.

There's no excuse for an advertising agency to hide behind corporate doublespeak. In fact, it's completely hypocritical given what we love to preach to our clients about the simplicity of powerful, direct language.

Now let's contrast that ad agency with a different service business, a company that gets it.

Southwest Airlines doesn't even accept e-mails from their customers. Because, as it's stated on their website:

"Our Customers deserve accurate, specific, personal, and professionally written answers, and it takes time to research, investigate, and compose a real business letter. We answer every letter we receive in the order it arrives...to keep our costs low, our People productive, our operating efficiency high, and our responses warm and personal."

And Southwest is in the airline business (or the 'freedom business,' for you GSD&M fans.) Perhaps that attitude is one of the reasons Southwest is making money while nearly every other airline is losing money even as you read this. Southwest may not be a glamorous brand, but at least it's an authentic one.

We need some of that authenticity in our business. Advertising is a self-critical, self-reverential, self-absorbed business. We spend so much time talking about advertising to other advertising people you'd think none of us working in the business would be able to tolerate jargon, much less spew it ourselves. But we embrace it, toss it into our agency website "philosophy" sections and cram it into new business presentations—even when we know that what's being said is meaningless.

I'd love to hear if you've been able to resist the temptation to couch your words in meaningless drivel. But please don't reinvent by wheel by ideating a paradigm-shifting holistic manifesto. The ability to swallow that kind of crap simply isn't in my skill set.