

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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## On Killer Books and Hard-Hitting Executions

*The bizarre vernacular of the ad industry*

As a writer, I'm perpetually curious about the power of words. Like any profession, advertising has its own vernacular. However, since we're in the business of communicating with the general public, I find the language we use internally to be very bizarre. Let me show you what I mean.

**"Shop"** Ad agencies are commonly referred to as "shops." This term has an old-world feel, as if ad people were artisans like cobblers or blacksmiths, crafting great ads in our "shop." But in my experience, clients tend to dictate what they want, and get it exactly how they want it, the way Meg Ryan ordered food in "When Harry Met Sally." Maybe we should refer to an ad agency not as a "shop," but as a "diner."

**"Killer"** Describing any great ad as "killer" always perplexed me. If an ad is a killer, well, does it mean the ad's "target" would be rendered dead by watching or reading the ad? Are we talking about advertising or quail hunting? Killer diseases are bad. Killer bees are bad. Serial killers like the Son of Sam are bad. Why are killer ads good?

**"Hard-hitting"** I once had a client who continually requested that ads be more "hard-hitting." This meant inserting more exclamation points, more use of warnings like "DON'T MISS OUT!" and of course, more starbursts and snipes. The result? My ads were hard-hitting, but they weren't killer. Many clients believe hard-hitting ads work and I think I know why. Ads deemed to be "hard-hitting" leave the audience staggered, but still physically able to buy something. However, an audience killed by "killer" ads is dead and can't use their credit card.

**"Executions"** In advertising agencies around the world, thousands of unsuspecting, innocent-looking ads are executed every day. An "execution" of an idea means a finished version of the idea. Just like variations of the death penalty, there are many ways to execute an idea, which brings me to a similar term:

**"Produced"** An idea "produced" means that the ad actually appears on-air or in print. Producing an ad means you've brought it to life. What confuses me is in some cases, "execute" means "to put to death" while "produce" means "to bring into existence." In advertising, though, it's perfectly acceptable to use the two words together, which makes for some bizarre English--more on that later.

**“Edgy”** Somebody (Dan Wieden I think, but I’m not sure) already addressed this term pretty effectively. He said that when something has an edge, someone is bound to get cut. The moral here is that if you go to present an “edgy” idea to a client, bring some tourniquets. Remember: edgy ideas are not always killer ideas. And if you fall on your sword for an edgy idea, you might be the one who gets killed. Or fired.

**“Book”** This word has a strange dual meaning: It describes both a creative portfolio and, more oddly, a magazine. The first time I heard a Creative Director refer to home improvement magazines as “shelter books” I nearly pissed in my pants from laughing so hard. A term like that sounds ridiculous, but it’s a common usage. If magazines are “books,” what do we call actual hard-bound books?

Confused about the way people in your agency talk? Don’t be. Just remember these tips:

--Any ad can be executed, but killers are usually executed well.

--To “kill” also applies when an ad isn’t going to reach the public. You can have a killer ad killed by a client before you get a chance to execute it.

--Killer ads tend to win more industry praise than hard-hitting ads. Especially in your book.

--An ad that is produced may not be the best possible execution, and your executions may not be well-produced.

--At any moment, your executions may be killed at random by people you’ve never met for reasons that don’t make sense.

--If an idea has legs, you may be able to produce many executions for a long time. And putting all those produced killer executions into your book may land you a great gig doing edgy work in a hot shop.

Got it? Good. Now let’s all go out and communicate with our audience.