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Entrepreneur.com

updated 12:00 p.m. CT, Mon., Dec. 15, 2008

The economy, unemployment, companies folding, people losing their homes--2008 has left consumers wary of businesses. And that lack of consumer confidence requires straightforward, honest advertising messages to regain marketplace security. In 2009, perhaps more than ever, the words you use in your copywriting can determine whether you make a sale or lose a customer.

Here are 10 words to avoid in your 2009 copywriting.

1. **Free**

Ads that include messages about a free product or service promotions can work well during an economic downturn, but consumers need to see the products perform well. E-mail spam filters are tough on messages that include "free" in the subject line. While it might be tempting to use a subject line that says, "Open now to get your free widget," that's an e-mail spam filter red flag that will send your message to most recipients' spam boxes. When the economy is tough, you can't risk having your e-mails not make it to the intended recipients. Replace "free" with "complimentary" or "gratis" to sneak by spam filters without compromising the effectiveness of your message.

2. **Guarantee**

Few people believe in guarantees these days. Unless you can prove your guarantee is real, use the valuable real estate space in your ad for a more effective message that consumers are likely to believe and act on.

3. **Really**

If you want to waste space in your ads, include "really" in your copy. This word does nothing to help your messages. Instead, it slows consumers down, and they are not likely to wait around for the complete message. Don't risk losing them by loading your copy with useless filler words. Make sure every word in your copy is there for a reason.

4. **Very**

Does a message sound more compelling with "very" in it? Is "When you need very fresh flowers, call ABC Florist," more effective than "When you need fresh flowers, call ABC Florist"? If you answered, yes, reread the last paragraph.

5. **That**

Once you finish writing copy for your ad or marketing piece, reread it and make note of every time you use "that" in your copy. Chances are, you can delete 90 percent of them because "that" is a filler word that doesn't advance the consumer through the message. Instead, it slows down time-strapped consumers. Deliver the messages your audience is likely to respond to, and deliver them quickly.

6. **A Lot**

Don't use vague copy with words like "a lot" that do nothing to differentiate your business from your competitors. Instead, quantify your messages. If you offer 20 varieties of roses in your flower shop, say so. If you respond to customer service calls within five minutes, tell people. Which is more compelling: "You can choose from a lot of shoe styles at Sally's Shoe Boutique" or "You can choose from more than 100 shoe styles at Sally's Shoe Boutique?" No doubt, "100 shoe styles" is more intriguing than "a lot of shoe styles". A lot can mean different things to different people. Don't leave room for guesswork in your copy. Make your messages extremely clear with no room for confusion.

7. **Opportunity**

You're not helping anyone when you offer "opportunities" in your copy. Consumers don't want opportunities. They want to feel confident handing over their hard-earned money. They want to know they'll get the results they want and need, not the opportunity to perhaps get those results. Don't let them wonder what they'll get when they pull out their wallets. Tell them.

8. **To Be (or Not To Be, For That Matter)**

Write your advertising and marketing messages in the active voice, not the passive voice. If any form of "to be," "has been" or anything similar appears in your copy, rewrite it. Writing in the passive voice doesn't command action. Writing in the active voice does.

9. **Synergy**

This overused piece of jargon has had a long life, but it's time to move on. Leave jargon and 10-dollar words out of your advertising messages. There's no room in copywriting for buzz words and words that consumers need a dictionary to understand. Consumers don't care about your "unique value proposition." They care that when they pay for your product or service, it will deliver the results they expect. Naturally, there are some exceptions to this rule, such as B2B copywriting, where jargon might be expected. In most copywriting, however, keep it simple.

10. **Drinkability**

Budweiser is already using "drinkability" in its ads. Seriously though, the point is valid--don't copy your competition. Instead, differentiate your product and business with unique copy and messages that your target audience is likely to respond to.