



Marketing Words and Phrases That Make Me Cringe

By *Andy Holtmann*

I never would have made it as a writer if I hadn't waded through — and learned lessons from — my fair share of “stinkers” when it came to copy. I've written stupid leads to stories. I've messed up facts. I've misspelled words and names and used wrong phrases. What routinely has me pulling out my hair, however, is when I re-read something I've written and realize I could have used different words or phrases that better tell the story, that better emphasize the points I was trying to get across.

Fortunately, having many writing mentors along the way helped me hone my writing skills. Yet many of today's marketing professionals, advertisement copywriters and public relations professionals haven't had a whole lot of chances to have their writing efforts scrutinized. Why not? The copy they write is perhaps *more* important to the readers they're addressing because it has to *relate* to *sell* what they're writing about.

I could write a dozen or so articles on what I see marketing and advertising copywriters doing wrong. But I thought I'd start with something simple — a list of words I often see in marketing, advertising and promotional materials that, in my opinion, are overused, misused or simply should not be used:

'Best' or 'No. 1' — Who says your property is the “best,” your buffet is the “No. 1,” or your entertainment is the “best?” I have no problem with the words “best” or “No. 1” themselves ... just when I see these words used alone without any backup as I do in so many advertisements. If I see the words “Best Casino in Southern California, I wince at the seemingly pompous statement jumping out at me. However, if I read “Voted Best Casino in Southern California by Readers of XYZ Magazine,” I'm a little more inclined to check out your joint and see what the buzz is about.

'Service' and 'Customer Service' — Yes, I cringe at the words “customer service.” Why? Well, “service” to me is a word that implies work. When I read that a property has good customer service, I can't escape the image of employees gritting their teeth and smiling because they *have* to. I tend to find that the companies that tout customer service the most are the ones that seem to have the most problems with it. Plus it's overused. Everyone today seems to have the “best customer service.” Find another way to say this that better relates to me. Tell me a story of how your casino host will greet me and make me smile the minute I walk in the door.

'Free Gift' — I see this everywhere and it's redundant. I would *hope* the “gift” you're giving me is free. I certainly wouldn't pay for your gift. Use one or the other and, while you're at it, use an extra word or two to tell me more about what I can receive from you ... for free.

'Reinvented,' 'refurbished' and 'remodeled' — Yes, I know you're describing the beautiful new hotel rooms or buffet your property spent millions of dollars on, but when I see these words, I'm reminded that what you had before wasn't really that good. And when I think of something being refurbished or remodeled, I can't help but think of buying a used car or video camera. It's still the same product, but it's been “fixed” and there may still be problems with it. I'd use words like “brand new” or even



MARKETING MIX

“upgraded” instead. To me, these evoke images of something more worthwhile than seeing a new paint job.

‘State-of-the-art’ — As a writer, I’ve used this phrase many a time (but it was usually in quotes). But what does it mean? Can you define “state-of-the-art?” It’s new technology, right? Or is it a new building design? Or is it an enhanced program that speeds you through lines quicker? This phrase seems to be the catch all for things we can’t really explain. “Come see our state-of-the-art sports book” says nothing to me. But if you describe the giant HD screens, the one-button electronic betting and the surround sound that makes me feel like I’m on the sidelines, I just might come and have a look!

‘Convenient’ — If you have to say that your parking garage is “convenient” or that your property has a “convenient” hotel check in schedule or that your players club is “conveniently” located by the front doors, it sounds like you’re really reaching to find anything in your property that might appeal. I think most casino properties have other features they can promote instead, but if you really have to promote the convenience of these features, tell me a story that places me at your property instead of summing your experience up as convenient. My local grocery store is convenient. That doesn’t mean I *like* shopping there.

‘Up To’ — I see it all the time. “Win up to \$1 million” ... or “Collect Your Share of Up To \$500,000 in Prizes” as the lead or bold print. Those two little words might as well be one giant asterisk that says you *won’t* win that much. Save the details and restrictions for your fine print if you can (Yes, I understand some markets require certain “disclaimers”) and concentrate on the appeal of the contest, the fun your players will have and the prize money. “You’re invited to XYZ Casino’s \$1 million slot tournament” gets my attention faster than telling me the most money I can possibly win in that tournament is \$200,000.

‘Competitive’ — When you say that your room rates or your reward points or your café prices are “competitive,” all that tells me is that you’re offering nothing better than the casino down the street. How many times have you looked for a job and read an ad that described competitive salaries? Did you think to yourself that the reason the salary isn’t listed is because the potential employer is trying to find someone for as cheap as possible? I do. So why describe the amenities and experiences your property has to offer as “competitive?” Give reasons why I should pick your property over another.

Remember, this is just one writer’s opinion and you may not entirely agree with me. But if I’m taking issue with these words and phrases, then the people you’re selling to might be too.

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