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# Mind Your Language

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# Mind Your Language:

## THERE IS A FUTURE FOR WELL CRAFTED, EFFECTIVE WORDS

**A pessimist might say that our fixation with imagery, celebrity and 'txt' messaging will eventually consign all lovers of language to the longdrop. In the context of brands at least, I doubt it.**

Why? Because brands, which are likely to remain powerful drivers of buyer choice, are about emotion and, increasingly in this digital, interactive age, a conversation. Imagery that merely clips the surface won't be enough. As the pendulum swings increasingly away from seller 'push' to consumer 'pull', potential customers are increasingly demanding a deeper, more meaningful story with matching integrity.

So there's a future for well-crafted words which can effectively convey the ethos of organisations and their various product and service offerings. But when it comes to communicating via the written word many marketers and branders still need to lift their game. The amount of promotional collateral where you open the document and are confronted with an array of trucks, large buildings or board members trying their damndest to look casual, and copy extolling how great they are at their business, is astounding. Where am I, your customer, in all this? The primary interest of these businesses appears to be themselves.

**Getting businesses to change from habitual 'we' language to 'you' (customer) language requires a distinct change of mindset and orientation. It demands that communicators look at every aspect of the company and its offering from the customer perspective. This can be a revealing, sometimes uncomfortable but ultimately refreshing exercise.**

Technology is a wonderful thing but it needs to be expressed in terms of how it applies to the realities of people's lives. Early on when we started doing branding work for Fisher & Paykel Healthcare, their collateral tended to highlight the clever technology inherent in their sleep apnea products. As a largely business to business brand, there was some logic in promoting their advanced IP relative to the competition. Nowadays, those technical facts are still promoted but the accent has shifted much more towards the people outtakes; the very real improvements these innovative products make to users' quality of life.

There's something attractive about having your company being perceived as human, telling engaging, insightful stories about your customers and the people inside your organisation. They let the brand shine through and get some emotional chemistry going with existing and potential consumers.

If you're in the business of promoting your wares offshore, there are one or two other points to consider around language. Having undertaken a number of writing assignments for multi-nationals operating in Asia, for instance, the practice of 'glocalising' written communications is critical. This entails getting your head around the main cultural imperatives that pertain to each country so you understand the drivers and avoid making gaffes. For writers who enjoy language, promotional writing for countries where English is not the first language and/or where the material is likely to be translated, the task can seem a little constricting, involving as it does usage of a very small dictionary. Everything needs to be readily translatable ie not ambiguous, free of subtle nuances and double entendres.

It seems odd that in Asian countries where storytelling is endemic to all cultures, that storytelling in a business or promotional context is largely superficial or non-existent. Even allowing for the importance of family in Asia, promotional messaging is awash with what my colleague refers to as 'happy-clappy endings'. Not that you should always slavishly follow local form but it pays to understand what rings their bells.

At the extremities of Asia, language itself becomes next to useless. When we were doing the writing components for cement bags for the Indonesian market, for instance, we learned that a high proportion of the masons buying the product were illiterate. To overcome this difficulty we designed a series of icons that clearly indicated both the usage for that particular variety of cement and the correct mixing methods. The market response was very positive.

The targets for our branding messages are highly varied but the common thread for communication success is language that clearly demonstrates an empathy with your audience.