

In the Avalanche of Words, Will Your Message Be Heard?

By Donna Kreutz

Words.

They still matter.

Well-chosen words can cut through the cacophony of communications today.

Despite the mantra that everything must be visual and nobody reads anymore, words do matter. They may matter more now than ever before.

But those words must be the right words – and not many of them. High-impact messages are short. They use words that are strong, clear, direct, honest and accurate. They engage, inform, motivate, amuse, persuade, provoke – or fall flat.

I like words. I make my living with words.

I invite you to take notice of the words that cascade through your life – in emails, blogs, advertising, articles, websites, newscasts, podcasts, conversations. Notice what catches your attention – a clever phrase, an incomprehensible sentence, a vivid image or the 'a-ha' moment when something really hits home with you. What stands out and what isn't worth your time?

Then ask yourself: What are your words saying about you or your business? Are people "getting" your message?

If not, you may want to consult with a professional wordsmith – a PR pro – to craft your message and tell your story in a way that people notice and remember.

Challenge yourself by describing who you are, what you do and what benefit you provide in one short paragraph or a 30-second sound bite. Ask your staff to do the same – or a few valued customers. You may be surprised at the different perspectives as each person describes what he or she thinks is key to your business.

That's one step toward identifying your core messages. Think about these questions: What is the essence of your business? What sets you apart? What's new or compelling? What's your wow factor? Why should people care? What's your goal? What do you want your words to accomplish?

Public relations professionals can help you with this process. Not only are they experts at crafting and delivering on-target communications – they also provide an objective real-world view of your business from the perspective of the consumer, the media and the public.

Once you have focused on your core strengths, think about more subtle factors like the style, character and personality of your business or the age, interests and habits of your customers. These factors also are part of the story you want to tell.

Words do matter. Can you or someone on your staff tell a compelling story about your firm in 100 words or less? Summarize the key elements of a major project on a single sheet of paper? Write a technical article for a trade publication?

We word people take all this quite seriously.

A recent seminar I attended highlighted 135 "emotional triggers" that compel people to donate to your cause or buy your product – ranging from fear and guilt to hope and flattery.



In June, the International Herald Tribune ran an article quoting PR specialists on the most effective words to use in e-mail subject lines to get the attention of the media. The finalists? Words like green, sex, fat, cancer, secret, safe and toxic. The article followed a media pitch about potentially toxic shower curtains that resulted in extensive print and broadcast news coverage.

As humans we crave communication. People want to connect. Witness the success of talk radio, MySpace, Facebook, blogs and texting. But we also are bombarded with messages we don't care about.

Cut through this chaos of communication with words that suit the medium.

When I started my career, I was paid by the inch and learned to write long comprehensive articles. Today I am paid far more to distill the message into one potent paragraph. I still like working with words.

I encourage you to become more word aware. Read, listen, watch, blog, text, talk. Choose your words. Appreciate the rhythm of our language, the turn of a phrase. Take note and save communications you like – and those you really dislike. Bad examples are good teachers.

Being word wise can help you communicate more effectively day to day. This also will make you a more discerning consumer if you decide to work with a PR specialist to tell your story.

Words do matter.

Contact Donna Kreutz, public relations specialist, at (520) 721-9110 or prwords@q.com. Kreutz has worked in Tucson, Denver and Phoenix, providing essential words and effective strategies for resorts, healthcare companies, arts organizations, PR firms and small businesses. As a child she enjoyed reading the dictionary. PR Corner appears the second week of each month and is written by members of the Public Relations Society of America Southern Arizona Chapter.