

Putting a 'Buzz' into your Writing

How buzzwords can help you get a commission

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"A word is not a crystal, transparent and unchanged, it is the skin of a living thought and may vary greatly in color and content according to the circumstances and the time in which it is used."

Although the American author Oliver Wendell Holmes lived well before the term "buzzword" came into the English language, this quote could undoubtedly be applied: Buzzwords are words currently in fashionable use. They can be new words that are created intentionally, often being a combination of two known words which each have a clear, separate meaning (i.e. frenemy – the friend who behaves like an enemy). They can also be individual known words or phrases, to which an innovative meaning is intentionally attributed (i.e. Wikileaks).

Why use Buzzwords?

The aim of buzzwords is to catch a reader's attention, which is a key element of any writing project. Whether you are writing a pitch or query that you want to be noticed by an editor or you are writing a novel and want to hold the reader's attention, buzzwords can be a writer's best friend; just as they have been effectively used in areas such as marketing, selling, advertising and politics, they can add immense value to a writer's career.

The notion of buzzwords might sound rather cheap or clichéd, but should not to be confused with jargon, catchphrases, slogans or fads, although these do have a common characteristic. A truly unique buzzword, either created or contextual, will grip the attention of the target audience or reader. Hence, it 'buzzes' to such an extent that everyone seeing or hearing it instantly recognises its meaning and significance. A buzzword can be the 'hook' that every editor is looking for.

Writers aiming to gain maximal exposure are well advised to take note of the latest craze, and to develop the skills and techniques for creating and using buzzwords to effectively target their pitches. A catchy new word which instantly identifies with what it describes can guarantee the success of a pitch by gaining interest in the pitch subject. It can also enhance the reputation of the writer and ensure further commissions. Indeed, buzzwords have found their way into all facets of human

activity – wherever there is a need and opportunity to optimise the use of language to focus attention, the use of buzzwords should be in every writer's skills set.

Some Buzzword Examples

Recent additions to the buzzword dictionary include 'chillaxing', an activity said to be a favourite of the current Prime Minister. Also in the political arena is 'omnishambles' which could describe the EuroZone or any of several political entities around the world. 'Hactivists' are an increasing concern for politicians or anyone with a new idea or policy they wish to protect from hacking or hijacking. Non-profit organisations lose money if they stage a 'fundraiser', which is highly likely given the UK weather this summer. We are all prone to 'ringxiety' when a mobile phone rings an annoying tune at an inopportune moment. In an interpersonal context, no-one takes a 'fauxpology', a half-hearted attempt at apologising. Thousands of people all over the world have become 'tweeps' by extended attachment to mobile devices and cyberspace. Many of these tweeps are on the lookout for 'trending' topics to get their teeth into. It is likely that you have also met more than a few 'pessoptimists' this way, people who enjoy the best of both worlds at the expense of those who bite the bullet and make real and definite decisions.

Our universities are full of 'slackademics' who choose to be perpetual students rather than to seek gainful employment. Younger students benefit from innovative teaching techniques by indulging in 'edutainment,' while those who do not wish to be educated opt for 'infotainment'. Then there are the teenagers, settling down for their daily 'zitcoms'.

'Wikipedia' and 'Wikileaks' are examples of the power of buzzwords and the recognition they can gain within the English language. So, how can an individual writer create status for a new story, feature, idea, or product using a word, and at the same time increase their own marketability and exposure? It is not as easy as 'trending' words such as 'Wikipedia' might have you believe. Fortunately, however, there are various internet sites that can help you create your own buzzwords. The most useful of these include Buzzhack and Word Central, which demonstrate to the user how buzzwords can be nouns, verbs, adverbs or adjectives, used as blends or strung together to best describe the subject.

Generate your own Buzzwords

Some sites offer to randomly create buzzwords on demand, such as raygent.com. Websites can be searched for dictionaries of known or suggested buzzwords, and it is worthwhile to explore several, as the lists are neither consistent nor exhaustive. Besides, your buzzword should, by definition, be unique. The computer-generated words and phrases are suggestive and can be used as a guide, but the core competency for creation is the ability to blend a thorough knowledge of a subject, a fertile imagination, a deep understanding of word usage and the structure of the English language, and a sense of humour. In the words of Lewis Carroll in 'Poeta Fit Non Nascitur':

*When you are describing,
A shape, or sound, or tint;
Don't state the matter plainly,
But put it in a hint;
And learn to look at all things,
With a sort of mental squint.*

If all else fails and that 'mental squint' just isn't happening, then do gain some inspiration from some of the buzzword websites highlighted within this article. Spending time on these websites is far from procrastinating; for writers, it is what we are all good at - 'creativating'.



Steven Chapman, horror writer, shares his thoughts on the use of buzzwords in fiction

"Buzzwords evolve from real life, and this natural process helps to lend an air of truth when the words are used within a fictional story – helping to create convincing worlds for believable books. Sometimes a buzzword can be so perfect to describe a given situation that there are simply no other words to sum up what is happening on the page. This is also true for dialogue during situations where a character would use an appropriate buzzword to portray their true feelings. They enable the writer to efficiently 'show, not tell' and avoid spoon-feeding the reader with longwinded descriptions or chunks of exposition. Buzzwords allow the writer to tell their story in a style in which their readers can easily identify with, without resorting to outdated slang or region specific catchphrases. They are so widely used that they are instantly recognisable."

www.stevenchapmanwriter.com

FOCUS! Sally Jenkins (continued)

it'll be obvious that it needs checking later. It's more time efficient to go through the completed piece, checking the facts for all the highlighted bits at the same time, than to keep distracting yourself from getting the story finished. Also, a particular research-heavy paragraph may be cut during editing and therefore any fact-finding that you did for it will have been wasted.

As you work through the red highlights of the completed manuscript beware of going off at a tangent whilst searching the internet for facts. If something new but 'off-topic' takes your fancy, make a brief note to come back to it for your next article. Reading about it now will not get the current feature on the editor's desk.

Instant Messaging

Turn it off immediately! The only way to get any writing project complete is to treat it with the respect you give your day job. That doesn't include breaking off every 2 minutes to type a message about what you watched on TV last night. If you've got something desperate to tell your friends, give them a call before your writing time begins and get it off your chest.

So now that you've made a list of how much time you waste on the internet, it's time to get tough. Turn off the Wi-Fi connection — unless it will cause World War III amongst the rest of the family. If you can't turn it off, exercise abstinence through self-discipline, followed by a splurge of social-networking as a reward for finishing your daily word count.

If your writing is more than just a pleasant hobby, make sure you use your hard won computer time wisely. Focus on your particular ambition, whether it's completing a short story each month, finishing a novel or securing a regular column and get rid of all those spurious internet activities that stealthily steal your time.

