



Dear Reader,

Many businesspeople are addicted to speaking in cryptic TLAs – or Three-Letter Acronyms – a surefire way to muddle both messages and audiences.

On a recent episode of the television series *The Office*, boss Michael Scott responded to the latest crisis by barking an alphabet soup of orders at his puzzled employees. What did “FNC” mean?, they inquired. He wanted them “front and centre”. Why not just say that? Using acronyms saves time, he insisted. But explaining the acronyms took even more time, his employees pointed out. This issue of **EC Buzz** will save you time by decoding some common TLAs.

Special thanks are due to branding consultant and author Harry Beckwith, whom I met at the recent Legal Marketing Association in Atlanta, Georgia. He gave kind permission to be quoted on the importance of clear communication.



Elizabeth Cockle  
Copywriter and Buzzword Banisher

---

### In this issue...

- The ABCs of TLAs: Business Acronyms Decoded
- Buzz Off : *Customer-centric*
- Parting Words

---

### The ABCs of TLAs: Business Acronyms Decoded

1. **CLM**: *Career-Limiting Move*. An action or comment that could derail one’s career from its upward trajectory. Using too many TLAs could be a CLM (but unfortunately it generally isn’t). Imbibing too much at the annual Christmas party very likely is.
2. **COB**: *Close of Business*. The end of the business day, when the whistle blows and all the happy factory workers punch their cards and knock off for the day, flush with the satisfaction of a job well done and joyfully anticipating more of the same tomorrow.
3. **F2F**: *Face to Face*. Business conducted in person, an increasing rarity.
4. **ITL**: *In the Loop*. To be aware of key issues. Finding yourself to be increasingly not ITL is a bad sign – perhaps you’ve committed a CLM, or worse still, could soon find yourself on the wrong side of an RIF (see below).
5. **POD**: *Point of Differentiation*. An outcome of product differentiation. The iPod’s main POD is its easy-to-use interface, although its name actually derives from the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*: “Open the pod bay doors, HAL.” (HAL, of course, stands for “Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer”).
6. **RIF**: *Reduction in Force*. Yet another euphemistic term for letting people go (what’s wrong with plain-old firing or axeing them?). An RIF is perhaps the natural consequence of one too many CLMs (see above).
7. **TQM**: *Total Quality Management*. A management strategy aimed at embedding awareness of quality in all organizational processes. American consultant W. Edwards Deming originally introduced TQM to the devastated Japanese manufacturing sector after World War II, where it worked so well that by the 1980s, American manufacturers were forced to re-import TQM to compete.
8. **USP**: *Unique Selling Proposition or Unique Selling Point*. Closely related to POD, USP is a marketing concept explaining how successful advertising campaigns make unique propositions to customers, convincing them to switch brands. FedEx became a major competitor of UPS because of its USP – a guarantee of overnight delivery.

---

### Buzz Off : *Customer-centric*

The widely used “customer-centric” carries a whiff of the ridiculous. Focusing on the customer is quite simply a requirement of doing business – it shouldn’t be touted as a special, unique characteristic. This also applies to “client-focused”, “customer-oriented”, and all permutations thereof.

Instead of homing in on “customer-centric”, simply focus on what you can do for your customer, and then do it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Which buzzword is your pet peeve? Send your suggestion to [writer@ecwriting.com](mailto:writer@ecwriting.com), then look for your buzzword and name in an upcoming issue.

---

### Parting Words

“The clearest communicator is the expert.”

– Harry Beckwith, author of *You, Inc.*