



Dear Reader,

As a new year gets under way, so do new projects and priorities. This means *meetings* – lots of meetings. Nothing seems to accelerate the absorption of voguish buzzwords into the corporate vocabulary as much as spending large chunks of time in a boardroom.

This month we look at buzzwords that may seem smart inside the boardroom (especially if the boss introduced them), but can sound ridiculous and pretentious to those on the *outside*.



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Boardroom Buzzwords

It's infectious – one person uses a new bit of corporate-speak at a meeting, and before you know it, everyone else in the room is using it too. Let's board up these boardroom buzzwords.

1. **Ramp up.** These days, when you want to rapidly increase activity or production, you have to *ramp up*. This of course means that the troops have to *redouble their efforts* (another awful cliché). Let's just dismantle the ramps in memory of the late Evel Knievel.
2. **Drill down.** This phrase implies *investigate thoroughly*, as in: "We should drill down on that problem." If the problem in question involves finding a new oil field or fixing a dental cavity, that's okay. Otherwise, hearing *drill down* too often starts to feel like going to the dentist.
3. **Dead-stick.** In the aviation world, a *dead-stick* landing occurs when an airplane is forced to land without power. Somehow this term has also come to denote a project that has stalled. Seems like a powerless metaphor given that it's the landing, not the plane itself, that is dead-stick, and this obviously requires skilled piloting.
4. **Blamestorming.** You might find yourself on the receiving end of this if you're mixed up in a dead-stick project. It refers to holding a meeting to figure out who should get the blame for a mess-up no one wants to take responsibility for. In other words, it's *scapegoating*, so why not call it what it is?
5. **Bandwidth.** This tech term refers to the mental and physical limits of one's working ability (i.e. the number of projects one can juggle simultaneously), as in: "Who has the bandwidth to spearhead this new initiative?" Whoever coined this pointless term for spare time obviously had bandwidth to spare.
6. **Level the playing field.** Task forces and special interest groups have been *leveling the playing field* for so long it must surely be flat by now. It's clearly time for a new working group to hold a meeting about *taking it to the next level playing field*.
7. **Take it offline.** This is meeting-speak for: "Let's continue a point of discussion after the meeting so that other attendees can get back to work." If you're the speaker or the spoken to, that presumably makes you *online* after the meeting as well as during it. In normal English you could just say: "Let's talk about this later."
8. **Meetnik.** A play on the word *beatnik*, this is a person who enjoys meetings so much that he or she tries to go to as many as possible, and therefore doesn't get much real work done. Let's terminate the person and the word.

Buzz Off : *Integrated*

It used to be pretty clear what was meant by an integrated company. If it dug something out of the ground, processed it and made some end product, it was an integrated mining and manufacturing company. If it carried out biomedical research and developed and marketed new drugs, it was an integrated pharmaceutical company.

Trouble is, businesses everywhere now like to proclaim themselves as integrated, or better yet, *seamlessly integrated*, especially when they've just taken over some other business. Integrated begins to sound like another catchy synonym for *cutting-edge* or *state-of-the-art*.

Of course there's a genuine value in being integrated – in bundling individual products or services together to form a cohesive whole. Just make sure the whole really is cohesive before calling it integrated, and that you can explain in concrete terms *how* it's integrated and why this is valuable to your customers.

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

Parting Words

"The happiness of the client took a trajectory upwards."

– Anonymous communications director at a team meeting