



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first post-summer issue of **EC Buzz**. Summer continues to the busiest season at **EC Writing**, and a brand-new website is underway to showcase new copywriting projects and services.

In this “back to school” issue, we look at punctuation marks that often create challenges in marketing copy. Despite their small size, punctuation marks have the power to clarify, clutter and confuse.



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Four Punctuation Marks and How to Use Them Properly

1. **An apostrophe** shows possession or indicates a contraction, such as *I'm* for *I am*. In the possessive use, an *s* generally follows the apostrophe with a singular noun (*the president's remarks*), but this is not always the case for a singular noun or name ending in *-s* (*the boss's office*, but *Agnes' office*). For plural nouns, the final *-s* precedes the apostrophe (*the directors' report*). The possessive pronouns *hers*, *ours*, *yours* and *theirs* do not have an apostrophe at all.

A key usage to remember is that *it's* is the contracted form of *it is*, while *its* is the correct possessive adjective. For more examples of how the apostrophe is frequently misused, check out The Apostrophe Protection Society's website at www.apostrophe.fsnet.co.uk.
2. **A semicolon** is typically used to include two closely related independent clauses in one sentence. In business and marketing writing, it's usually better to join the two clauses with a comma and a conjunction such as *and*, *or*, *but* or *so*, or create two short sentences. However, when you have a list of items that themselves contain punctuation, semicolons can add clarity: “We have branches in Springfield, Illinois; Springfield, Massachusetts; and Springfield, Missouri.”
3. **A colon** usually indicates that what follows expands the previous idea in some way, for example: “We have three European locations: London, Paris and Rome.” Colons are ideal for introducing lists, bullet points and direct quotations.
4. **An exclamation mark** adds impact to a statement – but use it sparingly to avoid blunting the effect. Save the shouting for headlines and for when you have something really important or unexpected to announce. (What do you say when you improve on a product that's already “Better than ever!”?)

Buzz Off : *Stakeholder*

“Stakeholder” is a hard buzzword to dislodge because it's a convenient catch-all for any person or group affected by a policy or organization. Trouble is, the list of such interested parties in any given situation appears to be inflating wildly these days. Stake-holding has become self-legitimizing. One might almost say that a *stakeholder* is anyone with a knife to sharpen who believes they're entitled to be a *steakholder*.

When drawing up a list of stakeholders, at least be sure to classify them according to the degree of consideration they merit (direct, indirect, marginal, opportunistic).

Is there a buzzword you would like to banish? Send your suggestion to writer@ecwriting.com, and we'll do our best to send it packing in a future issue.

Parting Words

“Cut out all those exclamation marks. An exclamation mark is like laughing at your own jokes.”

– F. Scott Fitzgerald, author