



Dear Reader,

Marketers have a knack for appropriating trendy-sounding words and phrases from other fields, then blurring their meaning. The real experts must grind their teeth at hearing their specialized vocabulary debased.

This month, we look at words that have morphed from the scientific arena into marketing-speak. If you like using them, remember that accuracy and precision are the hallmarks of science – especially if your target audience contains techies.



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P.S. If you're attending the annual Legal Marketing Association conference in Washington, D.C. next month, I look forward to seeing you there!

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Six Transmogrified Tech Terms

- Ergonomic**
What it really means. Designed and/or engineered to maximize efficiency and safety for the user.
How marketers use it. To describe everything from scissors to footwear, as long as it has a cool new look. Yet such items may be no easier or safer to use than "conventional" models.
- Event horizon**
What it really means. The effective boundary of a black hole beyond which not even light can escape. Thus, an object crossing the event horizon simply disappears from view.
How marketers use it. To refer to a point of no return in the near future after which something big is going to happen. Once the event horizon is reached, the event itself will inevitably occur.
- Holistic**
What it really means. Describing the analysis of systems as a whole rather than by dissecting them into their component parts.
How marketers use it. To imply a multifaceted approach for reaching potential customers, including direct mail, signage, TV commercials, social media, guerrilla marketing and anything else they can think of (or that the client can afford).
- Paradigm**
What it really means. The set of beliefs, concepts and values underlying a cultural or intellectual practice.
How marketers use it. In dramatic-sounding phrases such as "whole new paradigm" or "major paradigm shift". These imply that the new model or approach is so radically different that the old ways will become instantly obsolete.
- Parameter**
What it really means. A term in a mathematical equation that can be given different values to generate a family of relationships; similarly, a possible variable that is held at different defined values during a series of experiments.
How marketers use it. As a high-blown term for any feature of a process, product or business model, often implying that some limit or boundary has been reached.
- Proactive**
What it really means. A psychology term to describe someone who takes responsibility for his or her own actions, rather than looking for causes in other people or outside circumstances.
How marketers use it. As an antonym for *reactive*, meaning to anticipate future problems and act beforehand – in other words, actually to look ahead and make a business plan.

Buzz Off : DNA

DNA, or *deoxyribonucleic acid*, is the giant molecule in the nuclei of all living cells that contains their genetic information – the so-called "blueprint of life." If it wasn't for the neat three-letter acronym, it's hard to imagine such a specialized term entering common speech. However, we now hear regularly about *business DNA* or *corporate DNA*. These terms supposedly refer to an organization's core principles and values that somehow get passed on to all new employees.

But this is one scientific appropriation that's suffered too many mutations. Business culture is not governed by heredity but by environment. Change the CEO or the economic climate, or bring in some new consultants, and look at the paradigm shift – you practically end up with a new species! So let's end this silliness. Business may not be rocket science, but it isn't molecular biology, either.

Which buzzword is your pet peeve? Send your suggestion to writer@ecwriting.com, and we'll do our best to send it packing in a future issue.

Parting Words

"In fast-moving, progress-conscious America, the consumer expects to be dizzied by progress. If he could completely understand advertising jargon he would be badly disappointed."

– Daniel J. Boorstin, American historian (1914-2004)