



Dear Reader,

EC Buzz was recently named an “All Star” by Constant Contact, our email marketing service provider. This award recognizes **EC Buzz** for being published regularly, having a consistently above average open rate, and following permission-based email marketing practices. Big thanks to readers for caring about buzzword banishment and contributing to our success!

In this issue, we take another look at terms that marketers have co-opted from other fields because of their trendiness or “cool” factor. (See also our [March 2009](#) issue).



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Six More Transmogrified Terms

- Benchmark**
What it really means. Originally a surveyors’ term denoting a notch cut into a rock, wall or fence into which a bracket, or “bench”, was inserted to support their surveying equipment.
How marketers use it. To refer to current industry standards or “best practices” for indicators such as cost, productivity or quality, in order to suggest superiority to the competition.
- Deploy**
What it really means. To place military forces or equipment in battle formation or within desired operational areas, such as soldiers parachuted out of helicopters onto a battlefield.
How marketers use it. As a synonym for *use* with the (often imaginary) implication that some really intricate strategic skill or intent is involved.
- Guerrilla**
What it really means. A term dating from the Napoleonic Wars referring to small groups of armed civilians using stealth, surprise and mobility against a much larger professional army.
How marketers use it. To refer to unconventional marketing tactics and public relations stunts that rely on timing, energy and imagination instead of a big marketing budget.
- Organic**
What it really means. An agricultural approach treating a farm as a self-sufficient, balanced ecosystem producing its yield without need of artificial chemical assistance.
How marketers use it. As a buzzword implying *healthy* or *natural*, often on flimsy grounds that wouldn’t satisfy an environmentalist. Mounting evidence also indicates that plant-derived ingredients are not necessarily safer, healthier alternatives to synthetic ones, especially in the cosmetics and “natural” medication industries.
- Synergy**
What it really means. The phenomenon whereby two or more discrete influences or agents acting together create an effect greater than expected from these agents acting individually.
How marketers use it. To refer to the increased profits or decreased costs that are supposed to happen when one company merges with or acquires another and the two work together rather than separately. Sounds good but often doesn’t work.
- Viral**
What it really means. A microbiological term referring to a *virus*, a subcellular infectious agent that only reproduces in the cells of a host organism, often resulting in disease.
How marketers use it. To refer to marketing campaigns relying on word of mouth or Internet buzz, often in a sneaky way such that consumers don’t initially realize they’re being targeted.

Buzz Off : *Interface*

Interface is an established descriptive noun. For example, in science and technology, many synergies are found at the interface between disciplines. It was “verbed” by the computer industry in the 1960s (see [verbing of nouns, Summer 2006](#) issue) and now is a recognized term to describe the process of linking different hardware and software components.

We’re sorry to report that, like a virus, *interface* as a verb has escaped the tech domain and infected the business world – today we hear about managers who *interface* with their staff, and meetings called to *interface* with clients. This just sounds like pretentious jargon.

Instead of *interfacing*, choose something more expressive, such as:

- talk
- work
- interact
- cooperate
- exchange information
- compare notes

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

“First of all, never badmouth synergy!”

– ‘Jack Donaghy’, VP of East Coast Television and Microwave Oven Programming in the NBC sitcom *30 Rock*.