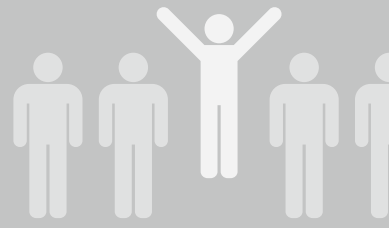




How to **Stand Out**
in a Crowd of Lookalikes:
Three Simple Strategies for Your Marketing Materials

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by Elizabeth Cockle, EC Writing



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Introduction

Nobody does it better than you do.

That’s the good news. The bad news is that you’re surrounded by a throng of competitors who also claim the same thing.

Whether you’re in law, accounting, consulting, another service profession or virtually any highly competitive industry, you’ve probably found that you and your competitors all make essentially the same promises – responsive service, strategic thinking, client-centric solutions.

When everyone claims to offer the same benefits, how do you show that yours are the most valuable to your target market? How can you convey to clients and prospects that you are a better choice than your lookalike competitors?

The following three strategies will help you to:

- determine what makes you different from your competitors; and
- convey this difference in your marketing materials – brochures, sales materials, advertising, website copy, team and individual profiles, case studies, presentations and proposals.

These strategies will also help your marketing materials to stand out because they don’t rely on generic language, seen-it-all-before assurances and tired buzzwords.



Strategy #1: Break Free of Bewilderment

“Know thyself.”

– Inscription at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

Imagine how bewildered your clients and prospects feel by the seemingly indistinguishable companies that appear to offer identical services, products and value. Maybe you yourself feel bewildered by trying to determine what makes your business stand out, let alone what you stand for.

Before your target market can really get to know you, you have to get to know yourself. Digging below the surface will always yield your true business identity as well as unique characteristics – even if you genuinely believe that you’re just one of the crowd.

These questions will help you to dig:

About Your Market

- Who is your current market? Your ideal market?
- What do these groups have in common?
- What motivates them to purchase a product or service like yours?
- How do they benefit from your product or service?
- What problems do you help them solve?
- Who are your major competitors?

About You

- Why do you love what you do?
- What do you do better than your competitors?
- What do you most want your target market to know about you?

The answers will give you a snapshot of what your business is about, who your target market is, and how they benefit from your products or services. Ask as many people on your team as you need to – even clients, if possible – until a clear picture emerges.



Break Free of Bewilderment (cont'd)

Now that you’ve unearthed your identity and uniqueness, you can tell your clients and prospects about them. The easiest way is to incorporate the answers to the above questions into your marketing copy, advertising, presentations and any other messages aimed at your target market.

This clarity allows you to boost your website traffic through search engine optimization. Once you know what you offer, you can incorporate keywords and phrases in your website copy that match the search terms prospects enter in search engines when seeking a company exactly like yours. Knowing whom you’re trying to reach also helps you to focus your marketing budget more strategically – for example, deciding where to advertise, whom to invite to events and types of sponsorship opportunities to pursue.

Above all, knowing what you already do well helps you figure out what you can do *better*.



Strategy #2: Beef Up Your Bios

Mr. Rogers said it best: “You are special. You are the only one like you.”

No matter what your business does, it is unique and individual simply because it’s made up of unique individuals. You can easily play up this uniqueness with detailed biographies of the people in your company or on your team.

Biographies are some of the most trafficked pages of corporate websites, particularly for professional services firms. Clients often choose a company based on a referral to a particular individual. Naturally they will want to know that this person – and anyone on his or her team – has experience doing exactly what they need.

Follow these tips for stand-out, informative, easy-to-read bios:

Style

- **Short paragraphs and sentences.** Help readers to find exactly what they need instead of drowning in an ocean of type – this applies to all marketing copy!
- **Consistency.** Use a consistent writing style across all biographies, such as full sentences only, or point form only. Ensure a consistent manner of address as well. Avoid referring to “Jack” throughout one bio and “Ms. Smith” throughout another.
- **Active voice.** Instead of using passive constructions such as “was involved in” and “was responsible for,” use action verbs such as “improved,” “managed” or “designed.”
- **Bullet points.** Break out critical experience and achievements into bullet-point lists that readers can easily scan.
- **Numbers.** Wherever possible, include numbers and dollar amounts. Did you negotiate a \$10-million deal with a large hydroelectric company? Good. Tell your prospects.



Beef Up Your Bios (cont’d)

Content

- A **succinct description** of your principal practice area or business. If you include a sentence or two on your approach, you individualize yourself even further.
- **Publications, presentation materials or news releases.** Make it easy for readers to learn more about credentials and experience by hyperlinking to these documents. Hyperlink back to the biography as well.
- **Contact information.** Help readers to make direct contact by including both a business phone number and a mobile phone number, plus an e-mail address as a clickable link.
- **Photos.** Not only do photos personalize the biography by showing a living, breathing human being, but they also show the diversity of your business. Photos also remove the ambiguity of unfamiliar or gender-neutral first names. Use a professional photographer for quality images, and ensure a consistent background for all photos.
- **Education and memberships.** List degrees earned, names of educational institutions and memberships in professional associations. In addition to showcasing credibility, these details satisfy prospects’ common preferences to do business with someone who belongs to a recognized professional community, or who went to school with someone they know.



Strategy #3: Banish Buzzwords

A buzzword is a trendy word or phrase that sounds important or profound because it suggests the user has special knowledge or experience. Buzzwords often start out as technical jargon with a well-defined meaning. But in the outside world, they morph into clichés, euphemisms, weasel words and gobbledegook.

While buzzwords have become standard corporate-speak, they deserve to be banished from your marketing materials for three key reasons:

1. **Overuse.** Because virtually everyone uses buzzwords – including your competitors – they guarantee that you’ll blend into the crowd. Overuse also automatically causes these words and expressions to lose impact, no matter how fresh or creative they once sounded.
2. **Lack of clarity.** Buzzwords breed confusion by nature. Prospects may misunderstand or be baffled by them, thus missing your message altogether. Your sales reps may also misinterpret buzzwords and inadvertently give incorrect or incomplete information.
3. **Human preference.** Most people prefer to be addressed in simple, clear English, in what former U.S. attorney-general Janet Reno called the “small, old words that all people understand” when urging the members of her profession to rid themselves of needless legalese.

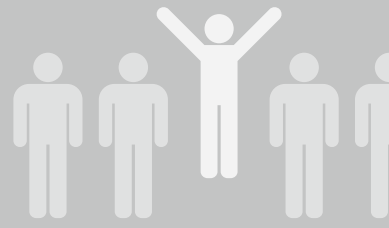
The next page shows some all-too-common buzzwords and their simple, client-friendly replacements:



Banish Buzzwords (cont’d)

Buzzword	Client-Friendly Alternative
Leverage	make the most of
Impact	affect
Cutting-edge	uses new, advanced technology
Mission-critical	crucial, important
Best-of-breed	the top performer in its category
Best-in-class	the best way to spend your money
Think outside the box	find new and better ideas
Utilize	use
Client-centric	<i>See answers to questions in Strategy #1 to explain in concrete terms what you can do for your clients</i>
Solutions	<i>See answers to questions in Strategy #1 to explain in concrete terms what you can do for your clients</i>

For more examples of worn-out buzzwords and alternatives, check out the archives of **EC Buzz**, my free monthly e-newsletter about communicating clearly with your target market, at www.ecwriting.com/ecbuzz.html.



Conclusion

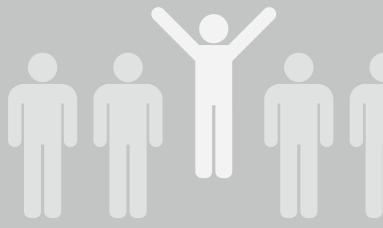
Standing out from the crowd can be a challenge when you and your competitors are saying the same things. Yet, if you want to reach your target market, you need to develop a unique message – and proclaim it high above the noise of the crowd.

As we've seen, applying these strategies to your marketing materials will help you to stand out:

1. The crucial first step is to **break free of bewilderment** – your target market's and your own. Figure out exactly who you are, who your audience is and how you can help them better than anyone else can. Then tell your target market all about it.
2. Next, **beef up your bios**. Your company's uniqueness is the sum of its parts. Emphasize this automatic difference with detailed biographies of the individuals who make up the whole.
3. Finally, **banish buzzwords**. Get rid of any faddish clichés and catchphrases that only conceal what you're really trying to say. Instead choose clear words that speak directly to your clients and prospects in language they understand.

Congratulations! You're well on your way to leaving the lookalikes behind – or in your dust, if you'll excuse the cliché.

Elizabeth Cockle



About Elizabeth Cockle



Copywriter, Buzzword Banisher, Lifelong Wordsmith

Predictions that I would become a writer started in sixth grade, when I won my first spelling bee. Several spelling bees later, I earned a Bachelor's degree in French from the University of Guelph and a postgraduate certificate in Book and Magazine Publishing from Centennial College, which led to work in publishing, marketing and communications.

I launched EC Writing in 2004 to help clients in jargon-heavy industries explain clearly what they do and how their clients can benefit. My specialty in professional services marketing began when a friend put me in touch with his boss, who was looking for a “good writer who isn't a lawyer.”

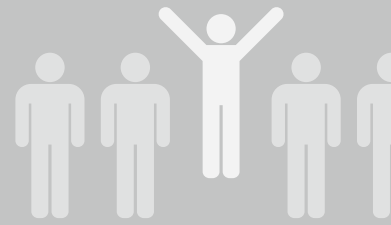
Based in Toronto, Canada, I'm a founding member of the Toronto chapter of the Legal Marketing Association and a member of the Professional Marketing Forum.

Need help banishing buzzwords or cutting through the clutter of legalese, financialese and corporatese? Please visit www.ecwriting.com to learn more about how I can help you translate complex into clear.

For more copywriting and buzzword-banishing tips, please subscribe to EC Buzz, my free monthly e-newsletter, at www.ecwriting.com/ecbuzz.html.

Questions or comments? Please contact me directly:

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What Clients Say about EC Writing

“Elizabeth has a knack for extracting the key points from complex material written by industry experts. I can always count on her for straightforward, informative copy that speaks directly to our markets in the legal field.”

Sue Sanders

Marketing Service Manager, LexisNexis Canada Inc.

“Elizabeth’s ability to work with our lawyers to identify and shape material for use with our clients was excellent. She was able to work collaboratively with them to produce superior RFPs, thought leadership pieces and other creative written materials. I would not hesitate to recommend Elizabeth to any organization seeking excellent writing capability and ability to produce high-impact marketing material.”

Mike Nethercott

Chief Marketing Officer, McCarthy Tétrault LLP

“Elizabeth quickly learned the key points of Individual Pension Plans and conveyed the benefits without fluff or financial industry jargon. Her dynamic direct marketing copy significantly helped the sales of my book on Individual Pension Plans, raising my profile in this growing field.”

Peter Merrick

President, Merrick Wealth Management Inc.

“Elizabeth’s persuasive, highly readable direct mail packages have helped promote the Information Technology Law series to lawyers, academics, business owners and others with an interest in technology law. The series has helped to establish Blakes’ Information Technology Group as a leader in IT law.”

Dr. Sunny Handa

Partner, Co-head, Information Technology Group
Blake, Cassels & Graydon LLP