

What language are you speaking?

Are you by chance speaking in jargon? Why are you doing that?

As a writer and a consultant, I often ask my clients what their “keywords” are. It is helpful, and sometimes crucial, to use the right terminology for any given industry. Especially when you are working in a business to business environment, you need to know how these businesses look for the services/products that they need. But when an outsider lands on one of these B-to-B web pages or marketing materials, he or she will most likely end up not understanding a word. For instance, a client of mine uses the terms “professional services.” For general marketing purposes, this is the emptiest phrase out there, but in the client’s world, it carries a specific meaning.

Setting aside the need for industry-specific terminology, and recognizing the importance of specific terminology in a B-to-B setting, what is going on with language today? Why are so many people talking in gobbledy-gook? Lately, I have heard the following phrases/terms on TV, in conversation and seemingly, everywhere else:

- Drilling down (apparently, this means getting to the heart of the issue or talking specifically)
- Sweet spot (as in where the perfect opportunity lies)
- Being out of pocket (never got this one although it means being unreachable)
- Getting your ducks all in a row (oldie but goodie, means be prepared)
- Leveraging an opportunity (making the most of something)
- Staying ahead of the curve (presumably, leveraging opportunities to get to your sweet spot)

In a sense, these universally used phrases serve as a crutch.

Use them and other people will understand what you mean, even when the meaning isn't entirely clear. Sometimes, using touch phrases makes someone look like an insider, someone who is in the know.

In the end, jargon and catch phrases muck up your meaning. It's one thing to use these in conversation where I can stop and ask you what you mean. It's another to use them in writing. When things are written (especially printed) there is no easy or quick way to ask the writer what he or she means.

Catch my drift?