

When you want to be found

Yesterday, I was browsing through books in my favorite used bookstore (where you can get most soft cover books for \$2 each, a real bargain, and most books are in great shape to boot). As I was making my way through the Fiction section, I came across Diane Ackerman's *The Zookeeper's Wife*, which is the *real* life story of a Polish woman who saved Jews during World War II, thus making it a non-fiction book. I came across a Denise Mina book that should've been housed in the Mystery section. I came across memoirs and biographies. In short, there were a lot of books that were not classified correctly and therefore shelved in the wrong place.

The used bookstore is volunteer-run, and it may be too much to ask volunteers to know what each book is or where it belongs. Since books are donated, there is no inventory. On the other hand, in a regular bookstore, books are shelved by ISBN numbers and inventories are computerized. It'd be rare that book was shelved in the wrong place, unless a customer put it back where it didn't belong. If you were looking for a particular book, you could ask someone to look it up to see if it is available and if so, where it is located.

Classification is important, especially on the internet.

The internet is more like the used bookstore than it is like the organized world of Barnes & Noble. The internet is pretty much volunteer-run and the volunteers are each website's owners. In other words, on the internet you self-classify—you put yourself on the right (or wrong) shelf.

As the website owner or manager, you choose how you want your site to look, what content to include, and what keywords to use. You choose whether you will optimize your site to be found on search engines (SEO) and whether you will do it well (use the right tools, or hire a professional) or not.

When you want to be found, especially online, you have to know how to describe yourself and where people would look for you. You have to know how you are classified and what keywords people use to find you.

You must understand yourself and your market.

In the used bookstore, there are some volunteers who are avid readers, some who are aces at alphabetization and organization, and some who just want to help but have no clues. The volunteers who can alphabetize, organize *and* know books well are the ones who know the right place to shelve a book.

You have to understand exactly what to do, and how the world

classifies you. You may think that you do one thing (like Mattress Firm thinks it sells “sleep solutions”) while most customers see you differently (customers shop for mattresses not sleep solutions). It may be tempting to figure out some fancy description to help you stand out, but unless you classify yourself correctly and use the more common keywords searchers would use, you will not be found.

Don't be the memoir languishing in the fiction section. Classify your website correctly and use the right keywords.

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?

Words are Key

Keywords. They are the mantra of the Search Engine Optimization (SEO) people. Some websites are written in a weird, keyword heavy format to make them seem like candy for

the search engines. Websites also have metatags and alt-text and other areas for keywords. Search engines read text, which is why content is king on the Internet. Search engines do not read images, unless they are labeled or tagged.

Some companies set up blogs just to increase their likelihood of being found. And SEO people think you should have keywords there too.

If you ever doubted that keywords are important, then do a little experiment on Twitter. Use a keyword like marketing, writing, or golf (if that is your thing) and see how many people start following you. Yesterday, I re-tweeted a story about the Christian Science Monitor getting rid of its religion reporter (fairly ironic, and that is why I shared it). Guess what, no less than three people of a heavy Christian persuasion started following me. Even though none of my posts and my bio say anything about Christianity. These people were simply keyword surfing and leeches on to the word Christian in Christian Science Monitor.

So, how do you create a list of keywords? Easy. Start with your industry and work from there. Say you are a civil engineer. You would have the following: engineering, civil engineering, building, and so on. The important thing is to think of variations and related words. If you are in advertising, you would naturally choose marketing, and perhaps sales. You may also want to include location (city, state, country) and specialties. You may want to use the names of your principals. **Just ask yourself: what would people ask if they needed to find me or someone that does what I do?**

Final thought: a popular word on this blog has been Twitter. In fact, I am sure if I tagged this article with the word Twitter, I will get plenty of search engine hits.

