

Do certain words have more marketing power than others?

Today's marketers have an ever-growing choice of how they can reach their targets. Besides traditional media such as print, TV or radio, marketers can now use email, podcasts and even cell phones. Yet, marketing experts say regardless of the medium used, one thing hasn't changed—how certain words hold more marketing power than others.

Identifying powerful and weak words

The first step to incorporating more powerful words into your marketing communications is to know them. A common example of this comes from the real-estate industry.¹ Agents often realize one or two key words in a listing could be the difference between enticing a prospective buyer and creating suspicion.

Marketing
Insights
from 5MetaCom

Powerful or weak?

This real-estate ad contains powerful and weak words. Can you spot which are which?



HOUSE FOR SALE

Spacious, charming, two-story home located at 101 Elm Street. Complete with a **state-of-the-art, gourmet** kitchen complete with **granite** and **Corian®** countertops and **maple** cabinets; in a **great neighborhood**. Don't miss out on this **fantastic** property!

Research has shown that only half of these terms are linked to higher sale prices.¹ In this listing, the words **granite**, **state-of-the-art**, **Corian**, **maple** and **gourmet** are deemed more powerful (linked to a higher sale price) than **fantastic**, **spacious**, **charming** or **great neighborhood**. The reason? **Straightforward**, **descriptive** words cannot be misinterpreted. **Vague** words may have a different meaning to each reader. The exclamation point is typically associated with **false enthusiasm**.

Internet study reveals "power of words"

Some words continue to show their power by virtue of their ongoing popularity. That's what a study conducted by America Online® (AOL) found when the word **free** came in as the most common search term among its Internet users. The word **new** came in second.² This finding, which collected responses from more than 17 million unique searches, bolsters the argument of those who realize the timeless appeal and power of certain words.

Search	
	1. Free
	2. New
	3. Lyrics
	4. County
	5. School
	6. City
	7. Home
	8. State
	9. Pictures
	10. Music

According to an AOL study of 650,000 of its Internet users, **free** and **new** continue to dominate its top-10 list of all search terms.²

Executive Summary

- Using the right words in your marketing tactics can improve the strength of your message to your audience.
- Knowing which words are powerful is a prerequisite to using them effectively in your communications. Power words are typically very specific and descriptive.
- Some words should be avoided altogether because they are overused and often misinterpreted (see back). The top four offenders are value, quality, service and price because these "neutral" words may be viewed negatively by some.
- Power words come in two categories: "sell" and "scare" words (see back). Both categories have a place in marketing when used in the proper context.

Use the right word at the right time for even more power

Marketing power words tend to come in two categories: sell and scare.⁴ Both types of words offer tools for marketers if used in the right way for their situation. If you want to sell your audience on a new product, then use sell words. If you're trying to create fear of a consequence, which in turn will lead them to your product, use scare words. Maybe you can even use both sell and scare words in the same communication. Keep in mind, in addition to the words, it's how you use them that adds power to your marketing.

Sell Words⁴

Free	Fantasy
New	Love
Now	Romance
Sex	Desire
Hope	Dare
Dream	See
Compare	Touch
Smell	Rich
Passion	Fun
Money	

Scare Words⁴

Cost	Pay
Contract	Sign
Try	Worry
Loss	Lose
Hurt	Buy
Death	Bad
Sell	Price
Decision	Hard
Difficult	Obligation
Liability	

Four marketing words to avoid

Some words used in marketing can confuse, and worse yet, lead to no sale. These are usually words most would assume to be universally understood as a positive by the audience. The trouble, however, is that some words have multiple or varied meanings depending on who is interpreting them. For this reason, it might be wise to simply avoid these top offenders.³

- **VALUE.** Since this term is in the “eye of the beholder,” it’s a risky word for marketers to tout about their own product. The customer will ultimately determine if value, as they define it, was there. Without using the word “value,” build your case for it by focusing on specific features and benefits of your product or service.
- **QUALITY.** Technically, quality means conformance to a set of requirements. However, consumers ultimately define quality in their own terms based on how well a product or service met their expectations. However, you can let third-parties confirm your product’s quality and then communicate it with a level of credibility. J.D. Powers and *Consumer Reports* are two examples.
- **SERVICE.** Experts say this word is overused. It’s much like “quality” because the consumer defines it personally. That means it’s better to just provide good service and let the customer spread the news. Rather than say “great service,” be specific. For example, say: “all calls answered in 45 seconds or less.”
- **PRICE.** Sometimes referred to as the “ugliest” word in marketing, experts contend that once you start talking about price, the consumer will start comparing you and the competition on that basis right away. This can distract your customer’s buying process and make you a commodity seller. Consider your brand image and ask yourself: “How does a low or high price affect long-term perception?”



If all customers and prospects interpreted word meanings alike, marketers wouldn't need to worry about misunderstandings. But since that's not reality, experts advise you to take steps to reduce the odds of saying something you didn't intend. In particular, they recommend avoiding four words that often trip-up marketers — value, quality, service and price.³

What's all this mean to you?

Certain words add more power to marketing tactics than others. As it turns out, some of the more commonly used terms in marketing can lead to negative results. Words which can boost marketing power come in a couple of general categories: sell and scare words. Depending on how they're used, both types of power words have a fit in marketing and can help improve the results of your efforts.

¹ Levitt, S., Dubner, S. *Freakonomics*. 2005: 74-75.

² Gomes, L. What are web surfers seeking? Well, it's just what you'd think. *Wall Street Journal*. Aug. 16, 2006.

³ Johnson, P. Four Common Words That Will Ruin Your Sale. Available at www.panache-yes.com. Accessed May 19, 2008.

⁴ Kern, R. B-to-B Insights: Powerful Prose. Available at www.targetmarketingmag.com. Accessed May 19, 2008.