



## **Solutions are a Problem:** **The Need for Jargon-free PR and Media Relations**

**By Tom Gable**

Does your company offer leading edge, best-of-breed, and end-to-end solutions for the wired economy? Well, you are not alone.

In today's fast-moving economy, PR clutter and jargon abound. If certain words could be measured like radiation, contamination sirens would be going off in newsrooms all over the country. The problem: both content and volume.

Some companies put out one or more news releases a week, whether they have real news or not. They announce minor partnerships, low-level hires and other trivia. They do it to populate the databases of the world, so their names show up when financial analysts go searching. Communications can't be totally jargon-free because words can have real meaning within an industry even when they cause the eyes of industry outsiders to glaze over like the zombies from the movie *Night of the Living Dead*.

The cure: go cold turkey in dropping the use of meaningless jargon and empty phrases to clearly communicate a company's attributes and avoid immediate media rejection.

For starters, most companies sound alike. Gable PR studied news releases issued during one week over PR Newswire and Business Wire. A new "solution" was promoted or touted every eight minutes on average. Wouldn't we have a wonderful, problem-free world if there were so many solutions?

### ***Everyone's a Leader***

More than half the companies claimed to be "leading providers" of something, but never submitted evidence to support the claim. We analyzed the news releases of 11 companies competing in the same business-to-business arena as one of our clients. Nine claimed to be the market leader. As an exercise, we took the basic descriptive copy of each company, blanked out the names and asked the client to identify any of them, including his own. He scored one out of eleven.

No wonder company messages aren't getting through. The media hate the deluge, then having to sort through empty words in search of nuggets of news. This is damaging to clients where the race for brand identity and market share is to the swift and smart.

Unfortunately, many agencies and new companies are fast but lazy, resorting to clichés and jargon instead of going through the hard work of being intelligent and developing real positioning and a personality. The authors of *The Cluetrain Manifesto* said it well: “Today we no longer make chips, circuit boards, computers, monitors and printers. We don’t even make products. Instead, we make *solutions*, a fatuous noun further bloated by empty modifiers such as *total, full, seamless ...and state-of-the-art.*”

Writers from Forbes and other publications have written stories about PR atrocities, including a list of their least favorite words. Top of the list: solutions.

### ***Bozo and Jargon Filters***

Research and interviews with editors and writers in the major media show a distinct anti-jargon bias. At a Bulldog Reporter Media Relations conference in New York City and media conferences in Seattle and the Silicon Valley, editors from Forbes, Economist, Investor Business Daily, WSJ Interactive, Fast Company and others said the daily tsunami of misdirected and poor pitches is so bad they’ve created "bozo and jargon filters" on their email, to automatically delete messages that contain words such as solutions, first, leading, leading edge, best, first mover, and end-to-end. Releases coming from certain public relations agencies and companies known for their hack-and-flack approach are automatically sent to the trash bin.

The editors collectively issued challenges to communicate with clarity about what companies really sell, then provide ongoing data or other proof of any claim to superiority or leadership. When clients insist on using favorite phrases against agency advice, the results can be damaging to both company and agency. One WSJ Interactive editor put it into perspective with this thoughtful response to a client-mandated pitch: “No thanks, I’m done covering solutions...I filter out pitches with the word ‘solution’ or ‘solutions’ now...especially ones that are ‘customer-centric’ or ‘mission-critical.’ Please don’t write to me about solutions anymore...they’ve become a problem.”

Can companies and agencies break through the clutter? Definitely. Join the crusade toward jargon-free PR. Analyze every release with the following Jargon Trash Index. Check the results and then see if you rank among the great communicators, night of the living dead, or somewhere in between.

### ***Four Easy Steps***

1. Take any release and circle the words that appear on the Most-Hated list below
2. Add the number of words circled
3. Divide by the number of paragraphs in the release
4. Multiply by the number of times the word "solutions" is in the release

### ***Your Jargon Rating***

**Less than 1** -- Very likely editors will read it, given it has real news value; good job!

**1 to 2** -- Creeping into Jargon Land, may get read if newsworthy

**3** -- A candidate for most media e-mail filters unless there are big dollars involved or industry icons

**4** – Getting unfit for human consumption, much less media attention

**5** -- Submit to the Guinness Book of World Records for the coveted Jargon Density Award (and start rewriting your business mission, vision and positioning copy)

**More than 5** – Put it in the bottom of your bird cage and start over

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### **Words Most Hated by the Media**

*Solutions*

*Leading*

*Leading provider*

*Seamless*

*Leading edge*

*Cutting edge*

*State-of-the-art*

*Best-of-breed*

*Robust*

*End-to-End*

*First mover*

*Customer-centric*

*Mission critical*

*Turnkey*

*(NOTE: Tom Gable (tom@gablepr.com) is CEO of Gable PR, San Diego (www.gablepr.com). A former financial journalist and Pulitzer Prize nominee, he is author of The PR Client Service Manual and a frequent speaker at national conferences and teleseminars on jargon-free public relations, media relations, crisis communications, creativity and strategic reputation management.)*

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