



Mastering Technical Sales
2037 Trowbridge Drive
Newtown, PA 18940
Phone +1-215-431-1552
John@masteringtechnicalsales.com
www.masteringtechnicalsales.com
John Care, Managing Director

Clichés: Step Outside The Box

Eleven Ways To Get Your Ducks In A Row

Cliché (n)

(1): A trite or overused expression or idea.

(2): A Sales Engineer whose behavior is superficial or predictable.

(3): The main ingredient of most marketing and corporate presentations.

Just last week I found myself using "raise the bar" and "push the envelope" in one horrific thirty second answer to a leadership question. I paused, took a deep breath to compose myself, and then provided a more original and direct response. I was being lazy as clichés are boring, unoriginal, trite and well .. mostly plain stupid.

Here are eleven ways (mainly because a top ten is clichéd in itself) to either eliminate clichés or use them to your advantage. Therefore, let us run these ideas up the flagpole and see who salutes them.

Know Your Enemy

Like any good Sales Engineer, you need to conduct a good discovery session first to understand the situation and what you are fighting against.

1. **Make a list.** Take ten minutes and write down as many clichés as possible. Include everyday conversational clichés as well as industry specific phrases and worn-out marketing drivel. Keep this list handy and visible at all times when you are writing or preparing a presentation.
2. **Review the list.** Did you include some of my all-time favorites?

<i>push the envelope</i>	<i>win-win</i>	<i>moving on</i>	<i>whole nine yards</i>
<i>raise the bar</i>	<i>24 by 7</i>	<i>outside the box</i>	<i>it's just business</i>
<i>industry standard</i>	<i>going forward</i>	<i>30,000ft view</i>	<i>industry standard</i>
<i>open</i>	<i>scalable</i>	<i>architecture</i>	

3. **Use technology.** There are several features within Microsoft Word to catch clichés, colloquialisms, jargon and “bad” words. Firstly the cliché catcher is an option within the style section of the Word proofreader - you just need to turn it on. Secondly you can create an “exclusion” dictionary, which flags regular words as being incorrect - perfect for atrocities such as *scalability*, *extensibility* and *programmability*. For more details examine Microsoft Word help or visit the [MTS Blog](#).

Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt and a Little Truth

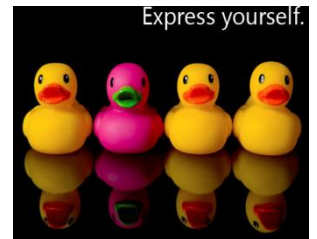
The adage, or maybe cliché, of **think positive** comes into play here. Removing negative words, uncertainties and annoying filler words will increase the effectiveness and impact of your sales calls. The best way to get rid of these distractions is to monitor your written communications and to have a trusted friend watch or video your next presentation and note every cliché and piece of jargon.

1. **Uncertainty.** You need to be confident and credible in your communications. Littering “**I guess**”, “**I think**” and that eternal HR favorite, “**hopefully**”, throughout your conversation is weak and self-defeating.
2. **Hesitation.** “**Please don’t hesitate to contact me**” is my absolute favorite, and although it is not quite a double negative, let’s call it a $1 \frac{1}{2}$ times negative. This is a phrase used at the end of many email communications, including my own for a while. Use “**please contact me at**” instead.
3. **If you will.** I have never understood this piece of filler, yet it afflicts at least 10% of the population. Using “**if you will**” is tantamount to begging for both agreement and acceptance.
4. **It’s the truth.** These are verbal clichés such as “**to tell you the truth**”, “**to be honest with you**”, or even “**frankly**” - a phrase which is now unfortunately sweeping through a large enterprise software company. To state the obvious, if you are being honest right now, what have you been saying for the past ten minutes?
5. **I am right because I say so!** This covers phrases such as “**OK**”, “**right**”, “**you know**” and the infamous “**don’t you agree?**” Instead, confirm with a “**do you find that**” or “**can you see how?**” Although they are still closed end questions, they are less filler and more everyday conversational phrases.

Positive Usage of Clichés

There are occasions when a good cliché can serve to make a Very Important Point, to act as a transition from one section of a presentation to another, or just to inject some levity into the proceedings.

1. **Historical quotations.** As long as you are consistent with your message, you can never go wrong with historical quotations. Einstein, Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Gandhi and Shakespeare never go out of fashion. "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." is much better than "there is no I in TEAM"
2. **Explain the cliché.** Sometimes you can take one of the older clichés and explain what it actually means. For years I thought *the whole nine yards* referred to American Football, until it was explained to me that nine yards was the length of an anti-aircraft machine gun belt (there are other explanations too). So the expression means 'completely, the whole, everything.'
3. **Self-deprecating humor.** When you really do need to use a cliché to make a point, experiment with a little gentle humor directed back at yourself. If you are trying to get your own, or someone else's, ducks in a row, and there is a problem - use a visual representation instead.



Summary

First - make a list of clichés you want to be rid of, and then program your Microsoft office environment to flag and reject these clichés. Secondly, have a colleague videotape you, or even use a webcam to record yourself giving a webcast, to understand which clichés and pieces of jargon you favor. Lastly, don't give up on them entirely - there is a place in the language for clichés and colloquialisms when used appropriately.

I could even say that you should avoid clichés like the plague.

"A good word costs no more than a bad one"

English Proverb

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

To receive the monthly MTS Newsletter, email info@masteringtechnicalsales.com