The Second Derivative
1538 Winding Way
Belmont, CA 94002
Phone: +1 650 631 3694
PCohan@SecondDerivative.com
www.SecondDerivative.com
www.DemoGurus.com
Peter E. Cohan, Principal

The Meaningless-Filler Gratuitous-Phrases Vocabulary List:
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How Your Demos Are Impacted by, um, like, you know, the Words You Use

Have you ever been listening to someone else's demo and found yourself annoyed or distracted by their wasted words and meaningless fillers? Here's a real-life example:

"So, um, if you, you know, kinda look here, you know, you'll sorta see how we've done our new wizard. Um, it's like, you know, um, kinda like other wizards, so it's like, um, you know, like really easy to use."

If you find this annoying, you are not alone. (If you find yourself thinking, "Get to the *%^$! point!" you are *also* not alone…) If you have people on your team who present demos like this, be <u>very</u> concerned... If you are someone who sounds like this, be <u>extremely</u> concerned!

We'd like to present, um, like, you know, sorta kinda like The Meaningless-Filler, you know, Gratuitous-Phrases Vocabulary List.

Damage (Out of) Control

What's the impact of this kind of delivery on an audience? Here's what your customers in the audience may be thinking:

- Staff Members: "What's he trying to say?"
- Mid-Management: "Can't he speed it up – I've got another meeting…"
- Senior Management: "Get to the point… I'm leaving if this goes on."

Colleagues on your selling team may also be concerned:

- Technical Staff: "She's making our beautiful architecture sound lame!"
- Sales Staff: "She's taking far too long – we're losing them…"
- Senior Management: "We've got to find someone else to do this!"

Loose, sloppy vocabulary can weaken your position and dilute your message. They damage your credibility. Wasteful and imprecise words can move someone from neutral to slightly negative – it can even cause a supporter to drop down to neutral or worse.

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Double Trouble

There are two types of words and phrases to avoid:

1. Spurious Spacers (um, like, you know…)
2. Weak Wimpy Words (kind of, sort of, maybe…)

Spurious Spacers are typically less destructive, but are still annoying. The next time you are in the audience at someone else's demo or presentation, keep track of how many times the presenter says one particular Spacer, such as "like" or "you know". Don't be surprised if you find the number of uses of the Spacer is nearly *double* the number of sentences delivered. That's a lot of wastage!

Wimpy Words are the worst. They increase perceived complexity, they obfuscate clarity and can directly reduce the value of your solution. Customers want to work with vendors who can get the job done – they aren't interested in vendors who can *kind of* deliver the software or *sort of* complete customization.

The List (A Starter Set)

Here are a few entries to get you started on compiling your own list for your team, along with pithy comments for each entry – feel free to add your own!

Spurious Spacers	Pithy Comments
"Um…"	Let us count the number of times…
"And stuff"	Stuff, such as what?
"Like …"	You *go*, Valley Girl (or Guy)… *Really* go. Away.
"Actual…" and/or "Actually"	Does this mean that everything else you've shown us is fake?
"And really"	Ditto.

Weak Wimpy Words	Further Pithy Comments
"You know…"	If I do know, why are you telling me?
"As you can see…"	If I can see, why are you showing me?
"Kind of …"	Kind of? Then what is it really?
"Sort of …"	Ditto.
"Like …"	Is it *similar to* something else, then?
"Gonna…"	Vs. "Going to"…
"Wanna…"	Vs. "Want to…" – great for lyrics, lousy for demos.
"Hopefully…"	And *hopefully* you won't be getting our order…!
"Possibly…"	Because we might *possibly* be going to your competition.
"Maybe…"	Or is it maybe not…?
"Might be…"	This and the previous three words and phrases suggest that your software won't work consistently for us…

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Weak Wimpy Words	Further Pithy Comments
"And again…"	Please let it be over…
"As you saw before…"	If I saw it before, why are you wasting my time?
"Needless to say…"	Then don't say it!
"Really really"	My kingdom for an adjective!
"Know what I mean?"	If I did, why would I look so confused?!

Repeatedly Repetitive, Recursively, Redundantly, Over and Over Again

Here's an example of a vocabulary felony offense:

"So now you are actually looking at the actual screen, which is the result of the search we actually ran…."

What we have here is a case of repetitive use of a Spurious Spacer. As audience members, we grow so weary of the word or phrase that we (actually) may stop listening…. It's worse than "hit and run" – it's "hit, hit, hit, hit, hit…" and the audience does the running!

No Hectoring the Witness…!

Another remarkably annoying habit is sometimes referred to as "lawyering" (no offence to any lawyers who might be reading this – the term is used only with the greatest possible respect!). Here's an example:

Vendor: "So, I believe you said you are concerned about making your quarterly numbers. Is this correct?"

Customer: "Yes…"

Vendor: "And you said that the reason for this is that it takes too long to roll-up your forecast? Also correct?"

Customer: "Yes…"

Vendor: "And your forecast is inaccurate and riddled with errors? Is this true?"

Customer: "Yes…! [sob]"

Vendor: "And then you said you are wasting hundreds of hours of your sales teams' time – every day? Is this also correct?"

Customer: "Yes, yes, YES – I admit it! It's all true! I'm a terrible manager and a worse senior executive…! I MUST buy your tool right away!"

Vendor: "Your witness, counselor…"

Other Crimes and Misdemeanors

Proof by Intimidation

> Wherein the presenter makes it appear that only an *idiot* won't understand.
> Example: "It is painfully obvious to the casual observer that the following is
> clearly true…"

"This will allow you to…"

> *Allow* me to? I need permission? Consider using "Enable" rather than "Allow":
> "This capability enables you to accomplish the task in three mouse-clicks."

Insultingly Fictitious Names

> "Mary Manager" – "Dave Developer" – "Ira IT" – "Larry Legal" – "Francine
> Finance"… These tell the audience that your example data is fake, fake, fake.
> And also indirectly suggest that your software is similarly suspect. Replace these
> insultingly fictitious names with realistic ones or, even better, use *real* data when
> appropriate.

Company-specific Jargon and (OMG) Acronyms

> Volumes could be written about how jargon and uncontrolled acronyms have
> negatively impacted demos and presentations. Internal company vocabulary is
> often peppered with TLA's – three letter acronyms – and your customers typically
> have no clue about their meanings. Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC – even
> their *name* was an acronym!) was stunningly effective in their generation and
> misuse of acronyms. They were even guilty of MLMNA's – that's Multi-Level-
> Many-Nested Acronyms – acronyms within acronyms!

Rising Inflection?

> A painful habit is the tendency for some presenters to turn statements into
> questions by ending sentences with a rising inflection? This can be very
> confusing? And annoying?

Revolving Point-of-View

> It is equally painful to listen to a demo where the presenter moves between first
> person, second person and third person – often without any warning – resulting in

a monologue that could have come from a Marx Brothers movie (Groucho, not Karl). Example:

"Now, I'll show you what she would do next. First we click here, then she would see this screen, and then I'll choose this option which will take the user to the report wizard, where we can add columns, which she can then send to a printer or mail to ourselves…"

Help From the Looking Glass

One of the best ways to improve and reduce one's use of Meaningless-Filler and Gratuitous-Phrases is to take a good look at yourself – in a video or other recording. Few things are as humbling as hearing your own voice and noting your own (bad) habits!

The strongest among us are able to identify our own errors and to take steps to reduce the use of wasted words. Many people find that if they focus on reducing the use of a single word or phrase they can make excellent progress by themselves. A terrific self-help vehicle is to record your voice while delivering demos or presentations using the recording capabilities in WebEx, Live Meeting, PowerPoint or similar tools. You can then play it back in the privacy of your own earphones…

Many others need help from a third party. Presentation skills classes that focus on the *behavioral* aspects of presenting are available nearly everywhere. Most of these vendors include video-recording your presentations and coaching on your delivery, with particular focus on your verbal and physical mannerisms.

Finally, the bravest among us can solicit the help of our colleagues to track our Meaningless-Filler and Gratuitous-Phrase transgressions. It is easy to ask another member of your sales team to count the number times you use "actually" in your next demo – and it is actually frightening to actually see how many times you actually used the word!

Eliminate the wasted words, sharpen your delivery and enjoy the rewards of more successful presentations and demos.

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