

## **12 Biggest Mistakes Salespeople Make in Their Writing**

**By Bonnie Budzowski**  
**President, inCredible Messages, LP**

Like it or not, salespeople accomplish important work through writing. E-mail, customer correspondence, executive reports, and business proposals are integral parts of the sales job. In the hectic pace of a business day, most people muddle through, but they fail to achieve the best possible results. They miss opportunities to make a sale, build a relationship, or distinguish their company as a preferred provider.

Here are the most common mistakes in writing that diminish sales results. Through speaking and consulting, I help salespeople gain a competitive edge by recognizing these mistakes and fixing them.

### **1. Make the message visually dense**

The appearance of your message results in a split second read/no-read decision on the part of the reader. Screens and pages that visually overwhelm the reader get deleted, trashed, or put aside for later. Later, of course, never comes.

Some simple guidelines regarding visual design can make all the difference. For example, use headings and plenty of white space to make your piece visually inviting. Limit yourself to two different fonts to avoid visual clutter.

### **2. Design the message chronologically**

The quickest and surest way to lose your reader is to start with background information. Busy people care about messages *only* in relation to how the messages are relevant to them—to their own goals, priorities, and schedules. Present things from the reader's perspective—and in the order that makes sense for the reader.

Rather than start a business proposal or executive report with the history of your company or your project, start with the conclusions or recommendations. This creates clarity and cohesiveness for the entire document.

### **3. Leave the sender and purpose of the message unclear**

People sort e-mails and documents by priority. A vague subject line in an e-mail will send yours to the bottom of the list, at best. A strategic subject line will capture attention. Make the subject line reflect why this message is important from the reader's perspective.

Use a subject line, even in a formal letter, to help the reader know the relevance of the letter immediately.

#### **4. Bury the key information**

As readers, we don't literally move from left to right, word to word. Rather, we scan a page or screen, looking for meaning. We want to know the overall message of a piece so that can fit individual bits of information into that frame. If a reader can't identify the key pieces of information, he or she will become frustrated and tune out.

Use headings in a way that breaks up information. Make those heading "rich" so they tell your sales story at a quick glance. If the story is relevant to your readers, they'll stick with your message.

#### **5. Misuse the executive summary**

Business professors and executives alike complain that people don't know how to write a good executive summary. Most people write introductions and label them executive summaries. Given this fact, a well-written executive summary makes a strong impression of competence.

Start your summary with conclusions and recommendations. Then present an overview of each section of the document, showing how each point to the conclusions. Provide a complete summary that saves the reader time and presents the key aspects of the document in overview, executive level form.

#### **6. Use vague rather than specific language**

If you tell your customer that you deliver results, strong customer service, and high quality, you haven't said anything that a competitor hasn't said. If, rather, you report that your product reduced the scrap costs of a specific customer by 68% without sacrificing quality, you've established a competitive edge. Specific language is always more compelling than non-specific language. Use case studies and measurable results to tell your sales story.

#### **7. Fail to create a clear link between features and benefits**

Even experienced salespeople fall into the trap of describing the features of a service or product and assuming the reader has a clear understanding of how he or she will benefit from the features. This is a dangerous assumption—the link is far too important to take for granted.

Create a link between your features and the benefits they deliver. For example, "Because our vehicles have built-in safety seats for infants, you never have to worry that your precious child is in danger because you've made a mistake installing the car seat." You must make this link because your readers are usually too distracted or disinterested to do this work for you.

## **8. Choose impressive, stilted language**

Every letter or e-mail you send does double duty. It communicates content and it contributes to the relationship. As you know, people buy from other people whom they like and trust. Formal language that sounds something like, “Pursuant to the above mentioned matter...” doesn’t contribute positively to a relationship of likeability and trust.

Choose the same tone for your letters and e-mails that you use with a professional colleague on the phone—friendly and professional without being overly formal. This tone makes your task of writing easier; it makes the writing easier to understand; and it adds warmth to the relationship.

## **9. Fail to use third-party endorsement**

Your potential customers know you are biased about your product or services. They expect sales people—even ones with integrity—to exaggerate the benefits and downplay the drawbacks of the things they sell. When you fail to ask your satisfied customers for endorsements, or fail to include these in your proposals and reports, you miss a huge opportunity to increase your credibility and sales.

## **10. Leave the follow up ball in their court**

Countless sales messages end with this phrase, “If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call me.” This is the poorest excuse for ending a letter that you can possibly choose! If you leave it up to a potential customer to call you, you’ve lost control of the sales process and should not expect anything good to come your way. Write, “I’ll call you tomorrow or next Tuesday to answer your questions,” and you have a chance to move to the next step.

## **11. Neglect to clearly request action**

In each message you send, the sales process should be moving forward. This fails to happen when salespeople expect their customers and their colleagues to instinctively know what comes next. As a meeting or call comes to an end, people will have different ideas of what should happen next. As those same people go back to their pressing tasks, they will have different levels of urgency regarding your tasks. Clarify your request for action often—at the end of a conversations, meetings, phone calls, etc.

In e-mails and letters, put the request for action in the subject line or first sentence so there is no room for confusion.

## **12. Fail to take a break between writing and sending**

Okay, you are in a hurry. Because of pressing work, you’ve waited until the last minute to write and submit your proposal. You rush through it and send it off as soon

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as you are finished. Thus, you miss opportunities to really connect with the reader's needs, and there's a good chance your document is full of embarrassing mistakes.

These twelve mistakes represent the most common mistakes salespeople make when they write. When you learn to avoid them—and even turn them to your advantage—you will stand out as an excellent communicator and service provider. Customers will clearly see the connection between their own needs and the services you offer. Not only that, they will feel a rapport as well.

I trust you have found this report to be helpful. At speaking events and working sessions, I demonstrate, as well as talk about, how these mistakes detract from sales effectiveness—and I show how to fix these mistakes in clear and relevant ways.

If you recognize some of the mistakes described in this report, I might be the right professional to work with your sales team. Where there is a fit, my work brings powerful results.

I look forward to discovering if there is a good fit between my offerings and your sales goals. To schedule a no-charge, no-obligation conversation, please call me at 412-361-1490 or contact me at [bonnie@inCredibleMessages.com](mailto:bonnie@inCredibleMessages.com). I look forward to talking with you.

Imagine yourself in a situation in which one professional shows you how to incorporate the insights of three perspectives into your business communication: marketing, persuasion, and visual design.

Imagine an interactive session with an entertaining and inspiring speaker. Do you like what you see? You've just envisioned working with Bonnie Budzowski, President of inCredible Messages, LP.

Learn more about how Bonnie can guide you and your team to create compelling business messages: [bonnie@IncredibleMessages.com](mailto:bonnie@IncredibleMessages.com) or 412-361-1490.