

# A/E Rainmaker

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The Guide to Attracting and Keeping Great Clients

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## Words That Work - and Those That Don't!

There is a new contribution to linguistic empowerment that is causing a lot of buzz in the media talk shows. It's the book *Words That Work* by Frank Luntz, a contemporary master of the art of using words to persuade. The premise is that "it's not what you say, it's what people hear" that makes the difference. It's what they interpret from your speaking, or from your writing that will persuade them or turn them off. Select your words carefully, and use those terms which are most likely to convince your client audience to accept your written words in letters, memos, brochures and proposals, and your spoken words in presentations to clients. Words are every bit as important as facial expressions, hand gestures, and voice pitch. In a word, Frank truly believes that words matter.

The world's best message is ineffective if the person on the receiving end does not understand or relate to it. It will fall flat if it doesn't touch the listeners' prism of experience, beliefs, preconceptions and prejudices. The key to communication is to put yourself in your listener's situation and understand his or her beliefs. What the listener perceives constitutes reality, according to Frank.

Other authors agree. Michael W. McLaughlin, principal with Deloitte Consulting and editor of *Management Consulting News* ([www.managementconsultingnews.com](http://www.managementconsultingnews.com)), and co-author, with Jay Levinson, of *Guerilla Marketing for Consultants*, states that proposals brimming with consultant-speak drive clients to the competition faster than you can say "seamless connectivity." His advice is to strip out empty phrases, tired superlatives, unproven hype, and buzzwords. In the war of words, he maintains that your most potent weapon is your computer's delete key.

Dennis Schrag of the Longview Group ([www.longview-group.com](http://www.longview-group.com)), has a more onerous warning for words used in marketing pieces and proposals that could present a professional liability issue. Certain proposal language can create legal traps. For every phrase used there is the legal interpretation that clients might attach to it, and he suggests looking for substitutes to reduce your liability exposure. Seemingly harmless words such as "thorough," may be interpreted by clients to mean "perfection," when you really only wanted to indicate "according to professional standards." Another is the seemingly harmless word "examine," interpreted by the client to mean "find every fault," when you should have written "observe, visit, or review."

In addition to worrying about words that cause the wrong impression, you should be concerned about saying a lot of things that dilute your message in the letter, memo, proposal or presentation. This happens far more often, but if you avoid starting a message with your history, number of staff, locations, and the like, you'll be far ahead of the game at the start.

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## TOP 6 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR A/E/C WEBSITE

By Paul Regensburg and John Canestraro

Think of your web site as an unflinching dedicated sales assistant who is working for you 24/7/365. Empower your web sales assistant with the tools necessary to make a favorable impression by making these six improvements to your own site.

**1. Design and build your web site with the same thought and care you employ when designing and planning client buildings.** A state-of-the-art web site includes great photography, fresh content, and interactivity to enhance the user's experience.

**2. Take full advantage of Search Engine Marketing.** The purpose of Search Engine Marketing is to help get the right people — prospects actively looking for your services — to your web site.

There are two categories of search to consider. One is known as *Natural Search*, and the other is *Pay Per Click (PPC)*. *Natural Search* is the science of determining what “keywords” prospective clients are using to search for services like yours and then making these words prevalent on your site and in links to your site. The goal of *Natural Search* is to get your site to be at the top of the Google and other search engine results when prospects come looking.

*PPC* advertising is a more focused way of getting the same result. This is where you buy keywords and thus your search

ad is placed in a separate and more prominent location on Google and other engines from which you buy. Then, you pay only when a user clicks on your ad.

**3. Use your web site to build relationships with customers.** You have to be dedicated to providing fresh content to your users to keep them engaged and coming back.

Here are a few tips for making your web site more engaging:

◆ **Call to action:** Include some sort of call to action on each page. What is the next step? This could be contact us, download our most recent white paper, sign up for a webinar, read a case study, etc.

◆ **Newsletter registration:** If you have an e-newsletter, include sign-up functionality on every page of your site. Create a one-step process with a simple text box where they can insert their email address and sign up in one click.

◆ **Resources:** Direct web visitors to related resources by creating cross links to case studies, services, articles, white papers, tools, proposal generators, ROI calculators, etc.

◆ **Updates:** Allow users to request regular updates and then have a program to auto e-mail them with relevant content.

◆ **Content management:** Content management can en-

able a more personalized web site experience by feeding up specific content to a visitor based upon past viewing preferences.

◆ **Customer testimonials:** Nothing speaks better for you than your satisfied customers. If they are willing, give them the forum.

**4. Integrate your web site with your other marketing programs.** Direct prospects to where you want them to go by using designated landing pages in your marketing. All programs, be they direct marketing, advertising, search engine marketing, PR, seminars, webinars or email blasts, should include a clear call to action that can be fulfilled on your web site.

**5. Make your site easy to use and navigate.** The name of the web game has not changed since day one. Make it easy to use!

**6. Take advantage of web analytics.** Analytics can help you determine user paths — where visitors are going, where they are not, and where they're getting hung up. Very often, we discover that users aren't going beyond the homepage because navigation or content is onerous.

The underlying fact is that the A/E/C industry is about relationships. Often, these relationships begin at your web

## 6 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR WEBSITE (CONT.)

site with your web sales assistant's ability to provide valuable, interactive content. People do business with those they know, those they've heard of, and those they trust. Your web site needs to validate these feelings, and if it does, it can be of great value in the lead generation process.

You are in the business of designing, building, and/or engineering spaces. Your web site may be your most important space.

For more ideas, download the complimentary white paper, *9 Steps to Getting the Most from Your Website*, by John Canestraro at: [http://www.raincastle.com/about\\_us/whitepapers/whitepaper\\_link.cfm?id=2&sr=ps](http://www.raincastle.com/about_us/whitepapers/whitepaper_link.cfm?id=2&sr=ps)

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## WORDS THAT WORK, AND THOSE THAT DON'T

(CONT. FROM PG. 1)

### Watch Your Language!

Marcy Steinberg, journalist, and Marketing Director for the Design Workshop headquartered in Denver, ([www.designworkshop.com](http://www.designworkshop.com)), has plenty to add to the list of words that don't work. After interviewing hundreds of clients, watching selection interviews, and role-playing sales presentations, she compiled a list of words that don't work. These "avoid like the plague" words fall into one or more of the following categories:

- ◆ **Cliche** - all your competitors are using these. Words like: "on-time and on-budget," "high quality," "out-of-the-box," and so on.
- ◆ **General and vague** - "responsive," "client service," "quality control," "effective," these do not say much on their own.
- ◆ **Overly technical** - "massing," "programming," and the like.
- ◆ **Presumptuous** - these convey arrogance.

In role-playing rehearsals, come up with a list of words to avoid, and "ring the buzzer" when you hear them. There's also a variation of "Bingo" that started in boardrooms when people were tired of hearing all the jargon. They put these words into a Bingo game, and when someone finally heard all the words on their card, which usually didn't take long, they won. There were a whole lot of words that could go into this game for proposals and presentations. Here's some you shouldn't bother using:

Value-added - world class - uniquely (never say very unique), extremely - we understand (don't say it, demonstrate it), we value-engineer, we're proponents of - we are pleased to submit - and absolutely stay away from... typically. You're telling them the way you're going to approach the project, and then... we typically do this! Now you've lumped them in with everyone else. The best approach is to just go right into what you're going to do "specifically" for them. A powerful word to a client.

Frank Luntz has many suggestions in his book *Words That Work* that demonstrate how to avoid misinterpretations and how to achieve effective communications. They are:

- ◆ Use small words that you understand the meaning of.
- ◆ Use short sentences and watch out for connotations.
- ◆ Use words that add to the credibility of your story.
- ◆ A consistency of style and message matters.
- ◆ Sound and texture matters.
- ◆ Frame your dialogue into frequent questions.
- ◆ Provide context and explanations whenever possible.
- ◆ Make sure everything is relevant to the reader/listener.
- ◆ Visualize what you say before you say it.

Enough said!