



# Does that resonate with you?

By Tiffany  
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Non-marketers don't use or always understand our A/E/C marketing jargon. When we use language that connects with our internal customers (AKA coworkers and pursuit teammates), we are more effective in our roles. Bonus, we will be better positioned to help educate non-marketers about our unique skills and capabilities.

Marketers are experts at using language and visuals to tell stories. We research customers to learn what they care about to develop compelling messages that help win work. As communicators and collateral experts, marketers are adept at learning and recognizing what customers will be more receptive to in sales collateral and proposals, on websites, billboards, signs, and on social media. Basically, we do everything we can with the time we have to customize what we develop and put in front of potential A/E/C buyers. But how often are we applying that same skillset to communicate internally with our colleagues and pursuit partners?

### A Language of Our Own

While marketers may not typically think about it this way, we (intentionally or unintentionally) use a lot of jargon. It can be like a foreign language to folks not in our circles. For example, have you ever said something like "leveraging our expertise," "message alignment," "benchmarking data," "utilizing relevant expertise," or "layering information to support the win strategy?" (That last one was 100% all me.) Our A/E/C-specific jargon and technical marketing terminology, basically, our way of communicating what we do and what we need others to do so we can make the products we are responsible for developing, can be head-spinning to a non-marketer.

Language is powerful. Communicating clearly can be challenging, particularly when speaking to a group with different roles and tenure in the industry (like during a proposal process or an interview prep). Susan Shelby, FSMPS, CPSM wrote in *What Marketing Language Do You Speak?* that "as A/E/C marketers, we are "native speakers" of this industry's jargon and understand the language intimately. We expect that our clients speak the same language, but the truth is they are conversant in their own vertical industry's language and tech-speak." (SMPS Boston, July 10, 2019)

While Shelby was talking about external customers, I believe that this observation also applies to our internal customers – the folks we work with every day on pursuits, bids, interviews, advertising, and whatever else marketers get involved in to help win work and do our jobs.

### A Quick Detour

My marketing teammates and I regularly attend our office's preconstruction workflow meetings. Our preconstruction managers are some of the first touchpoints for a new customer, and estimators share whispers on project opportunities. So, it makes sense for us to listen in. During these meetings, our estimators, MEP specialists, and preconstruction managers – all experts in their respective roles – talk about their workload, individual projects, and challenges of the day with terms like "CSI format," "SWAG," and "escalation" sprinkled throughout the discussion.

Have you had to look up any of these terms? I did. Similarly, I've sat in operations meetings and thought, "I don't know what these folks are talking about or how to use this info."

Being submersed in another work groups' technical language, AKA their jargon, can be confusing. The same is true for marketing. When we use too much marketing jargon, the message can get muddled. Our operations counterparts and colleagues are not pursuit/proposal experts and don't use marketing jargon or know what it means. It's up to us to recognize how to best message this to them, our internal customers. In other words - it's up to marketers to know which hat to wear to the rodeo.

Admittedly, there was a time when I thought that the work marketing professionals do, and the things we make, needed to be explained with "five-dollar words" to show how important/technical/valuable it was and is. I used to get annoyed when the sales lead that I was working with didn't recognize the research, branding, or design decisions that went into a "generic" qualification package. Or when (I perceived that) my technical skills were being marginalized by requests for collateral with only a few hours to turn something around "just to give the owner something to look at while we meet with them."

### Like Brené said...Clear is Kind

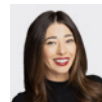
Not everyone understands the value of A/E/C marketing or realizes the full scope and capability of a marketer's technical skillset. While many companies have figured out how to tap into this, some organizations... still have a way to go. My opinion today has shifted away from being critical of these folks, to feeling quite the opposite. I've learned that they need marketers' help, explained in jargon that they connect with, to understand what it is we do, what we need from them, and how we can help. Because "advancing strategic goals, collaborating on solutions to secure wins, and championing initiatives" isn't clear to most non-marketing folks, and it doesn't explain what we do or how our role plays a part in the organization. (This was pulled from my LinkedIn profile - We're all a work-in-progress, right?)

It can be frustrating to hear how a quals package, pursuit response, or interview presentation is "basically a save-as from the last one for this customer" or how "the

marketing team can pretty up this document/visual/whatever." Instead, these instances are opportunities to acknowledge our language differences, and for us to consider not using our marketing jargon in that moment. Instead, the more we can lean into our ability to language-match and create more understanding with our colleagues (who may not be aware of the impact of these phrases in the first place), the more we all benefit.

### Key Takeaway or Recommendation

Since marketers possess fluency in a variety of industry jargon (or mini languages) within the organizations we all serve, consider facilitating a sales training or overview along with your sales staff to key folks. This will broaden awareness and knowledge of our jargon, and create or strengthen relationships with the seller-doers that you will be engaging with as part of your role. ■



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