

ACCURACY IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS - WORDS TO BE AVOIDED

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Abstract:

In today's highly competitive business environment and given the challenges of the current global economic crisis, it is more important than ever to have a good business communication in order to survive. This paper focuses on ways to achieve accuracy in business communications by exemplifying several words or expressions that must be avoided by all means. For the purpose of this study, we conducted a survey on thirty respondents. They were presented seven business related statements containing "relative words" in terms of time and were asked to try to quantify the periods they may have referred to. Results have proven once again the importance of sending a clear, unequivocal message in all business communications, namely being accurate.

Key words: business communication, accuracy

JEL classification: M20

Business communication involves constant exchange of information. It is a continuous process. The more the business expands, the greater is the pressure to find effective means of communication - both with the employees and with the world outside. Thus, business and communication go hand in hand. Without effective business communication, it is very difficult, if not impossible to run a prosperous business in the context of today's highly competitive environment and the ongoing global financial crisis.

For a good communication in business, the following basic rules should be considered:

- every business communication, oral or written, should be logically structured
- the appropriate means of communication should be chosen according to the audience, time reference and cost constraints
- communication should be articulate and concise
- the use of ambiguous or ambivalent words should be avoided
- the choice of words should be appropriate in order to overcome cultural differences
- business communication should be influencing and persuasive
- business communication should always be polite
- communication should be carried out using positive structures as much as possible
- presented facts should be complete and recent

When it comes to written business communication, any business text should comply with the following content criteria: accuracy, brevity, clarity, and emphasis. (Hartley, Bruckmann, 2001)

In order to keep things brief, the author of a business text should ask himself the following questions: What does the audience already know? What do they need to know? What do they want to know? For the sake of clarity, the use of outdated abbreviations and clichés should be avoided. One should also avoid the use of pompous words and unnecessary detail. Emphasis is necessary in a business text in order to point

out information that is important for the audience or information that supports the author's arguments.

As for accuracy, it is the most important criterion for any form of business communication.

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines accuracy as: "1. freedom from mistake or error: correctness; 2. conformity to truth or to a standard or model: exactness; 3. degree of conformity of a measure to a standard or a true value: precision."

Therefore, accuracy in business communications means that the information should be true or correct, clearly stated and precise.

In this respect, the choice of words and expressions is vital.

We are going to present and exemplify a series of words and expressions that should be avoided in any business communication.

First of all, especially when dealing with people coming from a different culture, one should avoid using ambiguous words. The same word may have very different interpretations in different cultures.

For instance, the verb "table" means "to put forward for discussion" in England, while in the USA it means "to postpone the discussion indefinitely". A relevant example comes from the Second World War, when, during a discussion between British and American officials, the British suggested "to table" a certain document. Both the British and the Americans wanted to have a discussion on that matter, but the latter had a different understanding of the word, which led to confusion.

Whether one interacts with someone coming from the same or from a different culture, it is equally important to avoid unfamiliar words and expressions.

Example: *Unfamiliar*: Our report is on Romanian businesspeople, broken down by age and gender.

Familiar: Our report focused on the age and gender of Romanian businesspeople.

The use of acronyms should also be generally avoided. If, for instance, the name of an institution made up of several words is used repeatedly, then the acronym is allowed only after the prior use of the complete name.

Idioms are equally not recommended, especially in an intercultural context involving non-native speakers.

Example: to break a leg = to do well at some performance

Slang should be avoided by all means in any kind of business communications, even advertising if targeted towards a different culture. For instance, Electrolux came out on the European market with a slogan for a washing machine that said: "Nothing *sucks* like Electrolux". The slogan worked very well for Europeans, but was completely unusable for the USA because of the negative connotations.

Even though slang should definitely be avoided, one shouldn't go for the other extreme and use pompous words that are unclear and nobody likes to waste time with.

Examples: Thank you for your e-mail of the 5th *ultimo* (this/last month).

...in connection with the *aforementioned*...

...our error *in this connection*... (the mistake we made)

In this respect, jargon should be avoided as well whenever possible.

Example: Your facility has been marked forward at its existing level. (Your overdraft arrangement has been renewed). (Law, 2002)

For the message to be clear, the use of the passive voice should be replaced as much as possible by that of the active voice.

Example: *Passive voice*: Our letter was sent in error.

Active voice: We sent you the letter by mistake.

As a general rule, it is also preferable to use positive sentences rather than negative ones.

Example: *Negative sentence*: I'm sorry I couldn't be more helpful.

Positive sentence: I wish I could have been more helpful.

Considering all of these suggestions will help improve the accuracy of any business communication. And accuracy finally means effectiveness. Experts have agreed on seven attributes of effective communication in business. The 7 C's of effective communication are: completeness, conciseness, consideration, concreteness, clarity, courtesy, and correctness (Vijayakumar, 2007).

Completeness refers to providing all required or necessary information.

Example: *Incomplete*: We sent you a complete list of our technical specifications attached to our previous e-mail.

Complete: The detailed list of our technical specifications was enclosed in our e-mail dated May 15th, Re: panel offer.

Conciseness means sending the correct message without using too many words, namely without being wordy.

Examples: *Wordy*: At this time

Concise: Now

Wordy: We hereby wish to let you know how much our company appreciates your confidentiality.

Concise: We appreciate your confidentiality.

Consideration means taking into account the feelings of the receiver of your message and emphasizing positive aspects instead of the negative ones.

Examples: *Inconsiderate*: You failed to attach a price list to your offer.

Considerate: The price list was not attached to your offer.

Unpleasant: When traveling on company expense, you will not receive approval for business class.

Pleasant: When traveling on company expense, you will only receive approval for economic class.

Concreteness refers to using specific facts and figures from reliable sources, as well as using action verbs.

Example: The function of this office is the collection of payments and the compilation of reports. (This office collects payments and compiles reports). (Law, 2002)

Clarity refers to the use of concrete, precise and familiar words.

Example: After our perusal of pertinent data, the conclusion was that... (The data we studied show...)

Courtesy means always being polite and tactful and correctness is, of course, an imperative for any business communication that is supposed to be taken seriously.

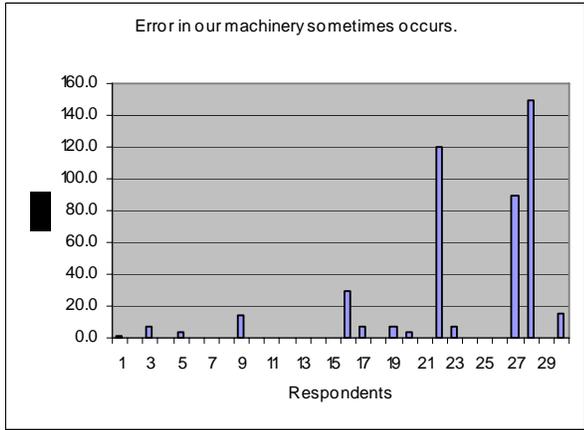
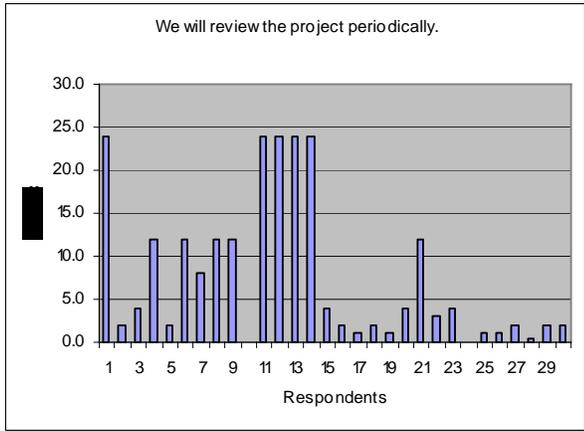
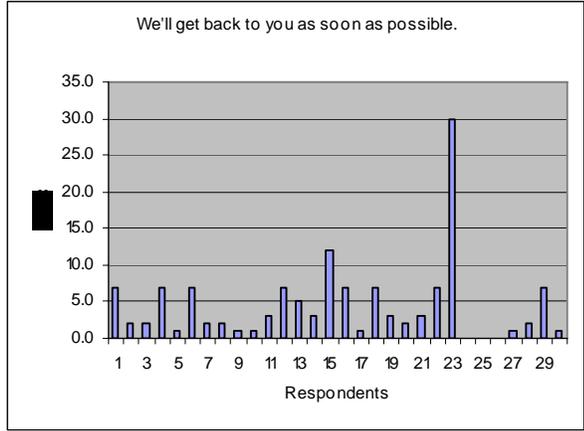
For the purpose of this study, we also added another category of words not to be used in business communications and we conducted a survey on 30 respondents to prove our point. In order to be completely accurate in business communications one should use "absolute words" rather than "relative words".

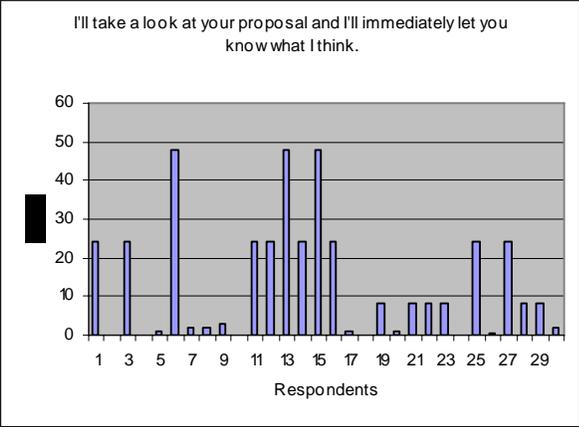
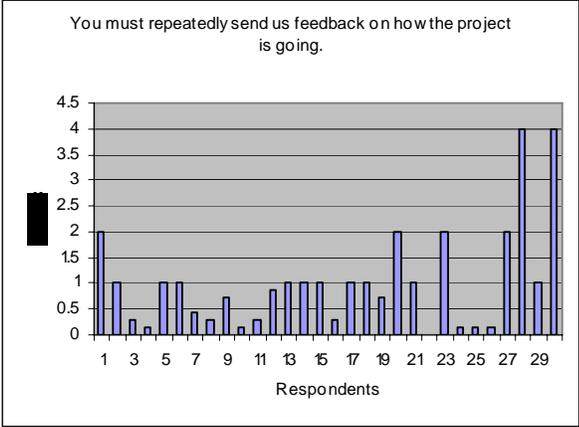
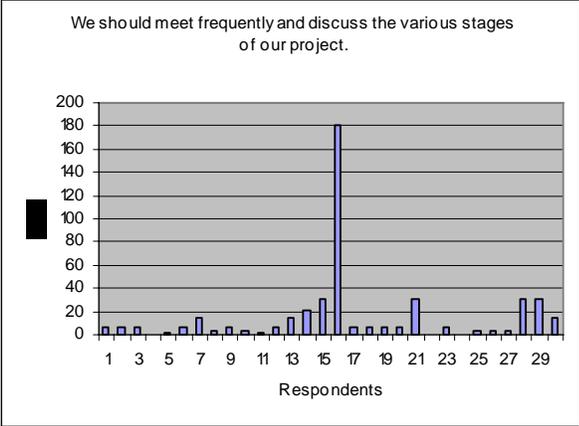
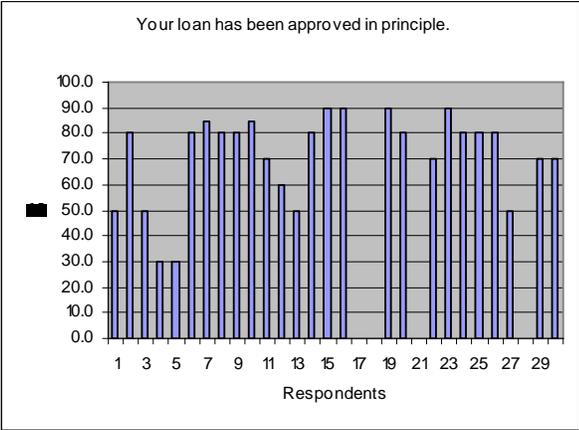
Our respondents were presented seven business related statements containing "relative words" in terms of time and were asked to try to quantify the periods they may have referred to. The statements were the following:

1. We'll get back to you as soon as possible.
2. We will review the project periodically.
3. Error in our machinery sometimes occurs.
4. Your loan has been approved in principle.
5. We should meet frequently and discuss the various stages of the project.
6. You must repeatedly send us feedback on how the project is going.
7. I'll take a look at your proposal and I'll immediately let you know what I think.

Of course we received a significant variety of quantifications, from one day to one month for the first statement, from two weeks to six month for the second one, from three days to three or four months for the third statement, from 30% to 90% for the fourth one, from two days to two weeks for the fifth one, from one day to one month for the sixth statement or from ten minutes to two weeks for the seventh one.

Here are the detailed results in the following tables:





Different people have different perceptions on different facts. Even when sending a clear message it is possible for different people to perceive it differently. That's why business communications should be accurate in order to reduce as much as possible the invariable degree of interpretation or misunderstanding. We think these data have proven once again the importance of sending a clear, unequivocal message, which is essential in business communication.

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