

March 2020

From decks to deep dives: Demystifying corporate jargon

By Nancy Ellen Miller



Corporatese. Bizspeak. Newspeak. Call it what you will. All of us have used confusing conceptual language that borders on the meaningless. From the *jargon* of Medieval France that referred to the twittering of birds to the contemporary buzzwords tweeted by *jargononauts* on Twitter, if language lies at the heart of any culture, does its jargon lie there too?

Illustrator of the comic *Dilbert*, Scott Adams has made a living out of mercilessly mocking management-speak. In the 1980s, Adams worked as a programmer at Pacific Bell in the wake of consultant Charles Krone's attempts to overhaul the company culture with "leadership development" programs. Promising to maximize employees' efficiency and unleash their potential, Krone focused on transforming internal communication. In one comic, Adams portrays a pointy-haired boss addressing two disgruntled engineers, Dilbert and Alice. "Our

differentiated value-added strategy is transformational change," he says.

The string of ungrounded terms nauseates Alice. In 2012, readers of *Forbes* also expressed their discontent at such language. Voting for the most abominable business buzzword amongst contenders like "robust," "leverage" and "empower," they gave the title to "Drinking the Kool-Aid," a phrase that means blindly accepting something, like a company mission. Alluding to the lethal mix of Valium, cyanide, chloralhydrate and Phenergan that killed more than 900 people in the 1978 Jonestown Massacre, it's hard to imagine a phrase more dehumanizing to throw around the water cooler.

"It can't be just me who's confused," writes *Marilyn Katzman for The New York Times*. "As a senior communications professional, she admits that she "had not expected to meet a language barrier working for national corporations." Katzman recalls jotting down reminders

of unfamiliar terms. "Decks" refer to not to playing cards, but to slide presentations. "Deep dives" needn't require snorkelling equipment, but in-depth analysis. If people ask if you have any "bandwidth," don't respond with technical frequency measures from your internet service provider. They just want to know if you can help with a project.

To linguist Gretchen McCulloch, author of *Because Internet*, corporate jargon amounts to nothing more than a boundary between work and the rest of your life. You pull on a pair of navy-blue slacks for the office, so why wouldn't you say things like "differentiated value-added strategy" to signal you mean business?

If you're baffled by buzzwords, take heart. Algorithms now speak all kinds of specialized vernaculars and can help you get up to speed.

Professor of Organizational Behaviour André Spicer disagrees. In his 2018 book *Business Bullshit*, Spicer warns us that once jargon "take(s) over organizations," it "can crowd out their core purpose and muddy the waters of language." In her farewell *column for the Financial Times*, Lucy Kellaway resigns from her "25-year battle from corporate clap-trap." She bemoans: "Business bullshit has got a hundred percent more bullshit."

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Webforge provides free access to "[The Original Bullshit Generator](#)." It delivers imperatives like "drive granular synergies," "strategize impactful convergence," and "deliver robust interfaces" to throw confidently around at your next business meeting.

Spicer offers his own solutions to what he sees as the corporate takeover of language. You can't ban bullshit, he argues. Instead, you need to understand its economics. How is it manufactured, circulated and maintained?

In the meantime, see the humour. Embrace the antics of Dilbert. Sing along to Weird Al Yankovic's "Mission Statement." Try your hand at a round of "Business Buzzword Bingo." Write down 25 buzzwords you can't stop hearing. "Laser-focussed," "disruptive," and "gamechanger" are all possibilities. When you come across one, mark it with an X. Once you get five in a row, stand up and yell: "Bingo!"



Nancy Miller is director of [Red Thread](#), a consultancy that drives growth for education technology companies with campaigns that build credibility and communicate without the claptrap.

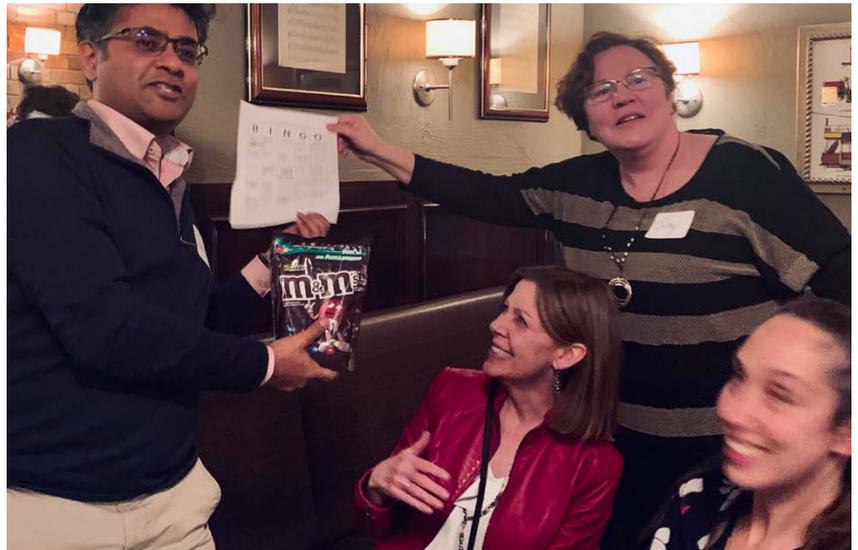
See you on social media

Build and strengthen your connections with other PIC members, advance your communications business, discuss business issues and network with PIC on social media: on Twitter at [@pictoronto](#); LinkedIn, [IABC Toronto Professional Independent Communicators](#); Facebook, [Professional Independent Communicators \(PIC\)](#), part of [IABC/Toronto](#).

Recent posts include tips for what to do when you lose an anchor client and best practices for LinkedIn company pages.

Winter blues? Busted

Satish Sarangarajan gets a sweet treat for playing networking bingo at our March 5 Bust the Winter Blues social. These events are a relaxed way to meet new people or catch up with fellow indies, with or without candy. PIC members and non-members are welcome.



Here's Satish Sarangarajan, our Bingo prize winner, proudly holding up his bag of M&Ms.

FEEDBACK

"Kudos for an insightful monthly newsletter that always delivers news-you-can-use. An engaging and helpful read for all communicators!"

– Cathy Cowan

Tips for trade shows

By Jacqui d'Eon

It's unusual for a solo consultant like me to exhibit at a trade show, but that's exactly what I did at the end of January. My reasons were simple. It was a trade show that attracted my target audience, and I thought I might be able to attract the attention of some people who knew nothing about me.

[Tête-à-Tête](#) is a one-day trade show produced by the Ottawa-Gatineau chapter of the Canadian Society of Association Executives. My skills in executive coaching, crisis preparedness and strategic communication consulting have resonated with association executives for a few years now and this was a chance to expand my horizons.

In preparation for the show, I had to rent a booth, customize it and develop some "swag" that was consistent with my brand. With the help of the show's producer, I found a good location on the tradeshow floor. Wonderful support from Freeman Rentals helped make my booth stand out from the rest. For the swag, I purchased branded merchandise that I can use any time.

My goal was to recoup my investment in the show by booking one or two new engagements. That hasn't happened yet, but with the quality of the conversations I had at the booth, I am confident it will.

More important are the lessons I learned from exhibiting:

1. **Make your booth visually attractive** to draw traffic.
2. **Don't stand behind a desk or sit at a table** – get out on the floor.
3. **Book your booth space early** so you can choose your location on the tradeshow floor.
4. **Engage experts to help you.** Tap into their expertise and take their advice. They are vested in your success.
5. **Have a trade show patter** that explains who you are and what you can offer. Ironically, this was my weak point.
6. **Don't overdo the swag** – I ordered and offered too much. Real potential customers want to hear from you and have one thing they can take away to remember you by. This is also a cost containment strategy.
7. **Take advantage of technology** to register your guests, but don't rely on it for all of them. Some guests were comfortable having their badges scanned, while others preferred to exchange business cards.
8. **Follow up with and thank** every visitor and the people who helped you. The sales cycle could be a long one. The important thing is to be remembered.



Will I exhibit again? I'm leaning towards it. I'm still in the assessment and follow-up mode, but I have everything I need to set up another booth on another tradeshow.

Jacqui d'Eon is principal of JAd'E Communications Ltd. She counsels organizations and executives to help them communicate strategically and effectively. Learn more about her on her [website](#).

IABC/TORONTO'S PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATORS PRESENTS:

Build a Better Brand

April 15, 2020
6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Central YMCA – Community Room,
20 Grosvenor St., Toronto
\$20: IABC member rate
\$30: Non-member rate



postponed
until further notice

How to define,
develop and
refine your
brand to boost
your business
and profile.



Nathalie Noël
Strategy and Brand Coach



Sharon Aschaeik
Principal at Higher Ed
Communications

Senior Communicator's Circle launches

By Mary Ann Prychoda

When IABC/Toronto asked if experienced members would like a forum to hold regular discussions with other senior communicators, PIC members were among those who answered: "Yes!"

Soon after the call went out, ten communicators – including four indies – gathered around a secluded table in a Toronto pub, kicking off the chapter's first Senior Communicator's Circle. The topic before us:



Clockwise from front left: Joe Waterman, Catherine White, Mary Jane Martin, Carrie MacAfee, Jacqui D'Eon, Nkiru Asika, Anna Relyea, Cathy Schlender, Mary Ann Prychoda and Natasha Renaud discuss the senior communicator's role in change management.

"The Senior Communicator as Change Leader/Manager: exploring the senior communicator's role in managing and planning for change, from disruptive technologies to strategic business, government, regulatory, and political change."

After introductions, **Carrie MacAfee** launched with a provocative question: "Isn't all communication about change?" From there, we shared our thoughts and experiences of defining our roles amidst change, particularly when working alongside partners, like change management professionals and HR leads.

"The circle is IABC/Toronto's response to feedback from senior members who felt underserved by existing professional development offerings," explained PIC Chair **Nkiru Asika**, who organized the event while wearing her other hat as VP of Special Interest Groups for the chapter.

She added: "Toronto has responded in a big way this year by introducing opportunities for senior communicators to get involved as mentors in our mentorship program; to step up as IABC representatives and spokespersons for the media or other public-facing groups; and to take part in this new Senior Communicator's Circle peer mentoring and networking initiative."

Jacqui D'Eon, of JAd'E Communications, has appreciated the effort.

"I'm delighted the chapter is doing something to enhance the IABC experience for senior communicators," she said. "As we mature in our positions, it can be difficult to have

meaningful dialogue as part of a normal PD event, which often only scratches the surface. We don't know everything, but senior communicators have a depth of experience that takes the conversation to a place that's a little deeper and more driven by principles."

The discussion at the Senior Communicator's Circle offered strong evidence of that.

One big topic was the challenge internal communicators face when an organization's commitment to customer service is not reflected at the same level internally. The impact of AI was

another hot topic and the link between leadership and employee communication was a third. The conversation flowed naturally through the evening from one subject to another, with opportunity for everyone to ask questions and share insights.

For Nkiru, the event was a chance to better understand the challenges change communicators face.

One big topic was the challenge internal communicators face when an organization's commitment to customer service is not reflected at the same level internally.

"One of my clients organizes The Change Leadership Conference – a high-profile conference for professionals responsible for leading change – so the discussion deepened my understanding of the target audience," she said. "It was interesting to hear the different experiences attendees have faced navigating and managing change in their organizations while wearing their communicator hat."

To which the other members of the Senior Communicator's Circle would no doubt again answer: Yes!

Want to be part of the Senior Communicator's Circle? The group meets downtown every two months and welcomes chapter communicators who have 15+ years of experience. Members, watch out for a notice in the e-Lert or a direct email. To make sure you're on the list, email your request to Nkiru at toronto-sig@iabc.toronto.



Mary Ann Prychoda is a long-time IABC member, experienced communicator and President of [Prychoda Communications](http://PrychodaCommunications.com).

Feb. 19: Get business by getting found

By Sue Horner

With all the social media channels out there, how does a solopreneur get business? By getting found on LinkedIn and Google My Business, according to the speakers at our February 19 event.

LINKEDIN

Kamila Karwowski of digital agency

[Jan Kelley](#) pointed out that people get 277% more leads on LinkedIn than other social media channels. Make the most of this platform in three steps:

1. Optimize your profile

Use a good headshot for your profile and a background photo that represents you or your skills. Make your headline action-oriented, with a strong verb and three keywords. Focus on what you do, who you help and how you make life better. Use your summary to show results you've achieved ("Saved customers \$X by..."), not just what you do.

2. Build your network

Connect with colleagues, classmates, customers and prospects; be sure to personalize your invitation. Look and get involved in the "watering holes" – groups, discussions, trending hashtags. How can you add value? Where are your customers?

Find prospects by looking at "Who viewed your profile." From their profiles, look at "People Also Viewed" and shared connections. Ask mutual connections to introduce you. Look at your competitors and their networks. Scroll through people's skills and endorsements.

3. Nurture your network

Produce relevant and compelling content about once a week, to build credibility. Think of three people you want to reach and what content would appeal to them. Don't be overly promotional.



From left, Nkiru Asika, Kamila Karwowski, Tricia Belmonte, Sharon McMillan and Judy Irwin wrap up a terrific session on using LinkedIn and Google My Business.

Test length, frequency and formats: text, video, graphics, "live" posts at tradeshows or other events. Use keywords but don't overdo it. Tag relevant people. Add your point of view. Get involved in conversations. Like and comment on other posts as part of your daily routine.

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS

Tricia Belmonte of [LikeUs Communications](#) says using the power of local SEO can rank your business high on Google search. Get started by entering or updating your information on Google My Business:

1. Go to [Google My Business](#) and scroll down to "Start managing your Business Profile." Sign in to your Google account and follow the steps. Your business may already be there, and if so, just claim it. Otherwise, fill out the form and request verification. You'll receive a verification code by mail. (See more specifics about getting started in our [September 2017 newsletter](#).) [Find allowable categories here](#). Make sure the address you use is exactly the same everywhere, including using "Street" vs. "St."

2. Click on "Posts" on the left. This is like a free mini ad, so showcase your services, an offer or event, blog post or other information. Use an image to stand out.

Update this once a week. The more active you are, the better.

3. Click on "Info." Fill in service areas, hours of operation, contact information, and especially explain what services you offer. Use keywords.

4. Click on "Reviews." Respond when people leave reviews. Encourage reviews by adding a line to blog posts or emails ("If you enjoyed what you read, please leave a Google review at..."), using a URL shortener like [bit.ly](#).

5. Click on "Photos." Add a photo of you speaking with customers or at work. (Note: Google does not like stock photos.) Show off what you can do. You can also use videos in this section.

6. Click on "Messaging." Install the app as directed to give customers another way to reach you.

7. Questions & Answers can be found using your cellphone to open Google maps. Type in your business name and click when it appears under the map. Under "Overview," scroll down to Questions & Answers. You can answer questions customers have left there or add your own that customers always ask you.

"This won't take too much time and is one more simple thing you can do to power up the results of your business listing," Tricia said.

Tricia has developed a Google My Business online course with Udemy and can give free access to 10 people who sign up within 30 days. [Follow this link](#) and enter promo code GMBPROMO. She also has a course that teaches participants how to build their own online course using easy to follow steps and marketing tips. Having an online course is a great way to build authority and a side revenue stream. PIC members, [follow this link](#) to get the course at just \$9.99 instead of the usual \$44.99.

See a [collection of tweets](#) from the session on Wakelet.



Sue Horner is a writer, principal of [Get It Write](#) and Co-Director of Communications for PIC. My Business forced her to sign up as a PR agency since it doesn't offer "Writer" as a category. "Pretzel Store" is an option, though.

THE INDEPENDENT VIEW

How to make the most of live events

By Nkiru Asika

Even the most confident person can experience a twinge of anxiety at the thought of attending conferences, seminars or other sizeable live events.

We all know that fear of walking into a hall full of strangers. Attempting the dreaded schmooze. Trying not to feel like an idiot as you “work the room.”

Still, there’s no denying the benefit of getting in front of your ideal prospects and partners. Here are some tips to help you make the most of any live event:

1. Connect with people on social media beforehand

Most large events have social media communities for delegates. Reach out to people before the event and arrange meetings with key prospects so you have valuable conversations lined up before you even arrive.

2. Don’t hang out with your friends

Force yourself to sit with people you don’t know. Instead of talking about your business or industry issues all the time, bond with them over trivial stuff, too. This helps you get personal during follow-up. “Pleasure to meet you at X Conference”

will never elicit as warm a response as “Remember that mystery meat at lunch?”

3. Come prepared to speak

Your name may not be on the roster, but grab the mic at any available opportunity. Prepare questions ahead of time and muster the courage to ask them. Also prepare your elevator pitch, because you will typically have to introduce yourself before asking a question. There is power in everybody hearing your name and what you do.

4. Seek out the speakers before they talk

Learn what each speaker is talking about. If possible, ask them a question or voice a memorable opinion before they present. Oh, how you’ll shine if during the presentation, the speaker mentions “this is what Nkiru Asika and I were talking about yesterday.”

5. All work and no play could cost you business

Don’t cut out as soon as the formal event is done. Plan to attend the after-event socials. If there is nothing official on the calendar, then initiate an informal gathering with a few of the people you met. The most useful conversations may take place at the bar.

6. Follow up quickly

Be prompt and personable in your follow-up, whether by email or social media. If you took a photo together, send it to the person along with your note. Better yet, write or record a post about your experience at the event and tag everyone you met, including the organizers.

Come and practice your networking skills at in a safe environment at the next professional development workshop on April 15, focused on [building your business brand](#). I look forward to hearing from our members **Nathalie Noël** and **Sharon Aschaiek!**

As always, if you have any ideas for professional development topics, possible speakers (including yourself) or any questions, concerns or ideas about PIC, please don’t hesitate to reach me at toronto-sig@iabc.toronto.

Onwards and upwards.

Nkiru Asika

Chair, PIC;
VP, Special Interest Groups,
IABC Toronto



[Professional Independent Communicators](#) (PIC) is a special interest group of [IABC/Toronto](#). PIC’s mission is to support independent IABC/Toronto communicators through professional development, networking and marketing. [IABC](#) connects communicators from around the world with the insights, resources and people they need to drive their careers and the profession forward.

THE BUZZ *The Buzz* informs members about upcoming events, shares professional development tips from past meetings and keeps us connected. Editor this issue: [Nancy Miller](#) | Graphic design: [Deana De Ciccio](#).

Want to recap a meeting or do other writing for *The Buzz*? Contact [Sue Horner](#) or [Nancy Miller](#).

Quick links

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- [PIC on LinkedIn](#)
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- Email us: toronto-sig@iabc.to
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- Get a copy of [The Independent Life](#)
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PIC executive

Contact any of us with questions, comments and ideas for speakers or topics:

Chair: [Nkiru Asika](#)

Past Chair: [Sharon Aschaiek](#)

Communications: [Sue Horner](#), [Nancy Miller](#)

Membership: [Kathy Lim](#)

Programming: [Judy Irwin](#), [Sharon McMillan](#)

Social Media: (*vacant; let us know if you can help!*)

Design: [Deana De Ciccio](#)



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