

# BULLDOG REPORTER'S DAILY 'DOG

## #TheDogsBack

THE LEADING SOURCE OF PR VIEWS, NEWS AND TOOLS

April 27, 2015

### Quantify Your Efforts to Communicate Success

By Sandi Sonnenfeld, Author, [PR & the C-Suite Executive](#) blog



Organizations rightfully want to put their best foot forward when engaging with their constituencies. Yet all too often they fall prey to what I call “adjective mania,” defaulting to generic, overinflated and qualitative language in their company descriptions and other communications.

Adjective mania refers to the tendency among many C-suite executives and communications professionals to incorporate *qualifiers* like “best, top, preeminent, leading, amazing, greatest, finest, most innovative,” into company profiles or product descriptions rather than using *quantifiers* (how much? how many? how often? what type? who benefits?) that illuminate or distinguish your offerings from your competition.

For example, based on the text below, which company would you be more likely to contact for help with your data storage needs?

*MegaStorage A is a global leader in data storage solutions, developing amazing products that enable companies around the world to create, share and preserve their essential business data. What began with one storage innovation has evolved into multiple solutions delivering the most reliable, customer-friendly system on the market.*

or:

*MegaStorage B enables companies around the world to create, share, and preserve their essential business data by allowing users to access and interpret data quickly, accurately and securely thanks to our StoreLock software that was named “Most Reliable Storage Solution” three years in a row by Well-Read Data Storage Industry Outlet magazine.*

On the surface, while MegaStorage A’s description may seem more compelling (after all, who wouldn’t want to buy an “amazing product” that is the most customer-friendly system available), it also raises credibility issues that might make me hesitate to contact them. What makes the product amazing? Who says it is customer-friendly and is that person or entity someone I trust or even have heard of? MegaStorage A does highlight its innovative past, which tells me they have a track record, but rather than reflecting on itself, I would be more interested in learning how the company’s offerings benefit me—i.e., what value does it deliver?

By contrast, MegaStorage B's language focuses on client deliverables—to access and interpret information quickly, accurately and securely, all items that will make my job easier to perform—and clarifies that a credible, objective third-party has found it reliable rather than saying so itself.

To truly set yourself apart from your competitors, consider these tips when writing a company description or product overview:

- **Review company boilerplates and “About Us” sections on the websites of your main competitors.** Look for the information they highlight and more importantly what they leave out, so that you craft a differentiating message. You will be amazed by how many of your competitors sound alike.
- **State in the opening sentence exactly what type of company you are or what type of products or services you offer.** Unless what you do is in your company name, ABC Candy Manufacturing, for example, don't assume what you offer is obvious, even if you have a strong brand.
- **Eschew jargon.** If you can't describe what your company does in plain English, you are failing both your company and your customers. Draw on real-life examples to help illustrate your company's capabilities.
- **Be brief.** Keep paragraphs short and use headers to highlight what you want readers to remember. Boiler plates should run no longer than two paragraphs max, and limit web copy to 200 words or less per page.
- **Be factual.** Describe your products and services clearly and concisely. List your strengths but don't puff up content with generic adjectives conveying your greatness.
- **Quantify all claims.** Mention any awards or important business rankings your company has received. Describe what your company does, how it does it and back it up with concrete data.
- **Include your value proposition.** Explicitly state how what you make or do helps clients or customers.
- **Never exaggerate your company's capabilities or achievements.** Not only can you do permanent damage to your company's reputation, but you could be subject to false advertising allegations or other legal woes.
- **Comply with all regulatory or industry association rules.** Just as the SEC mandates adequate financial disclosure for public companies, your organization may be subject to other requirements related to communications, particularly if you work in a regulated industry like healthcare, financial services, telecommunications or energy.
- **Avoid passive voice.** Not only does it create distance between you and the reader, it often comes across as pretentious.
- **Use simple words,** particularly when writing about complex technologies or concepts.
- **Revisit your company boiler plate at least once a year.** To keep it fresh and that your proof points are still valid, you should review your company description on a regular basis and edit it accordingly. On the other hand, to ensure continuity, do not revise your boiler plate or About Us copy more than twice a year, unless major changes occur.

## Quantitative v Qualitative Adjectives: Test Yourself

To ensure that you haven't misrepresented your company's products or services in any way, try this exercise. Review the most recent press release or promotional piece you have developed. Circle all quantifiable adjectives, such as those that describe the color, shape, chemical or biological composition of a product, for example, or adjectives that relate to data such as how much, how often, how many, what kind, or what percentage.

Next, cross out any qualitative adjectives such as "most," "best," "leading," "innovative," "smart," "talented," "greatest," etc. Now look at what you have left. Does it ring true? Do you have more quantifiable data that you can include in lieu of what you took out?

Chances are just by eliminating qualitative adjectives the overall description comes across as much stronger as the data points now stand out. If not, considering adding one or two additional quantifiable "proofs," including a quote from a trusted third-party source.

*Sandi Sonnenfeld focuses on reputation management, orchestrating sophisticated, corporate communications campaigns to build trust, enhance credibility, drive revenues or, in the advent of a crisis, mitigate damage to a company's brand. The author of the [PR & the C-Suite Executive](#) blog, Sandi has written for Harvard Business Review, International Journal of Medical Marketing, Washington Business Journal and Marketing Inc. among others. The winner of two PRSA Silver Anvil Awards, she also has been recognized four times in the past seven years by the Legal Marketing Association for "Best Media Relations Program of the Year" on behalf of law firms. She can be reached at [sandisonnenfeld@verizon.net](mailto:sandisonnenfeld@verizon.net).*