

Don't Use These Words!

Plenty of people use tired clichés, overblown superlatives, and breathless adjectives to describe themselves in resumes, social media profiles, and marketing materials. Plenty of people write things about themselves they may not have the nerve to actually say.

But some go ahead and say them.

The following are terms that, when other people use them to describe you, can be awesome--but you should never use them to describe yourself.

1. "Driven"

Maybe you're *data* driven. (Wow, you try to objectively make decisions?) Or maybe you're *customer* driven. (Wow, you try to please the people that pay you?)

Or maybe you're just plain old *driven*.

No matter what the form, driven is like "motivated." Or "inspired." It's filler.

2. "Motivated"

Never take credit for things you are supposed to do--or supposed to be.

3. "Extensive experience"

Say you have "extensive experience in web design." Fine, but how long you've been in business indicates nothing: You could still be the worst programmer in the world.

What matters more is what you've done: how many sites you've created, how many back-end systems you've installed, how many customer-specific applications (and what kind) you've developed...

Don't say how long you've been doing it. Say what you've done. We'll figure the rest out on our own.

4. "Authority"

As Margaret Thatcher said, "Power is like being a lady; if you have to say you are, you aren't." Show your expertise instead.

"Presented at SxSW" or "took a company from startup to IPO" indicates a level of authority. Unless you can prove it, "social media marketing authority" might simply mean you spend way too much time worrying about your Klout score. (Do people still worry about Klout scores?)

5. "Results-oriented"

Really? You focus on doing what you are paid to do?

6. "Responsible"

"Responsible" cuts two ways. You can be responsible (but, one hopes, isn't everyone?) or you can be responsible *for* (which is just a boring way of saying that you did something).

If you're in social media marketing, don't say you're "responsible for social campaigns"; say you grew conversions by 30 percent using social channels.

"Responsible" is a great example of passive language begging to become active. So don't say what you're responsible for. Tell us what you've done. Achievements are always more impressive.

7. "Global provider"

The majority of businesses can sell goods or services worldwide; the ones that can't are fairly obvious.

Only use "global provider" if that capability is not assumed or obvious; otherwise, you just sound like a small company trying to appear big.

8. "Creative"

See particular words often enough and they no longer have an impact. "Creative" is one of them. (Use finding "creative" references in random LinkedIn profiles as a drinking game and everyone will lose--or win, depending on your perspective.)

"Creative" is just one example. Others include "extensive," "effective," "proven," "influential," and "team player." Some of those terms may truly describe you, but since they are being used to describe everyone, they've lost their impact.

9. "Track record"

We all have a track record. It may be good, it may be bad, but we all have one. (And they're all "proven.")

I actually like what "track record" implies: You've done stuff, hopefully awesome stuff. You've gotten results, made things happen, come through in the clutch ... so share a few facts and figures instead.

Describe on-time performance rates, or waste percentages, or underbudget statistics; let your track record be proved by your achievements.

10. "Dynamic"

If you are "vigorously active and forceful," um, stay away.

11. "Guru"

People who try to be clever for the sake of being clever are anything but. Don't be a self-proclaimed "ninja," "sage," "connoisseur," "guerrilla," "wonk," "egghead," etc.

It's awesome when your customers affectionately describe you that way. But refer to yourself that way, and it's obvious you're trying way too hard to impress other people--or just as likely, yourself.

12. "Curator"

Museums have curators. Libraries have curators. Tweeting links to stuff you find interesting doesn't make you a "curator" or an "authority" or a "guru."

13. "Passionate"

I know many people disagree, but if you say you're incredibly passionate about, oh, incorporating elegant design aesthetics into everyday objects, then to me you sound over the top.

The same is true if you're passionate about developing long-term customer solutions. Try "focus," "concentrate," or "specialize" instead.

Or try "love," as in, "I love incorporating an elegant design aesthetic in everyday objects." For whatever reason, that works for me. Passion doesn't. (But maybe that's just me.)

14. "Unique"

Fingerprints are unique. Snowflakes are unique. You are unique--but your business probably isn't. That's fine, because customers don't care about unique; they care about "better."

Show you're better than the competition, and in the minds of your customers you will be unique--without ever having said so.

15. "Serial entrepreneur"

A few people start multiple successful long-term businesses. They are serial entrepreneurs.

The rest of us start one business that fails or does OK. We try something else, try something else, and keep on rinsing and repeating until we find a formula that works.

Those people are entrepreneurs. Be proud to be "just" an entrepreneur--because you should be.

16. "Strategist"

I sometimes help manufacturing plants improve productivity and quality. There are strategies I use to identify areas for improvement, but I'm in no way a strategist. Strategists look at the present, envision something new, and develop approaches to make their vision a reality.

I don't create something new; I apply my experience and a few proven methodologies to make improvements.

Very few people are strategists. Most "strategists" are actually coaches, specialists, or consultants who use what they know to help others. Ninety-nine percent of the time that's what customers need--they don't need or even want a strategist.

17. "Collaborative"

You won't just decide what's right for me and force me to buy it? Wow. If your process is designed to take my input and feedback, tell me how that works. Describe the process. Don't claim we'll work together--describe how we'll work together.

18. "Innovative"

Most companies claim to be innovative. Many people claim to be innovative. Most are, however, not innovative. (I'm definitely not.) And that's OK, because innovation isn't a requirement for success. (You don't have to be new--you just have to be better.)

And if you are innovative, don't say it. Prove it. Describe the products you've developed. Describe the processes you've transformed.

Give us something real so your innovation is unspoken but evident, which is always the best kind of innovative to be.

19. "World class"

Usain Bolt: world-class sprinter with the Olympic medals to prove it. Serena Williams: world-class tennis player. (Oh, let's just say it: best female tennis player ever.)

But what is a world-class professional or company? Who defines "world class"? In your case: probably just you.

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