

# Does your brand wording send the right signals?

We've all met someone who makes a good impression on us at first blush, only to ruin everything by talking. The same thing can happen when you meet a new brand. A brand can say all the right things, but not necessarily in the right way. So when we talk about finding a brand's tone of voice, we mean finding the right words to send the right signals to your audience.

Pinpointing the right tone of voice and bringing it to life in German is hard enough. It can be twice as difficult to accomplish in another language. In this issue, we explore how to tackle this challenge for audiences outside Germany.

**Put people at the center of your communications.** B2B communications has an unfortunate reputation as staid and faceless. Agencies may dismiss the product or service as boring, and client-side stakeholders may want to convey stability and professionalism at the expense of originality. The result: brands that sound lackluster and distant. Not exactly a recipe for an engaging conversation – a practice embraced by most consumer brands today. Here's the thing: Businesses don't have conversations with one another. People do. Thinking in terms of "businesspeople to businesspeople," remarks Steve Patrizi, VP of Advertising Sales and Operations at LinkedIn, helps us reintroduce the human element. With living, breathing decision-makers in your mind's eye, you'll find more compelling ways to appeal to them.

When you make your writing more personal in English, you can't be blamed for thinking that this approach will make your words sound more informal. You may have also heard this English maxim: "Write like you speak." It's important to remember that writing like you speak is about getting closer with your readers, not about labeling your

words as formal or informal. When you use "we," "you," and contractions ("isn't" instead of "is not"), you begin to shed corporate-speak and set the tone for conversations.

**Let people guide your tone.** So how do you speak to businesspeople as people? "We need to bend over backwards to accommodate readers and demonstrate empathy with them," explains Phil Woodford, a London-based advertising creative. "And we start by mirroring their patterns of speech."

Let's explore two examples. In a Wazlak ad introducing a new tool that rates operational risk, the copy opens with: "One piece of technology that can save the mortgage industry? Yeah, that sounds about right." This phrasing isn't slang per se, but it's what you'd hear if you overheard two operations officers discussing the product. In another ad, Air Products, a Fortune 500 company, dramatizes a product benefit using informal English. "Microfoam-free forever. Woohoo!" exclaims the headline. What an efficient, adventuresome, and genuine expression of how relieved technicians feel when they know they don't have to struggle with this unwanted by-product!

**Assess your brand's tone of voice.** Start by exposing yourself to the English that your audience is exposed to. Do they read *BusinessWeek*? *The New Yorker*? *National Geographic*? Read the same. This gives you a handle on how they like to be spoken to.

Then, instead of focusing on grammar, ask whether your words accurately reflect your brand values. Not sure? Consult a select few in the target market or knowledgeable native speakers. It's the first step toward a brand that sounds as good as it looks.