



## Overuse of acronyms in your marketing writing is BS.

Every industry has its jargon, acronyms and language that is shared only by those within the profession. Such shorthand is necessary and understandable; people, particularly those who deal with highly technical information, benefit from methods that help them quickly communicate ideas among themselves. Sometimes acronyms spill out into the general population and become so widely used that they can be comfortably employed by writers in any industry with the understanding that most people will be aware of their meaning. But more often, industry terms are confusing to those who have no cause to use them regularly.

There is a difference, technically between acronyms and initialisms. Acronyms form a new word that is pronounced as such, like SNAP, while initialisms form a series of letters that is read as letters, like FBI or ACH. Both acronyms and initialisms should be used thoughtfully and sparingly when writing for a broad audience – and especially when writing for marketing purposes.

Marketers are one group of professionals who seem to be able to use endless acronyms to describe fundamentally non-technical information. Why do marketers like acronyms so much? This question may be unanswerable, but the practice should still be addressed. According to Marketing Profs, 64 percent of marketing professionals say that producing enough content is their biggest challenge. Maybe the constant demand of producing new content forces people into a bubble from which they forget not everyone knows the language of their trade. Or, maybe content producers sincerely think that peppering their articles with acronyms makes them seem knowledgeable....

But that assumption is BS: Bad Strategy. Using too many industry specific acronyms is confusing and annoying to readers who are not familiar with them. It can make you seem aloof and pretentious, as though you are more concerned with playing the expert than you are with actually communicating to your audience. If readers are confronted with acronym after acronym they do not understand, they are not going to take the time to look them up. They will simply click away.

When writing articles for general consumption, avoid the following bad habits:

1. Headlines that contain too many acronyms. In professional writing, the best rule is to always write out a full phrase first, identify the acronym and then use the acronym throughout the rest of the piece. By definition, this precludes using them in headlines. (In less formal writing, ubiquitous phrases like, “U.S.” or “FBI” may be written as acronyms from first mention. But these terms are hardly relevant to only one industry.)

Headlines with too many acronyms suffer from multiple issues. First, people who do not know the industry-speak may be instantly turned off. You could have something valuable to offer, but your readers will never know whether they should be interested if they do not understand what you are saying. Also, headlines with too many acronyms smack of industry-related overbearance.





Just because you know the terms does not mean you need to cram as many of them into a headline as possible. That is all bluster, no substance.

2. Headlines that use overly vague words. You have seen them – article titles that are so non-specific that they could apply to any group or industry. Headlines that read obliquely, “Ensure Your Strategy Succeeds” do not convey any information about the article’s content. Sure, you want your strategy to succeed, most people do, but no one wants to read about strategies that are completely irrelevant to the problems they need to solve or the goals they hope to achieve. Headlines must tell people why they should take the time to click through and read. Overly vague, acronym-laden headlines fail that test.

3. Assuming that others understand your acronyms. No matter how often you have heard an acronym used, always remember there are others out there who have no idea what it stands for. Also remember that there are many acronyms that have multiple meanings, depending on the setting in which they are being employed. You may be saying something completely different and nonsensical to a reader who has a different understanding of certain acronyms than you do. It is best to err on the side of caution and clarity in your writing.

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