Research Measures IT Communications Gap

Submitted by: Optimum
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Report identifies means to address language differences that divide the IT industry from its customers

Analyzing and comparing a millions words of everyday conversation with IT marketing material has shown the IT industry is not speaking the same language as everyone else. As well as special industry terms, IT marketing departments prefer a type of English that makes their messages harder for people to understand.

While the public at large uses 78% of words from core English*, customer newsletters from leading IT companies use barely 50%. Instead they choose many more words derived from French, Latin and Greek, so readers have to deal with vocabulary they rarely use themselves.

"The way to help people understand complex ideas is, wherever possible, to use the same type of words they choose when talking to each other," said Malcolm Galfe of Optimum, the communications advisers that conducted the research. "The percentage of words from core English, as spoken for more than 1000 years, provides an index of how easy marketing information will be for people to take in.

The Optimum research on language used in everyday conversation across Britain is designed to provide benchmarks for the amounts of core English to aim for."

A recent survey completed by Benchmark Research* highlights the importance of using language that customers are familiar with. The survey found that 45% of managers responsible for choosing IT systems thought "jargon and over-hype" were barriers to IT investment. Only economic slowdown and demonstrating return on investment were mentioned more often.

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Charles Ward, Director of Marketing Services at Intellect (formerly the CSSA and FEI) commented: "As a result of Dot Coms and the Year 2000, the industry has some credibility to restore. It can help itself enormously by choosing vocabulary that customers can easily understand. Likewise, individual companies should use the same approach to highlight the unique benefits of their products and services as well as clearly differentiating themselves."

During its research, Optimum found that the lowest use of core English words in general conversation among professionals was 73%. In customer newsletters from IBM, Oracle, HP, Microsoft, Xerox and Micro Focus, the highest figure was 56% and the lowest only 47%. However, the leading weekly computer industry newspaper shows it is possible to write about IT using language closer to that in everyday use. Its articles average 57% of words from core English.

Last year, IT businesses in the UK spent an average of 3.3% of revenue*** on marketing. Of this 45% went on advertising, PR collateral and Web sites. Malcolm Galfe believes the industry can get much more value from this by making it easier for people to understand what they are saying. "Most of the marketing

budget is spent on getting the message to the right people at the right time - very little is done to ensure customers know what it all means."

The full report is available at £250 from Optimum on 020 7243 2429
or info@optimum-uk.com

Notes to Editors

Although it makes up most of spoken English, less than a tenth of today's English Dictionary is pure English derived from the language spoken before the French-speaking Normans invaded in 1066. The other nine tenths are newer words, mostly derived from French, Latin and Greek

In the research, 955,000 words spoken by 265 men, women and children from all regions were analysed. To help in this work, Optimum had specially written Word Classification Software. With this, it could classify many thousands of words by source language in hours rather than the months this would have taken otherwise.

This release is 64% core English.

 *Words derived from Old English (otherwise known as Anglo-Saxon), the class of languages spoken in England before 1066

** IT in Manufacturing 2003, published in June 2003

*** Figure from Intellect/KPMG Commercial Benchmark Study 2002