



By Carl Carter, APR

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Details

Don't be uniquely, beautifully ordinary. Marketing success hangs on descriptive details.

Every bid caller learns early that the important part of the chant is the number. Good ones practice counting — forward and backward, in all sorts of increments. They know that if the bidders don't know the number, they don't bid. The filler words in between are just that — something to keep the flow going.

So, when the auction is done, and you're writing the brochure or web copy for your next sale, approach it the way you called your sale. Start with verbs and nouns, because those are the “numbers” of powerful sales copy and contain practically all of the language's power. All you need for a complete sentence is a noun and a verb. He flew. I ran. They knew.

I know you can't write a whole brochure in two-word sentences. But, you can tell a much more powerful story if you start with them. You are selling an antique sideboard? Nice. You will really get my attention if you tell me it's a Greene & Greene reproduction, made of red oak with ebony plugs and splines, as well as hand-cut dovetails.

That takes a little work. You have to ask more questions, but it beats the heck out of breaking out the same old filler words like beautiful, classic, ornate and elegant. Plus, it actually means something.

Let's say you're selling a luxury home. Of course it's beautiful; gorgeous, even. People with the money to build luxury homes rarely build something ugly (if they did, you wouldn't tell anybody). So, “beautiful” says little or nothing.

It has a big, luxurious kitchen (yawn) with top-of-the-line furnishings? Don't they all? Tell us about the seven-foot-long island built of walnut, with a two-inch thick, rose granite countertop from a quarry in Brazil.

Don't tell me it's an open floor plan. Tell me the stovetop faces outward so that I can see across the dining area and through the 14ft, floor-to-ceiling glass doors out onto the travertine patio and the 11,000ft peak beyond.

If it's a farm, let me know how many acres are tillable, with what kind of soils. If it's a commercial tract, don't just tell me it's a great location. Get the traffic count and tell me how many blocks it is to the civic center.

Years ago, I had the challenge of writing about a home set up on a hillside in Colorado, and when I wrote the brochure copy, that was about it. The seller assured me that “no expense was spared” in construction, and I was struggling not to doze off.

“What cost so much?” I asked.

“I wanted to build something that would last forever. You see those beams up on the ceiling? Every one of those is joined using mortise-and-tenon joinery. There's not a nail or screw in the whole works.”

Now, you could argue that he was just being wasteful, but he was after the kind of buyer who'd like to know that sort of thing. It told the story of the home's quality far better than a generic statement that about “exquisite detail and superior craftsmanship.”

As I recall, we sold the house.

If you can't break the habit of recycling the same old fillers, try this: Every time you publish a brochure or ad, look through it and make a list of all the modifiers you used. Start a Word file with a list of them, and refer to it before you start writing your next one. Over time, you'll build up a nice list of words you're probably wearing out, and it'll force you to put more thought into your next one. ❖