Delete Marketing Fluff
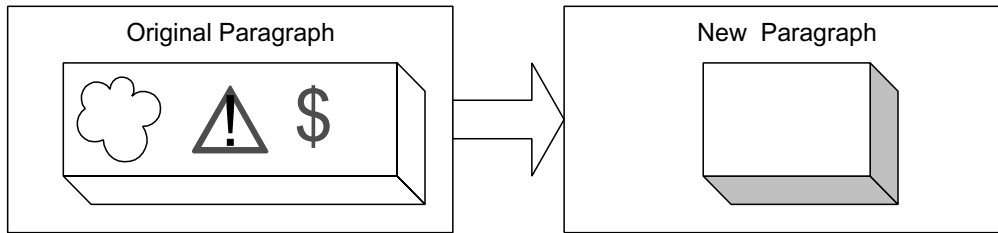
If you're out to describe the truth, leave elegance to the tailor.

—Albert Einstein

Most writers regard truth as their most valuable possession, and therefore are most economical in its use.

—Mark Twain

Filter out the hyperbole

Exaggeration makes your text less useful than objective prose. In one study by Nielsen (1997b), the objective language was 27% more usable than the promotional language because people understood the plain language faster, made fewer errors, and remembered the ideas longer. Nielsen hypothesized that people have to spend extra energy "filtering out the hyperbole to get at the facts."

If you routinely describe your company with adjectives such as *premier*, *top-rated*, and *world-class*, you need to calm down. Let the facts speak for you. You don't need to give up your enthusiasm, just your adjectives and adverbs.

Be direct

Users mistrust anything that looks like an ad, so they tend to ignore logos, mission statements, and slogans.

If you want to earn your users' trust, turn down the hype. As Bricklin says, "Simple, direct language works better on-screen than flowery or 'marketing-oriented' prose."

You can still do plenty of marketing on the Web. You just have to make your case with nouns and verbs, rather than adjectives and adverbs, particularly the ones that suggest you are being swept away by emotion or your own hype.

Features and benefits, yes. Hand-waving, no

If you are marketing a service or product, you have to point out your unique selling proposition, and you must stress the features and benefits. But keep the explanations simple and cut back on the exclamation points.

If you absolutely positively must have an adverb or two, or an adjective, well OK. Just make sure they don't look, well, silly.

EXAMPLES

Before

As the world's premier provider of e-mail services to the beauty industry, we are extremely proud to offer you the most imaginative creation and fastest delivery of highly targeted e-mail messages aimed at consumers, spa owners, and staff in beauty boutiques.

After

If you want to send e-mail marketing beauty products to consumers, spa owners, or staff at beauty boutiques, let us help you create and deliver targeted messages.

Before

Welcome to the incredibly useful FormFiller, with the revolutionary algorithm for filling in forms for you. No more remembering user names and passwords. No more typing the same address over and over. FormFiller is just so easy. You click once, and the form is filled in with your information. Our world-class recognition software reads the form and figures out what information should go where, enters that, and presses Enter, so the login form just whisks away. And it's super safe, because your personal information lives on your own computer, encrypted so no one else can read it.

After

The FormFiller bar saves you time by filling in forms for you.

It's easy. You don't have to type the same information over and over.

It's fast. You enter the information once, and FormFiller does it for you from then on. One click, and the form is filled.

It's safe. Your personal information is secure on your own computer, encrypted so no one else can read it.

AUDIENCE FIT

If visitors want this...	How well does this guideline apply?
TO HAVE FUN	Only a marketing manager thinks that raving about your product will actually amuse people.
TO LEARN	Any fluff interferes with learning. Cut it out. If you must save the promotional lingo, move it to a different location.
TO ACT	Marketing themes distract from instructions.
TO BE AWARE	If you can't tell the truth about your topic, you're not making anyone more aware. You may fool some folks, or annoy them, but most people will react with anger when they encounter a pitch along the path to enlightenment.
TO GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE	Acceptable. You can be carried away with enthusiasm for your product or service. But if we suspect that you are insincere, or just voicing the party line, we delete your message.

See: Bricklin (1998), Morkes & Nielsen (1997), Nielsen (1997b, 1999f, 2000a, 2000b), Spyridakis (2000).

For your review only.

Excerpt from *Hot Text: Web Writing that Works*.
(New Riders).

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ISBN 0-7357-1151-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card: 2001089176