



# The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,  
advertising, sales and  
promotions  
by Murray Raphel,  
Chairman, Raphel Marketing**

**June 2005**

**Number 73**

---

## **What Do the *Tiny Words* and *Misleading Offers* Really Say?**

Watch TV and see the car ads.

They offer you very attractive prices on leased automobiles.

But wait! There, on the bottom of the screen, in *tiny words*, are how many thousands of dollars extra due at signing. This is followed by a few dozen undecipherable words unless you have a giant magnifying glass you can quickly bring to the screen and read – but wait! It's gone!

See the special offer in your newspaper ads. A cable offer for your TV “at only \$29.99 a month for three months.”

But wait! What's the cost AFTER three months? There it is – in the *tiny words* at the bottom of the ad: “After the 90 day period, regular rates will apply.” Really? How much are the “regular rates?” No answer. And, how about their other offers where, “equipment charges may apply?” And, “other restrictions may apply?”

And what do THEY cost (because you know there will be “customer charges” and “other restrictions”)?

Watch the messages coming over your fax machine.

They list “specials” on computer equipment, \$99 trips to Bermuda including EVERYTHING! (their capital letters), and special prices on office supplies. (Where did they find my fax number?)

There is a way out: these fax messages say you can call an 800 number and have your name removed.

Marvelous. Wonderful! A way to eliminate fax spam. But wait! Their fax number to use to take your name off their list is printed (again in tiny words) at the bottom of the message in a box with 250 more words - all of which are unable to be read because the tiny type tends to blur.

When we tried this opt-out offer (when we were able to make out the fax number), we received three kinds of responses:

1. A busy signal. Consistently. All day. All night. Busy, busy, busy.
2. "The number you have called is invalid or blocked from your area code." Really? Then how did they find my area code to send me the message in the first place?

3. "The mailbox is full and cannot accept new messages." Sure. From all those folks calling and yelling, "Take my name and number off your list!"

You can read an ad about a new pharmaceutical product in your favorite magazine. The ad is usually a full page with 100 words or less explaining the benefits of the drug.

But wait! Turn the page and read what they call, "A brief summary of prescription information." This "brief" summary is (ready for this?) about 5,000 *tiny words* (5 point type). Quick, where's that magnifying glass?

Watch TV and hear the pharmaceutical ads. They tell you about the medical conditions their products will cure.

But wait! *Misleading offer?* Listen carefully as the announcer quickly tells you the possible "after effects" such as diarrhea, abdominal pain, nausea and serious stomach conditions, and lists the candidates not eligible for the medication, with a long list from pregnant women to those with heart conditions.

OK – I know that the advertising from the pharmaceutical industry and banks are confined by government restrictions. But there must be some way to communicate with easier-to-understand words and explanations. Write your congressperson for help? OK...but sadly, this may result in return letters, chock-full of government gobbledygook and/or legal boilerplate equally vague and confusing.

And have you had to decipher misleading offers for a new credit card? Don't try. If you can plow through all the explanatory descriptions, you will be staggered by the dramatic jump in interest rates that they can initiate at any time.

Then there are the *misleading offers* you read. And re-read. And read again and still don't know what they say. Here's one from a "Business Information" company that offered me: "A free CD with individual segments and summary groups described on a CD-ROM with information about each segment and summary group included with an interactive chart of market potential index dates for each segment."

What?

Are there any solutions for these confusing and often misleading offers? Sure. If I had a car agency I would list the amount of money you pay monthly on your lease. The true amount with "no additional dollars at signing." No license plate fee. No extras. Just this one price.

I would quickly see lots of new customers because I advertised something easy-to-read-and understand. An offer not available from any other car dealer. Well, until they saw the extra business coming my way.

Phil Broughton, who worked for many years with the U.S. Public Health Service, invented the “Systematic Buzz Phrase Projector.” He accumulated bureaucratic words he read or heard and listed them at random in three columns. He then picked a word from each column in no particular order to come up with phrases that sounded erudite but had no particular meaning.

Here are his thirty words in three columns.

- |                 |                     |                |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| 0. Integrated   | 0. Management       | 0. Options     |
| 1. Total        | 1. Organizational   | 1. Flexibility |
| 2. Systematized | 2. Monitored        | 2. Capability  |
| 3. Parallel     | 3. Reciprocal       | 3. Mobility    |
| 4. Functional   | 4. Digital          | 4. Programming |
| 5. Responsive   | 5. Logistical       | 5. Concept     |
| 6. Optional     | 6. Transitional     | 6. Time phase  |
| 7. Synchronized | 7. Incremental      | 7. Projection  |
| 8. Compatible   | 8. Third-generation | 8. Hardware    |
| 9. Balanced     | 9. Policy           | 9. Contingency |

Now, think of any three-digit number. Then take the corresponding words from each column.

Example: the number 159 gives you the phrase, “total logistical contingency.” Nobody will have the remotest idea what you're talking about, but they will think you are very knowledgeable...especially when it's used in one of those *misleading offers*. Hmmmm. Do you think all those advertisers I talked about know this already?