

The 2018 buzzwords I'm hoping won't make it to 2019

 By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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I've never been a fan of trends pieces. Or, more accurately, I like reading other people's - but the idea of predicting what we're in for in the future...? In *writing*? That's not my thing.

Here, instead, are six popular buzzwords from the worlds of marketing, communication and media that I'm hoping we *won't* see in 2019.



Tiffany Markman

1. Thought leadership

What we hear: Thought leadership, thought leader

What people are trying to say: "I have niche wisdom with the potential to influence the way a sector thinks or behaves."

What they are really saying: "I think things and I share them publicly. Very often, the things I think are more or less the same things everyone else thinks, but they are presented as 'disruptive', conveyed slightly better, or include infographics."

What the problem is: If the thought leader has some money to throw at it, his/her thinking may yield a series of (ghost-written) bestsellers that all say the same thing.

Top tip: Ask yourself these three defining questions: 1. Have I changed the world in some way? 2. Might Thuli Madonsela or Trevor Noah want to chat with me over a meal? 3. Am I Elon Musk? *** No? [You're not a thought leader](#). Sorry.

2. Artificial intelligence

What we hear: Artificial intelligence, AI

What people are trying to say: There are computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human brain power; i.e. 'knowledge work', and these have the potential to change the world as we know it, beyond our limited recognition.

What they are really saying: "Computery-pokery. Products, services and software we don't really understand, like Google Maps and smart toasters."

What the problem is: Dilution of the real meaning of the term ([which is closer to this definition](#)). We're now seeing the 'AI' label marketed to oblivion, much like 'HD' or '3D' were, and attached to everything from chatbots to home automation.

Top tip: An Excel spreadsheet, one of the most common pieces of software ever created, is capable of knowledge work. That's thanks to algorithms. Then there's machine learning: getting an apparatus to acquire knowledge, learn adaptively, and make choices. Neither of these is artificial intelligence. Nor is your smart toaster.

3. "The Uber of"

What we hear: Uberisation, the Uber of [insert industry here]

What people are trying to say: Reinventing how an industry works, by abandoning previous models of how things are done; for instance, blending real-time data, mobile payment, instant gratification and dynamic pricing into an on-demand solution.

What they are really saying: "We've made an app."

What the problem is: Thousands of businesses in every economic sphere claim to be 'the Uber of...'. The genericide can't last. And it's making us lazy as innovators.

Top tip: If you're committed to 'uberising' your niche, [start](#) by avoiding surge pricing during emergencies, handling safety and security issues, treating your staff well, and investing in real, human, AI-chatbot-free customer service.



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4. Future-proofing

What we hear: Future-proofing (noun), future-proof (verb), future-proofed (adj.)

What people are trying to say: Being cognisant of, and prepared for, the uncertain outlook that's inherent in the fast-changing nature of the world

What they are really saying: “Let’s pretend the world isn’t terrifying and we’re not paralysed by fear. Let’s give everyone a false sense of security about not having to upgrade to new and inferior versions of previous systems every six months.”

What the problem is: The future isn’t something you can protect against. You can acknowledge constant exponential change, but it’s never over. You’re never ‘done’.

Top tip: Don’t call widespread retrenchments ‘future-proofing’. That’s just firing a bunch of people because you got an algorithm to do what they were doing (see ‘AI’).

5. Disruption

What we hear: Disruption (noun), disruptive (adj.)

What people are trying to say: Radical, unprecedented innovation

What they are really saying: “We’re doing really well, so here are a lot of no-context numbers for business journalists. Let’s talk vaguely about the future, perhaps mentioning how unique our culture is and how millennials are responding to it. Let’s blow some money on metaphorical explosions, which (much like their literal counterparts) can be quite good at exciting the watching masses.”

What the problem is: The corporate [obsession with disruption](#) has become near-religious. All that disrupts is good; all that stands in disruption’s way (like taxi companies and newsprint) must die. And yet, real disruption is uncomfortable as hell.

Top tip: Disruption for its own sake (and getting ‘thought leaders’ in to talk to your people about it) will only end up disrupting your bottom line. Rather think about how to organise your hierarchies so decisions can be made faster and with better data, and get serious about treating your people like gold.

6. Everything 2.0

What we hear: This is [insert name of previous thing] 2.0

What people are trying to say: “This is a new version of a previous iteration of a thing. We’ve made a significant step forward.”

What they are really saying: “Our app has a new font and a pastel colour scheme.”

What the problem is: The term ‘2.0’ is synonymous with the 2004/2005 emergence of platforms like YouTube, MySpace, Facebook and Flickr, which heralded the beginning of a second major era in the web, after the dot com collapse in 2001. [That was a long time ago](#). Also, you must change things a LOT before you call them ‘new’.

Top tip: Customers and consumers aren’t that stupid. Naartjie 2.0 is still a naartjie.

What’d I miss? Want to add a few more? (Or want a laugh? [Read this next.](#))

ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa’s Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world’s ‘Top 50 Female Content Marketers’ in 2021.

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