

The Solution Illusion

By Danny Flamberg
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Where was I when everything became a solution? Have you noticed that everything from software to hardware to financial services to professional services to dentistry has become a solution?

The problem is that all these so-called “solutions” never really solve anything. They are partial answers masquerading as solutions. And while I’m rarely accused of being too literal it seems to me that the word solution means -- final answer to a problem.

A solution puts a particular problem to bed, at least until the problem morphs and requires a new solution. Jonas Salk discovered the solution to polio. And we haven’t had a case in this country for 60 years. Einstein solved the relativity puzzle. We’ve also used his proof ever since. That’s how a solution works.

So why have my marketing brethren adopted this term to pitch their wares? In fact they’ve adopted it at such a pace that almost everyone, everywhere in every industry uses the phrase “seamlessly integrated solutions” to describe whatever they’ve got. Beyond the obvious copycatting somebody or a lot

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of somebodies think that this innocuous phrase not only means something important but distinguishes one offering from another and keeps up with the Joneses.

News Flash – it doesn’t. Buyers glance at or hear this phrase, nod and move on. Even if it truly represents table stakes in your category, no one is getting any extra credit or extra consideration for having “seamlessly integrated solutions.” At best it’s a pro forma check off.

In fact it is so ubiquitous, even though there is no common understanding of what it actually means, that it means nothing. And if every Tom, Dick and Harry has something that seamlessly integrates how big a difference can their possibly be between products and services? The dumbest prospective client

can figure this much out.

Does the embrace of the term “solution” represent a universal craving for answers? Maybe. Does the “seamless integration” part hint that buyers don’t want to toss out what they already have and have finally paid for to buy something new? Probably.

So how do you beat the solution illusion? You have to have the nerve to buck the trend and sidestep the obvious. You must create a new vocabulary to separate your brand from the bad guys. You have to get past what the sales guys and the prod-

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uct team are familiar with and parrot on cue. And while it will feel uncomfortable, it will set you apart, which is the whole point of branding and marketing in the first place!

You have to call a spade a spade. The alternative is being like everyone else lost in the soup of sameness and meaninglessness.

About the Author

Danny Flamberg has been building brands and building businesses for more than 25 years. In the US, Europe, and South America, he has helped start-ups become important players in their markets and helped leading global brands extend their reach, market share, and relationships with customers. Prior to joining Delve, he was Vice President of Global Marketing at SAP, where for four years he served as global demand generation czar responsible for prospecting, nurturing, selling and retaining \$2 billion in pipeline plus sales and marketing alignment and infrastructure in 50 countries.

He earned an A.B, an M.A. and a Ph.D. in politics and economics at Columbia University. He has been widely published on marketing topics and writes a regular blog on current branding, messaging, and marketing topics. Mr. Flamberg can be reached at dflamberg@delvegroup.com.