

Does Your Communication Feature a Catchy One-Liner?

By **Sam Horn**, author of *POP! Stand Out in Any Crowd* (Perigee, Sept. '06)

I was listening to a jazz station and caught the tail end of the name of a song they were about to play by Wynton Marsales . . . *I Heard You Twice the First Time*.

What a GREAT line.

Let's analyze why it works so well.

1. It turns a cliché on its head by replacing one of the core words with a surprising substitute. You think you know where it's going – and then it takes a verbal left turn. That's the essence of humor as it elicits an almost involuntary smile.
2. The substituted word is similar to the original word because it is also one syllable and it mimics the long I of the featured vowel. A verbal twist or a re-working of a cliché work better when the new word sounds like the original word – but has a different meaning.
3. Like good art, this line keeps revealing new layers the more you think about it. It has another “gotcha” by playing off the number twice and one – you can't really hear someone twice the first time – however most people would “get” this anyway if they've been subjected to a long-winded monologue.
4. This simple line also “says a lot in a little.” Comedian Steven Wright said, “My grandfather invented Cliff- Notes. It was in . . . Well, to make a long story short.” This song title makes a l-o-n-g story short – 7 words to be exact – however you can read a lot into this sentence and are eager to, as popular broadcaster Paul Harvey would say, “Hear the rest of the story.”

What does this have to do with you? Part of your effectiveness as a communicator is whether you, as Bonnie Raitt said in her popular song, “*Give 'em something to talk about.*”

Does your presentation have at least one “keeper” line that people will remember and repeat? If not, why not? The way to build buzz and develop a word-of-mouth and word-of-mouse phenomenon is to coin a catchphrase that becomes a POP! icon.

Perhaps one of the best practitioners of this technique (excerpted from my book *POP!*) is the movie *Jerry Maguire* which spawned several iconic lines including, “You complete me,” “Show me the money,” “Help me help you,” and “You had me at hello.”

To produce your own iconic line that gets your product or program noticed and remembered, write down ten words you use when describing your idea or offering. Now, visit www.lyricsfree.com and enter your Core Words one by one. Up will come a variety of lyrics that contain your key words.

Don't use those lyrics verbatim because there are strict copyright laws forbidding that. Re-arrange those lyrics to create a clever new twist that grabs people's attention and tickles their funny bone. Author Kathy Goldmark did this with her clever one-liner, “What if my ship comes in and I'm at the airport?”

You may be thinking, “I'm busy. I don't have time to do this.” Ask yourself, “Is it worth an hour of my time to craft a line that gets my message repeated and remembered? Do I

want more clicks on my website, more referrals to new customers, more being the topic of water-cooler conversation, more eager participants for my next presentation?”

If so, invest the time to draft up your Core Words and run them through the corresponding song titles online. You could coin an iconic phrase that makes your product or program The Next New Thing. This is just one of the 25 ways to create Purposeful, Original, Pithy titles, taglines, and topics in Sam Horn’s book *POP! Stand Out in Any Crowd*, available www.SamHorn.com and at quality bookstores everywhere.

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