



## **BANISHING BUSINESS JARGON**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**JUNE 2007**



## Introduction

Being one of the UK's leading business communication providers means that ntl:Telewest Business operates in an industry with a lot of technology and acronyms. Whilst people in telecoms generally know their IP VPNs from their WANs and LANs, do they really know what people mean when they talk of having synergies, and of running things up the flag pole? We would guess not...

Which is why ntl:Telewest Business commissioned Tickbox.net to conduct research into the use of business jargon in the UK workplace, how often people are using it, why they do and how people react when they do.

The findings make for fascinating reading. The use of business jargon is becoming more and more widespread in the UK workplace. People are using it to make themselves appear more intelligent and credible, yet people's general thoughts on the use of business jargon ranges from irritating and meaningless, right the way through to embarrassing and rage-inducing.

And it can have a significant impact on business too. The consequences of misunderstanding business jargon include getting a telling-off from the boss, failing to complete a task, and some people have even lost a client because of it. This is why ntl:Telewest Business has launched its campaign to ban the use of business jargon in the workplace. We are not pretending to be 100% innocent when it comes to using business jargon ourselves, but we are making a company-wide effort to be more clear and honest in all of our communications, and we encourage you all to do the same. In the meantime, a question by question break down of the results can be found below.

## Results

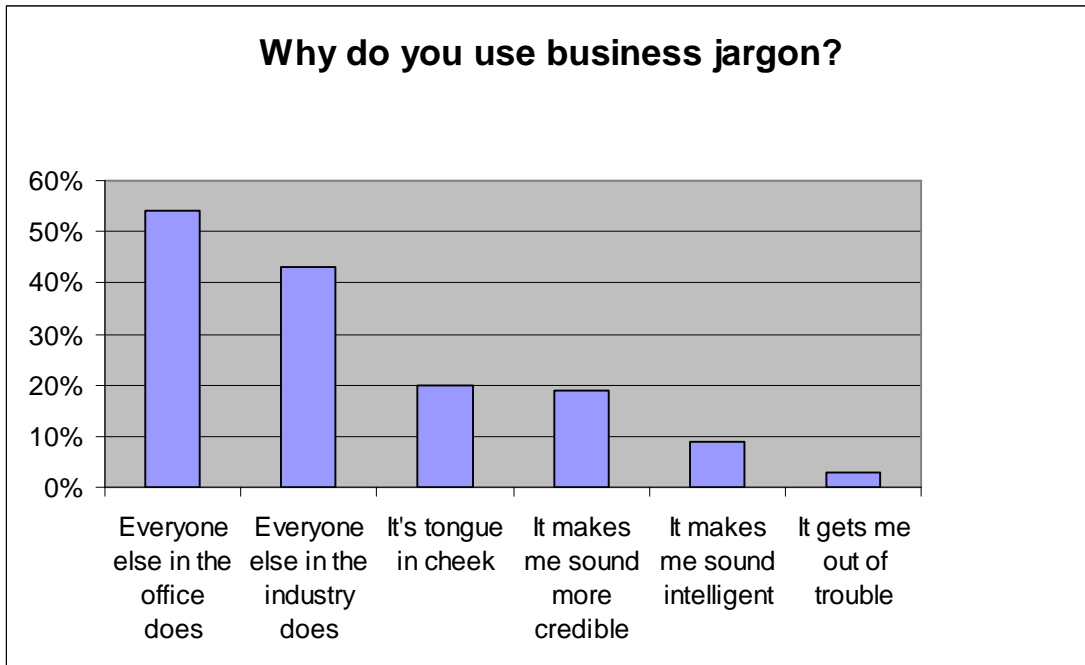
### Q1. Do you ever use business jargon in the workplace?

Nearly two-thirds of people surveyed admitted that they used business jargon in the workplace. Whilst we expected this to be a little higher, the key word here is 'admitted'. The real figure of business jargon users is almost certainly much higher – people just feel uncomfortable coming clean when asked about it!



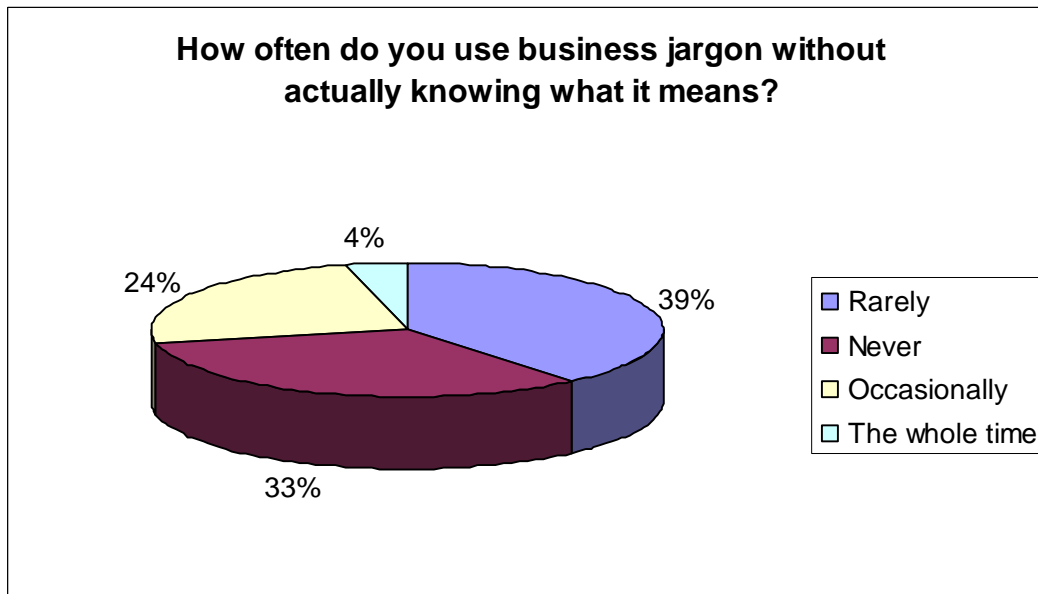
### Q2. Why do you use business jargon in the workplace?

The reasons that people cited for using business jargon varied a fair amount. A fifth of respondents said when they used business jargon they were doing so tongue in cheek, and a number said that they did so because their peers (either people in their office or in the wider industry) used it. Whilst it is worrying that people seem to be using it to fit in, it is more worrying when you see that 19 per cent of people use business jargon to appear more credible, and nine per cent do so to appear more intelligent. Do these users really think that people will be impressed by the use of business jargon?



*Q3. How often do you use business jargon without actually knowing what it means?*

It would appear that a good number of people in UK businesses use business jargon without knowing what it means. Only a third said that they never did this, with the rest of respondents split between doing so rarely and occasionally. Four per cent confessed that they used business jargon without knowing its meaning 'the whole time'.



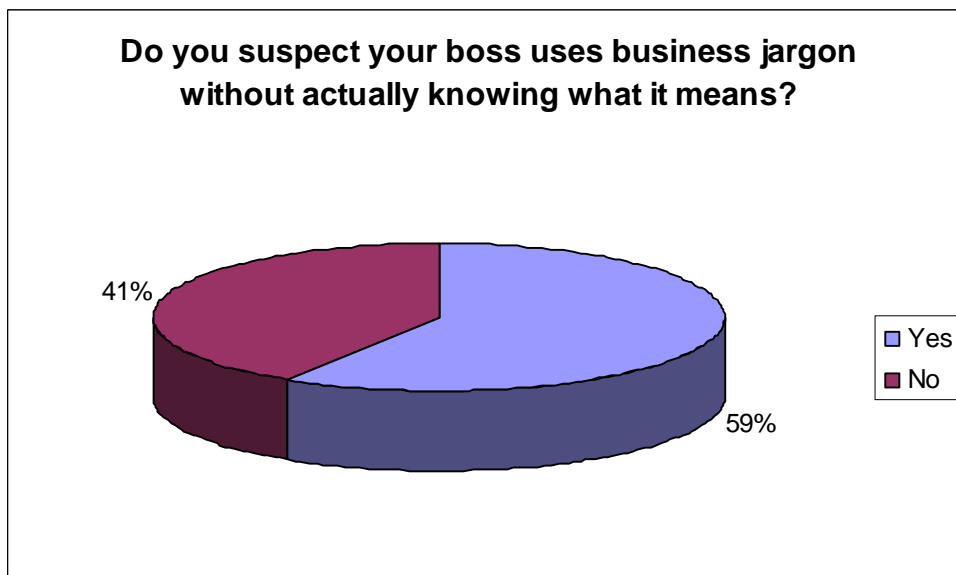
*Q4. Does your boss use business jargon in the workplace?*

The idea of UK bosses using business jargon is not a new one, thanks to television programmes such as *The Office*. But the results to this question were surprising, as they revealed that almost two-thirds of respondents said that their bosses were users of business jargon – a higher figure than we were expecting.



*Q5. Do you suspect your boss uses business jargon without actually knowing what it means?*

This question was one of the least surprising in terms of results. Almost two-thirds of respondents believe that their boss uses business jargon without having the first idea what it means.



Q6. What do you consider to be the most annoying piece of business jargon?

This question certainly provoked the most heated debate. Opinions varied as to what the most annoying piece of business jargon was, but in the end a clear winner emerged – ‘let’s bluesky that’ took the most annoying title. A list of the top ten is below, but other notables included ‘synergies’ and ‘vanilla’.

Business jargon	What it actually means
1 Let's blue sky that	a discussion with no boundaries
2 Out of the box	a creative solution
3 Ring fence that idea	put that idea to one side and move on
4 Run it up the flagpole	finding out what people think of a new idea
5 Thought shower	an exchange of creative ideas
6 Brain dump	reveal your thoughts
7 Push the envelope	exceed limits
8 Reinvent the wheel	to needlessly repeat a task
9 Close of play	end of the working day
10 Bang for your buck	value for money

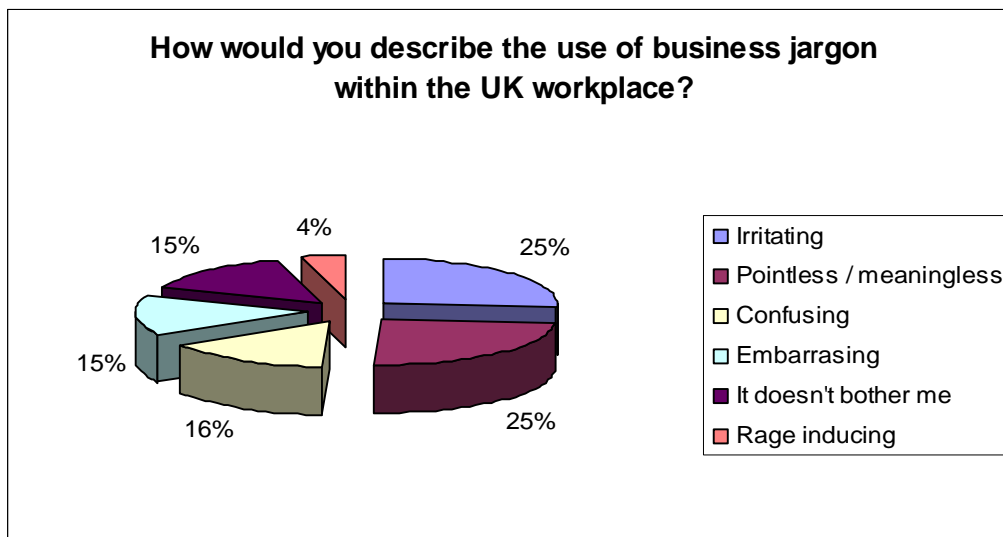
www.sayno2businessjargon.com

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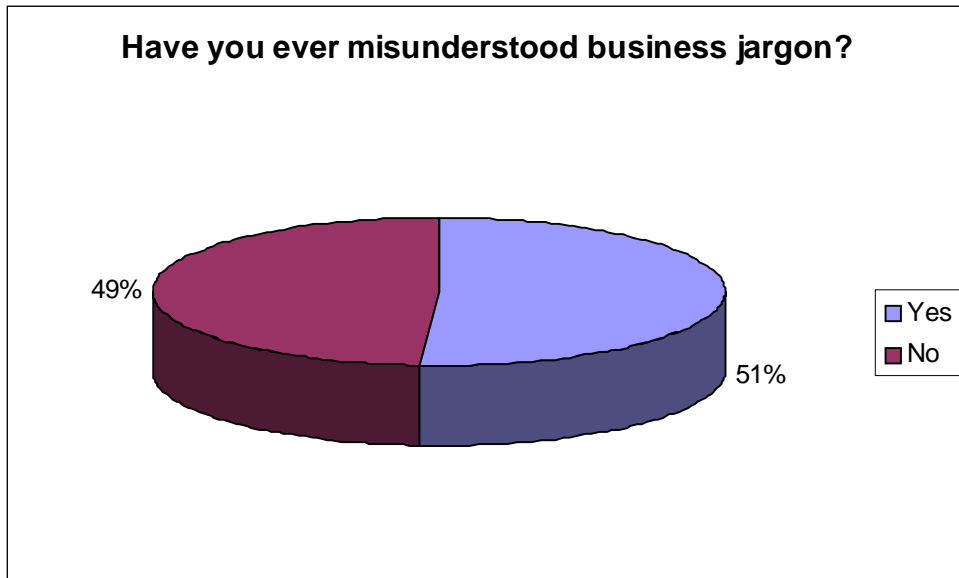
Q7. How would you describe the use of business jargon within the UK workplace?

This question generated some emotive responses! Almost a quarter claimed not to be bothered by it, but a majority of us feel that business jargon is both irritating and pointless. More than a quarter of us have been left scratching our heads when a colleague uses jargon, whilst many of us have found ourselves left embarrassed. For some, business jargon even results in a red mist, with 7 per cent describing its use as nothing short of rage inducing.



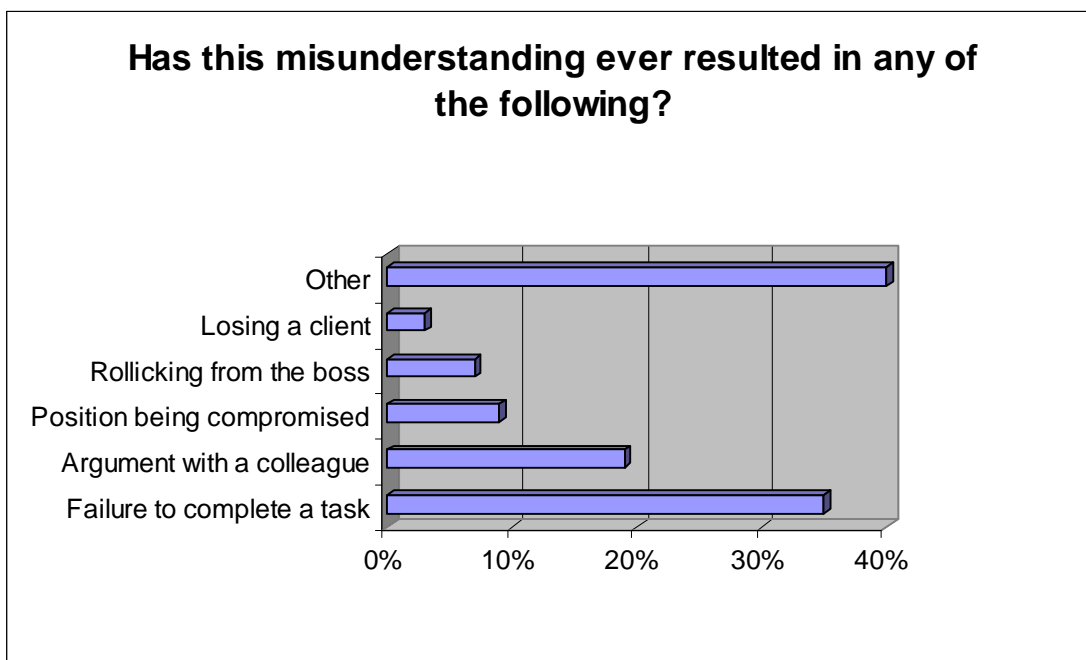
Q8. *Have you ever misunderstood business jargon?*

We're surprised, given the rest of the results, that so few people have actually ever misunderstood business jargon. This ranged from city to city though. For example in Belfast 70 per cent of office workers stated that they'd misunderstood jargon, but in jargon Nottingham just 34 per cent have been left uncertain about what a colleague means when using business jargon.



Q9. *Has this misunderstanding ever resulted in any of the following?*

Most people selected to record their own personal account of how business jargon had impacted them. Many listed embarrassment, but there was one case of someone's boss losing the company £150,000! Business jargon also isn't good for productivity, with 35 per cent stating that the use of jargon had left them unable to complete a task. Office harmony was also impacted, with 19 per cent attributing jargon as the cause of an argument with a colleague.



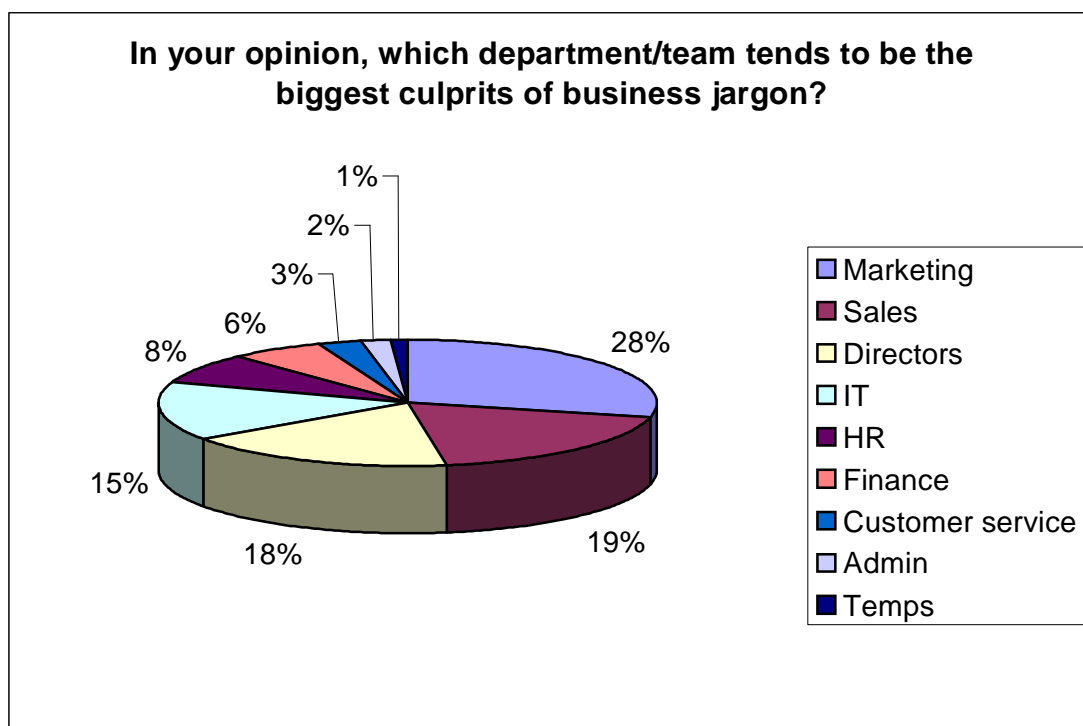
Q10. *Would you be in favour of business jargon being banned in the workplace?*

Unsurprisingly, the majority would back a ban on business jargon in the office. When you read about its repercussions and how it affects both employees and organisations, it's easy to see how a ban business jargon campaign will gather momentum.



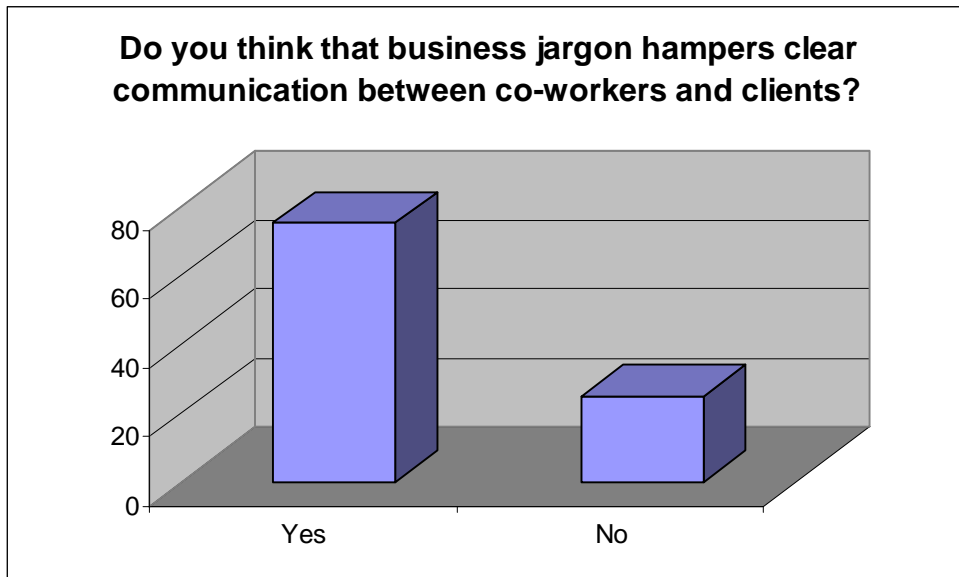
Q11. *In your opinion which department / team tends to be the biggest culprits of using business jargon in your office?*

It's something of a stereotype to suggest that the marketing department is rife with flowery language and business jargon, but the research only confirms this image. Marketing may well top the table, but the sales department and company directors aren't that far behind.



*Q12. Do you think that business jargon hampers clear communication between co-workers and colleagues?*

Whilst there was some disparity across the cities in relation to other questions, the UK is united in the assertion that business jargon is not conducive to clear communications. Three quarters of office workers think that meaningless sayings and abbreviations only serve to cloud the issue. Britain, the message is clear – drop the jargon and start saying what you mean!



The research for ntl:Telewest Business was carried out online by Tickbox.net between 04/04/07 and 11/04/07 amongst a nationally representative sample of 2,853 UK adults aged 16+.