

# EchoPoints 2009



## 10 MESSAGING ANTIDOTES for Recession, Distrust and Disgust

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# Messaging EchoPoints for 2009

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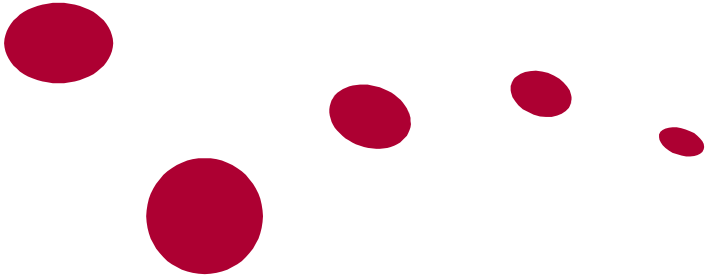
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“JUST PLANE DESCPICABLE,” the *New York Post* called CitiGroup’s plans to use part of its government bailout to buy a \$50 million corporate jet. Add in the Bernard Madoff debacle and the recession’s impact on employment, credit, college funds, retirement accounts, and housing values — plus dizzying volatility in food and energy costs — and it’s no wonder Americans are feeling cautious, disgusted and distrustful.

A message of “change” carried a new administration into the White House and brought 1.8 million people to President Obama’s inauguration. No matter what your politics, it’s a wake-up call that your own messaging may need to change ... fast!

From sales talking points to proposals, Website content and employee communications, **messaging that supported you a few months ago, could now quickly poison your success.** What’s the antidote? Replacing old, “because you can” messages with EchoPoints — 10 messages that echo the new spirit of the times.

## EchoPoint 1

# TRUST ME

Creating a trust EchoPoint means answering two questions: *Why* should customers trust you? *What* can they trust you to do? For example, simply saying you've won awards only partially answers the "why" and doesn't even touch on the "what." Here's how a Web design firm might flip that awards statement to create EchoPoint messaging:

We don't start with technology. We start with who your audience is, how they like to communicate, and what content they value. Then, we use the most relevant design, technology and content strategies to engage your audience with your Website *and* your brand. That's why we win so many industry awards. More importantly, it's why you can trust us to help you win new business.

A major component of trust messaging is who else has bought your product or service. That's why customer stories, testimonials, client lists, and case studies are such an important element of this EchoPoint. Instead of vague, "I love it" testimonials, however, try to get customers to focus on a specific problem and how you solved it.



## EchoPoint 2

# WHAT I STAND FOR

America is hungry for strong, ethical and effective leaders — and we no longer define leaders at those who are most powerful or most visible. You can edge out even large competitors by creating compelling EchoPoint messaging that reflects your heritage, beliefs, and what you stand for. Start by looking at your own unique story:

- Why did you get into the business?
- What have you always stood for ... what has always been your greatest strength?
- Why does your history/culture/process matter now more than ever?

### EchoPoint 3

## SUBSTANCE

A few months ago, flashy was fashionable. Now it's irresponsible. To avoid undermining your company, product or service, pay attention to more than words: A sales person reported losing a "sure thing" contract because the customer who had a year ago valued his approach, now viewed the presentation, proposal, and *attire* as so "showy" it gave rise to questions about the pricing. Ouch!

If you don't think your offering lends itself to a substance EchoPoint, look closer:

After seeing a steep drop in massages and facials, an urban spa traded "pamper yourself" messaging for "feel sharper, look younger." Business soared as female and *male* customers began to perceive spa services as giving them an edge in an intensely competitive economic environment.



### EchoPoint 4

## SILVER LINING

If your customers face bad news, offer them a silver lining. For instance, the drop in housing values means many homeowners can't "move up" to a new home. Home remodelers can still create a silver lining — for customers and for themselves:

Let others feel trapped by today's housing market. Why not just relax, breathe easy, and fall in love with your home all over again? We help you do it — with a refurbished kitchen-family room that makes spending time at home more fun than going out! And down the road when housing values climb, your renovations can pay you back with a better price and faster sale.

## EchoPoint 5

# LIGHT OF DAY

In his inauguration address, President Obama promised that government would do its work “in the light of day.” Again, whatever your politics, you want to make sure your own messaging taps into the spirit of the times by stressing honesty and accountability. Show how you arrive at your prices, what goes into your products, or how your service is free of hidden costs or risks. The key to leveraging this EchoPoint is to light up how honestly you do business. Here’s a good example from a software firm:

The software supports every basic function of a nonprofit organization, as well as a wide range of specialized capabilities. With built-in functionality, there is virtually no need for expensive extra customization and training. Plus, with little or no customization, upgrades are faster, easier and less expensive, too.



## EchoPoint 6

# FACE THE MUSIC

This is no time to bury your head — or messages — in the sand. If you have to raise prices, explain why in up front and in very concrete terms. If problems arise, *let your customers know you’ve fixed them*. A face-the-music EchoPoint contributes to an image of honesty and accountability. It will also help counteract any negative messaging about you. For example, if someone rants about you on a blog or posts a bad review of your business at referral sites like Yelp or CitySearch, pay attention! Do all you can to fix the problem and then make it a point to show (1) how you listened and (2) how you corrected the problem. Encourage customers to post comments about how a problem has been resolved. Your willingness to face the music in negative situations

sends a very positive message about your strength of character in doing the right thing — a bankable trait, *especially* today!

**Another benefit of a “face the music” EchoPoint:** Take the time to make problem resolution part of your core values — it can pay off in messaging *and* in defusing conflicts. For example, faced with an irate customer, a contractor pulled out the company's Code of Values and showed that fixing problems to the customer's full satisfaction was fundamental to the company culture. It immediately eased the tension and allowed the customer and contractor to find a mutually agreeable solution.

### EchoPoint 7

## JUST ENOUGH

Businesses, consumers and government are all tired of excess. From super-sized meals, to the screen clutter of software features we never use, we're looking for simpler solutions and less waste. In response, pare down your messaging. Remember, too much messaging creates so much noise, nothing gets heard.

Don't overwhelm customers with everything you could possibly say about your product or service. Focus on the one message that matters most for each audience. From ingredients, to size, to steps in a process or features on a product, emphasize that what you offer is “just enough.”

Make it clear that you've used your expertise to provide precisely what's needed to solve a problem without adding extra complexity – or cost.





## EchoPoint 8

# LONG-TERM

In most cases, we don't want to risk doing business with someone who is on the ropes. That's why you need an EchoPoint that expresses that you're here for the long term — to build a relationship, answer questions, provide upgrades, and deliver uninterrupted service. Visually, your messaging should also communicate stability: if you have a storefront, keep it well-stocked and well-maintained.

Make sure your Website stays fresh (keep your "NEWS" section filled with *recent* news). Even one-on-one, never talk about how tough things are. Instead, focus on why you're going to be around: e.g., you have low overhead and little debt, you've weathered other downturns and prospered, you have a better product, etc.

<b>WHAT'S OUT</b>	Greed	Snarky style, aggression
	Bad manners	"Because I can"
	Big carbon footprints	Careless consumption

## EchoPoint 9

# I CARE

Rethink any messaging that says you don't care — and that can include everything from sloppy sales materials to poor customer service. Rewards, free information, preferred-customer discounts, even establishing a community of customers: these tactics all create an EchoPoint that says you care about customers and share your experience and resources to provide "above and beyond" value. This messaging puts you into a partnership with your customers and industry. "Giving back" puts you into the same relationship with your community. Plus,



supporting a good cause or helping those less fortunate positions you as a good guy rather than one of the snarky, self-serving, untrustworthy businesses that today's consumers would love to put out of business.



#### EchoPoint 10

## CHOOSE ONE

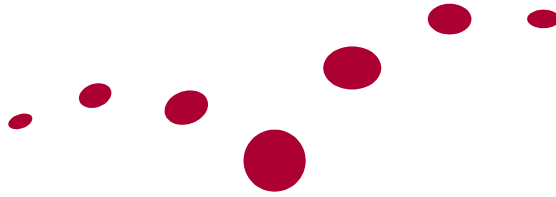
With money so tight, spending is shifting from *AND* to *OR*. That's why messaging that positions you as "get this *AND* that" can quickly take you out of

the running. Instead, create an EchoPoint that positions your product or service as what to choose if customers can only buy one thing.

Clothing retailers, for example, should replace last year's "fill your closet with all the season's hottest items" messaging with something like "here are the few smart pieces that can update your entire wardrobe." Help customers decide which *one* of your offerings is best for their needs. If you offer a modular system, help customers prioritize what they will purchase first and show them how to phase in the other modules over time. You can also turn "or" into a compelling choice:

For example, in this economy, the price of ballroom dancing lessons might seem like an "and" that quickly gets cut from the family budget. But turn it into an "or" and you shift the perception of the cost:

*For their anniversary, will you give Mom and Dad a weekend cruise ... or an entire year of romance, exercise, fun, and new friends (all cleverly disguised as ballroom dance lessons)?*



## About Judy Kirkland

Judy Kirkland and Nick Lutkins co-founded EchoPoint Marketing Partners and specialize in helping clients define, develop and use their “biggest bang” messaging and marketing tactics. Prior to EchoPoint Marketing Partners, Judy enjoyed more than 20 years of success as a nationally known marketing consultant and copywriter, with an award-winning track record of work for B2B, B2C, and B2G clients. Judy also contributes to monthly e-zines and newsletters in the fields of franchise sales, small business development, and online marketing. You can also read her regular blogs at [BusinessManagementDaily.com](http://BusinessManagementDaily.com) (The Integrated Marketer blog) and [YodelPoint.com](http://YodelPoint.com)

## About EchoPoint Marketing Partners

EchoPoint Marketing Partners offer consulting and ready-to-use systems that help businesses, franchises, and associations find their “EchoPoints” — messaging and marketing strategies and tactics that deliver the greatest competitive advantage. The result is that our clients find they can attract more business from better clients, while investing less time and money on marketing and communications. EchoPoint services include:

### Assessments:

Messaging  
Marketing Tactics  
Competitive Edge & Positioning

### Audits & Alignments:

Messaging, Marketing, Brand  
Messaging Review of Proposals

### Action Plans:

Marketing Strategy & Tactics  
“Living the Brand” Program for Employees/Sales Team

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