

Governing Energy

Becoming a Part of Speech—Pluses & Minus

Volume 3 Number 22—November 20, 2014

Conventional marketing wisdom suggests that becoming a verb can be a very good thing. “Google it,” is an oft repeated statement when searching for information on almost any subject. Becoming a household name is generally viewed as a good thing. However, becoming a generic term may “mean losing the legal power of a trademark.”ⁱ

It can be argued that the power of the verb is greater than the marketing power of a trademark. The market dominance of a genericised trademark such as Xerox as the decade’s long term for photo copying probably sold more copy machines than strict trademark legal defense ever would.ⁱⁱ

As a general rule, this author believes that when the company or a product becomes part of the vernacular the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Aggressive trademark defense may actually detract from the brand in this case.

However, there is a dark side. The World War II Norwegian politician who collaborated with the Nazis, Vidkun Quisling became a part of speech. Quisling, the noun is now often used to describe someone as a traitor or collaborator. The verb form of the word is *to quisle*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Most recently, an American economist has joined the club of rogues.^{iv} Following the release of several videos, it did not take long for the slang to begin. More than just an attempt at humor, his revelations cast serious doubt on major political figures and their motives. Like all political red meat, expect more to come.

According to the news, he is losing major contacts and it is likely that his reputation and ability to obtain future consulting are probably compromised. Moreover, as with the positive power of “Google it,” “Grubered” will probably stick with less desirable effects for this professor.^v

The genericisation of a product or brand can have sustained benefits even when society in general grammatically tramples intellectual property. The opposite sustains and often ridicules individuals and brands. Mr. Quisling has been dead since 1945, and many using the term in contemporary times may not even know that the word quisling is an individual’s family name.

How does your company protect its Brand?

About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of four books and has written extensively about the field of

operations management. Shemwell is the Managing Director of The Rapid Response Institute, a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management. He has studied cultural interactions for more than 30 years--his dissertation; *Cross Cultural Negotiations Between Japanese and American Businessmen: A Systems Analysis (Exploratory Study)* is an early peer reviewed manuscript addressing the systemic structure of social relationships.

End Notes

ⁱ <http://www.fastcompany.com/3004901/google-what-it-means-when-brand-becomes-verb>

ⁱⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Generic_trademark

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quisling>

^{iv} <http://www.politico.com/story/2014/11/obamacare-jonathan-gruber-architect-112886.html>

^v Ibid.